

of the Syrian tradition of Aphraat and Ephrem with the Greek thought of Origen and Evagrius.

Thus these three sets of recordings, though not explicitly recognized or identified as such, provide a significant sampling of Merton's most extensive course in monastic history, much of it discussing sources not available at the time in English – evidence both of his own deep interest in the roots of monastic spirituality and of his commitment to share the fruits of his own research with the young men whose spiritual formation had been entrusted to him. While some of this material might seem somewhat esoteric for a general audience, Merton's informal, often humorous yet deeply informed approach, always intent on making connections with contemporary issues within and beyond the monastery, brings even the most obscure movements and figures to life. It may be hoped that future Now You Know sets will make available further segments from this vast survey of the early phases of Christian religious life.

Patrick F. O'Connell

FOREST, Jim, *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), pp. xiii + 223. ISBN 978-1-62698-197-3 (paper) \$25.

Jim Forest's *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers* is a masterful synthesis of Merton's writings on war, peace and conscience. It is also a call to each reader to seek and pursue peace. Forest, the recipient of Merton's "Letter to a Young Activist" and a co-founder of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, regards the monk as a "pastor to peacemakers."¹ He considers his own vocation to pray, witness and work for peace as being significantly shaped by Merton's guidance. Forest argues that Merton offered a timely voice for peace in the 1950s and 1960s and that his witness to Christian peacemaking remains relevant today. Each chapter features substantial quotations from Merton's books, journals, essays, poetry and correspondence. Forest's reflections and commentary on Merton's insights are woven throughout the text. The result is a dialogue between a master and his apprentice that urges the reader to ask, "how can I, drawing on Merton's advice, become a better peacemaker in today's world?" (xi).

Forest's response to this question is to tell a story of Christian peacemaking during the Cold War period, a time that Forest regards as

1. See Staff of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, "The Duty is Evident: Merton, the CPF, and the Apostolic Work of Peacemaking," in *The Sign of Peace* 8.1 (2009) 11; accessible at: http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/downloads/WINTER_2009.pdf.

bearing haunting similarities to our own day. While Thomas Merton's life and witness are central to the text, this is a story of a community of peacemakers and the crucial role they played in promoting Catholic peacemaking in the 1950s and 1960s. One of this book's most notable strengths is that it is born of Forest's own experience struggling for peace alongside Merton, Dorothy Day, Tom Cornell and others. Forest writes that it was thanks to Merton, Day and their companions that "the Catholic peacemaker, then a rarity, was to become far more common in the years ahead and to receive support from the highest levels of the church, as we saw with Pope Francis choosing them to spotlight in his historic address to Congress" (23).

Merton is renowned for the breadth of topics that captured his imagination and his pen: mysticism, poetry, art, interreligious dialogue, racial justice and more. In *The Root of War Is Fear* the author argues that a passion for peace and concern about a war-addicted world "runs like a red thread connecting [Merton's] very earliest writing and his later work" (2). This text includes a nearly chronological survey of the impact of war on Thomas Merton's life, published writings, correspondence and friendships.

Merton's personal encounters with the devastation of war launched him into a lifelong struggle for peace. In chapter 1, "Jonas in the Belly of a Paradox" (1-18), Forest illustrates the influence of war on Merton's childhood and young adult life. Merton was born in 1915, and the First World War was the context for much of his family's early life. As a young man during the Second World War, Merton struggled to form his own conscience about military conscription and was particularly fascinated by the nonviolent witness of Gandhi. In April 1943, Thomas tragically lost his brother, John Paul, to war. In his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton even describes his pursuit of monastic life at the Abbey of Gethsemani as a protest against the secular and violent forces in American culture (see 94-95).

In chapter 2, "A Book in a Bus Terminal" (19-36), Forest narrates the weaving together of his own vocation to peacemaking with that of Thomas Merton and of Dorothy Day. In December 1959, the author's journey from the U.S. Navy to becoming a conscientious objector to war and seeking new life as a Catholic Worker was influenced by reading *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Forest also describes how Dorothy Day prompted his initial correspondence with Merton, which was the beginning of a significant friendship.

Like Forest, Merton's vocation as a peacemaker grew in conversation with Dorothy Day and members of the Catholic Worker. In 1959, Merton

wrote to Day about his admiration for the Catholic Worker's main peace witness between 1955 and 1961 – non-participation in air raids drills, which Dorothy Day saw as “a dress rehearsal for nuclear war” (21). In October 1961, *The Catholic Worker* newspaper published Merton's essay “The Root of War Is Fear.” In this essay, Merton addresses the Christian duty in what he calls a “post-Christian era”: namely, “to strive with all his power and intelligence, with his faith, his hope in Christ, and love for God and man, to do the one task which God has imposed upon us in the world today. That task is to work for the total abolition of war” (30).

The publication of “The Root of War Is Fear” marked a new period in Merton's monastic vocation. The monk who was famous for his writings on prayer and contemplation became a public voice for peace. Forest quotes the following words from Merton's journal entry of October 23, 1961:

I am perhaps at a turning point in my spiritual life Walking in to a known and definite battle. May God protect me in it. . . . [I]t appears that I am one of the few Catholic priests in the country who has come out unequivocally for a completely intransigent fight for the abolition of war, for the use of nonviolent means to settle international conflicts. (32-33)

Forest highlights that from this point forward – despite the Trappist Order's censoring and eventually forbidding his public writing on war and peace – Merton remained a guide and mentor for peacemakers. Chapters 8-11 detail aspects of Merton's correspondence with Catholic peacemakers, the birth of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, and the “Spiritual Roots of Protest” retreat that Merton hosted at his hermitage in the fall of 1964.

This reviewer was especially moved by Forest's discussion of Merton's influence on Catholic Church teachings about war, peace and conscience. Merton's book *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*,² written in 1962, was among the monk's banned publications. In chapter 5 of Forest's book (60-72), the author explains that at the core of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* is Merton's urgent appeal that Christians seek to form their consciences about participation in war, to ban nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and to work for the total abolition of war. Forest draws attention to the fact that in 1962, the words “peace” and “peacemaking” would have been suspect among most Catholic communities. Yet Merton saw peacemaking as an integral dimension of the Christian vocation: “The Christian is and must be by his very adoption as a son of

2. The banned book was finally published more than four decades later, with an extensive Foreword by Jim Forest: Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

God, in Christ, a peacemaker (Matt 5:9)” (63).

Merton argues that the doctrine of the Incarnation – God’s becoming human in the person of Jesus Christ – obliges Christian disciples to respect the life of each person. Both friend *and* enemy are created in the image of God (see 63). Merton examines the ways in which fear obstructs one’s ability to see the image of God in his or her enemies, a blindness that is exacerbated by technologized war (see 84). Forest quotes Merton’s claims that the root of violence in the modern age is a spiritual problem: “the fact that in many Christians, the Christian conscience seems to function only as a rudimentary vestigial faculty, robbed of its full vigor and incapable of attaining its real purpose: a life completely transformed in Christ” (69).

Merton’s strong and impassioned words struck many in the church as revolutionary. And yet, writes Forest: “What [Merton] had attempted to say in his banned book in 1962 had become the official teaching of the Catholic Church in 1965” (148-49). In chapters 7 and 12, Forest underscores the resonance between Merton’s writings on war, peace and conscience, Pope John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (April 1963) and the Second Vatican Council’s pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (December 1965). Key themes of *Pacem in Terris* include war as a significant threat to the fundamental human right to life, the priority of each person’s conscience and a call to ban nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction (see 89-90). Similarly, the final draft of *Gaudium et Spes* contained a “solemn condemnation” of war and emphasis that “conscientious objection to participation in war ought to be universally recognized and respected” (146-47).

Following the publication of *Pacem in Terris* and *Gaudium et Spes*, Merton emboldened Jim Forest and Tom Cornell of the Catholic Peace Fellowship in their apostolic work of peacemaking. The role of the Catholic Peace Fellowship, according to Merton, was the “colorless and less dramatic job” of educating people in the church’s teachings on war and peace. Merton wrote that the Catholic Peace Fellowship should aim to reach “ordinary” Catholics – focusing efforts on Catholic colleges, seminaries and clergy – and “simply spelling out the [Vatican Council’s] teaching on war” (149). Merton writes that the position articulated in these ecclesial documents is neither liberal nor conservative, but is “simply Catholic, and nothing else” (151). He continues, “The more we can work along on the assumption that the whole Church is united . . . the better chance we have of getting [the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World] understood, and making the first step toward an abolition of war or a renunciation of the war mentality by everyone. The job is titanic” (150-51).

Chapter 17, “Letter to a Young Activist” (190-200), is especially striking. Forest addresses the reader as an apprentice peacemaker, passing on a much needed word of hope in the face of the temptation to despair. This chapter begins with a generous quotation from Merton’s letter in which he counsels Forest during a period of personal desperation and raging war. The author regards this correspondence as “the most helpful letter” he had ever received (192). Forest continues by offering the reader a nearly line-by-line commentary on the letter. For example, in this letter Merton writes: “do not depend on the hope of results. . . . In the end . . . it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything” (192-93). This, writes Forest, was one of the most important insights that he ever received from Merton, for “It sums up incarnational theology. . . . In the context of peace work, it suggests getting to know, as best we can, the people and cultures being targeted by our weapons” (198).

Throughout the text, Forest calls the reader to persevere in the slow work of Christian peacemaking. He names and laments the challenges – especially the fear present in our hearts that obstructs our ability to see Christ alive in the world and in our enemies. Forest also points to the beauty of the Christian vocation – conversion of heart, communion with the Truth and a vision transformed by God’s purifying love (see 200).

To this end, Forest encourages the reader to practice habits and disciplines that Merton viewed as essential to a life of Christian peacemaking. These include but are not limited to a willingness to encounter and dialogue with those regarded as enemies, to clarify one’s conscience around the political and military realities of the present day, and to remain “anchored in the deep waters of an active spiritual life” (80). Forest’s pastoral and contemplative writing style makes this text particularly suited for discussion in school, seminary and parish settings. The Catholic Peace Fellowship’s study guide for the book (available at <http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/wp/wordpress/resources/study-guide-for-the-root-of-war/>) aids individual and group reflection. Readers will also find Jim Forest’s book *Loving Our Enemies: Reflections on the Hardest Commandment* a rich supplement to this text. I especially recommend Part II: “Nine Disciplines of Active Love,” in which Forest discusses specific practices that foster the breaking down of enmity and conversion of heart.

On the whole, *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton’s Advice to Peacemakers* is a vivid introduction to Merton’s life of apostolic peacemaking. Jim Forest also welcomes the reader into his own experience of laboring for peace. In a world marked by seemingly endless violence and what Pope Francis calls the “globalization of indifference,” Merton and Forest offer an honest and hopeful call to imagine the world differently.

This book impels readers to pursue peace one person at a time and to seek the face of him who is our true peace, Jesus Christ.

Maria Surat

WEIS, Monica, *Thomas Merton and the Celts: A New World Opening Up*, Foreword by Bonnie B. Thurston (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. xvi + 142. ISBN 978-1-4982-7844-7 (paper) \$21.

This relatively slim but content-rich monograph is a welcome addition to the expanding catalog of publications by and about Thomas Merton for several reasons, but there are three in particular that seem to be especially significant. First, the topic of Merton and his spiritual (as well as intellectual and artistic) affiliation with “the Celts” is one that has just recently begun to be explored in any depth, and Monica Weis’ thorough study affords future scholars and Merton enthusiasts not merely an introduction to, but also a necessary resource for this multifaceted subject. Secondly, Weis approaches the concept of “Celtic Christianity” as a knowledgeable scholar and therefore quickly dispenses with the misguided “new-age” approach to Celtic studies: her carefully researched analyses of definitive themes in Celtic religious traditions are important correctives to the ahistorical – and thus anachronistic and uninformed – persuasion of much contemporary scholarship on (particularly) Celtic Christianity. Finally, she properly locates Merton’s primary interest in the Celtic Christian tradition within the values, practices and spiritual teachings of Celtic monasticism, which, as she explains, seemed to Merton to be a “mirror of his life and his desires” for the ascetic, solitary life of contemplation he wished to experience (124). Monica Weis’ book, then, is an essential addition to Merton studies since Merton’s own insight into the Celtic traditions and the coherence of that worldview with his own spirituality offer the reader a deeper understanding of Merton himself.

The specific stimulus that set Merton on to the path of Celtic studies remains somewhat elusive. As Weis notes, Thomas Merton did not fully engage Celticism until later in his life as a monk, during (what would become) his final years, between 1964 and 1968, and there was likely no single reason for the new direction of his religious and intellectual exploration. However, in chapter 1 (10-24), Weis does propose a few potential sources of inspiration, including his correspondence with noted medieval scholars like Dr. Nora Chadwick (a specialist in Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse and Celtic literatures and languages) and his personal friendships with such individuals as Canon A. M. (Donald) Allchin, scholar of Eastern Orthodoxy, honorary professor at the University of Bangor,