

been. But it was who we were, and the very thought of having to come out from behind all of that to become, well, nothing, brought the whole purpose of the life into question."

The author became the prioress in 1978 when her community she writes, "was ripe The years of renewal had taken their toll, both in energy and in relationships" Joan, who speaks here about exercising her authority through the shared authority of the community, moved into the process of revitalization which, she says, ". . . sets out to channel old energy, now dissipated, into new directions" (p. 210). The new directions meant conversion of heart and a commitment to gospel living in the daily which is what Benedictines are called to by the ancient but ever new Rule of Benedict.

Note

1. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, March 10, 2005.

Theresa Schumacher, O.S.B.

DEKAR, Paul R., *Creating the Beloved Community* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing House, 2005), pp. 325. ISBN 1-931038-30-9 (paperback). \$23.95.

It has become commonplace that communities need stories and history to build the bonds that give purpose and even permanence. The history of a nation binds together citizens, as religious history does the faithful. The same holds for the peace community. In fact, one might argue that, since it is such a minority whose views are so countercultural, the peace community needs such a narrative much more than these others. In most places those who work for peace are so few that they can fall under the illusion that the peace movement is just the group of people they know—and similar small groups dotted around the country and the world. Individualist and fragmented, the illusion can even be discouraging and isolating.

Creating the Beloved Community is an antidote to the sense of isolation. A history of the Fellowship of Reconciliation from its founding in the early Twentieth century, Dekar's book gives a vision of the sweep of this important part of the peace movement. FOR was started by Christians who understood the gospel as incompatible with war. As it has broadened its religious base and

refined the conceptual basis for its opposition to war, the organization has had an amazing impact in its pursuit of peace. It is a story that incorporates generations of peacemakers and traverses several eras in the development of war and of peacemaking. The reader gains the sense of a movement that transcends individuals and their placement in time. We need such books as a counter to the history that is composed of princes and their wars. Against the story of "breaking things and killing people" we need the story of mending things and saving people.

Covering roughly a hundred years, the book has a non-linear, somewhat recurring structure. The first half is organized around six major themes in the FOR statements of purpose (pp. 24-25). The first, "abolishing war by refusing to participate in war or to sanction military preparations," covers the way in which FOR started as a movement of pacifist Christians before the outbreak of World War I. The history moves forward as FOR affiliates with Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, and various Christian fellowships, while developing its opposition to war into the nonviolent direct action of Gandhi and King. Then, the story goes back to the beginning to tell how FOR worked to "build a just social order in which the resources of human ingenuity and wisdom are used for the benefit of all and in which no one will oppress or exploit others." The obvious relation between these two themes is that the second addresses the social problems that are frequently the causes of war. A peace movement cannot just oppose war; it must try to remedy its causes.

Naturally, this structure gives the story a recurrent character. We start anew each time. While some of the characters occur again, there are also a lot of new actors, with different talents and different goals, relevant to the different themes. The variation, in fact, leads to conflict in ideas about the direction of FOR; some people depart and others come on board. The effect is to give a broad view of the movement as a variety of activities and achievements. Still, Dekar preserves a sense of consistency to the facets of this history.

The second half of the book turns to organizations that have been associated with FOR. While FOR grew to tens of thousands during the Vietnam war, for most of its history it has been much smaller. Like most such peace groups, it has worked with allies. These have included the Historic Peace Churches, local groups of FOR, denominational groups, and the Jewish, Buddhist, and Mus-

lim peace fellowships. Here we find a rich history of activities and accomplishments that goes beyond the history of the first half. For instance, in the aftermath of World War II, FOR worked with the Historic Peace Churches, Friends, Mennonites, and Church of the Brethren, to promote peace studies programs (pp. 172-178). In addition, even as it became less explicitly Christian in its ideology, FOR encouraged such denominational groups as the Baptist Peace Fellowship, Catholic Peace Fellowship, Methodist Peace Fellowship, and Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. These groups are able to mine the non-violent genius of the gospels for sustenance as well as move their own churches closer to the path of peace.

As valuable as this sort of endeavor is, it has built-in limitations. Like the history of a college or university, it cannot easily develop the larger context—especially the criticism of opponents. As a consequence, there is always a triumphalist tone to these kinds of stories. Perhaps that kind of emphasis is appropriate to a project that rightly wants us to know the good that FOR has accomplished. Still, at points one has the sense that there is a grittier background story that would add a useful context. A second criticism springs from another strength of the book. In the section about denominational fellowships, Dekar tells the fascinating story of Thomas Merton's role in convoking Catholic peace activists and others, including members of FOR, during the Vietnam war (pp. 205-207). The story leaves rather vague the relation between the Catholic Peace Fellowship and two other important groups, Pax Christi USA and the Catholic Worker movement. The result is that it is hard to tell where FOR leaves off and the others begin. This story is emblematic of those passages where the emphasis on the role of FOR leads to a distorted sense of its place in the larger peace movement.

These criticisms should not be taken to detract from the overall achievements of this book. *Creating the Beloved Community* gives us solid insight into a history that is remarkable in its witness to the power of peaceful non-violence.

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