

# Interior Freedom and an Activist Conscience

Thomas Merton's Journey with Social Movements

## Gordon Oyer

### Introduction

'I guess Merton is really about the journey.'<sup>1</sup> So a friend who rarely reads the monk's work recently conceded to me. Indeed, Merton's openness to share how he engaged with life, welcomed new ideas, and grew from his experiences—including mistakes—drives his appeal for many. This holds especially true for those drawn to his journey's often-noted 'Turn toward the World' during his last decade of life. Despite many consistencies across the 'early' and 'late' works of Merton, equally grounded in his monastic commitments, a recognizable reorientation of focus during his latter years remains evident. As he entered middle age, Merton sought to simultaneously transcend boundaries behind which he initially sought to keep out 'the world', yet also remain skeptical of external social forces that dominate and drown out the voice of divine mystery.

A useful point of departure in considering Merton's journey with social engagement may be found in Merton scholar Ephrem Arcement's distinction between the presence of prophetic personal conviction or *insight* and its public expression or *communication*.<sup>2</sup> This distinction also begs added questions, however, of how we then move beyond mere communication of insight toward its implementation, or how we seek prophetic *transformation*, not just personally, but broadly as part of shared social practice. For Jesus-followers, this includes asking: What do we really mean when we pray 'May Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth?' Writing in 1959, Merton responds:

Building the Kingdom of God in this world ... means in fact  
*building a better world here and now.* ... The Kingdom of God

is the Kingdom of Love: but where freedom, justice, education, and a decent standard of living are not to be had in society, how can the Kingdom of Love be built in that society? ... We who have been called ... must take care to see that we build for one another a world of justice, decent living, honest labor, peace and truth.<sup>3</sup>

And in this context of building the Kingdom as a better world here and now, questions of the connection between faith commitments and movements for social transformation come to the fore. In many ways, Merton's personal journey with social issues reflects this trajectory that starts from gaining social insight, to publicly communicating that insight, to grappling with how his words, actions and vocation intersect with movements that seek transformation sympathetic to his insights—grappling with how he might retain his interior spiritual freedom when faced with the demands of an activist conscience.

#### **Merton's Compass for Engagement—Four Key Points for Navigation**

As a rule, Thomas Merton harbored suspicion toward most 'mass' human activity and toward social dynamics that might ensnare our God-endowed human freedom. He therefore exercised great care as he began his foray into dialogue on contemporary social and political issues. When we read his resulting commentary on social evils of his day, at least four core priorities often surface. In keeping with a journey metaphor, they might be framed as four interdependent points on a compass he used to navigate social terrain.

The first may seem obvious, especially in today's environment of alternative facts, fake news, and skepticism in general, but must still be named: Merton held to the notion not only that ultimate *Truth* actually exists, but that humans can access it to shape our vision for society. In his 1966 essay, 'Blessed Are the Meek: The Christian Roots of Nonviolence', he shared that the activist is 'not fighting simply for "his" truth ... [but] for *the* truth, common to him and the adversary, *the* right which is objective and universal.'<sup>4</sup> Rather than rely on propositional statements or formulas, Merton felt that humans access the truth on which we build social relationships through our spiritual freedom and express it through love. As he wrote in 1959: 'To build the Kingdom of God is to build a society that is based entirely on freedom and on love.'<sup>5</sup>

Merton's second compass point emerges from his belief that all

embody some portion of truth. Not all are equally guided by that truth within, however. He distinguished between the *person*, the true self—where awareness is grounded in freedom and ultimate Being, i.e., in God; and the *individual*, the false self—where awareness is artificially constructed through the ego grasping after illusory whims offered up for consumption by society's 'mass-mind'. For Merton, 'the person must be rescued from the individual.'<sup>6</sup> He prioritized both nurturing our own personhood and eliciting the person in others. Socially, Merton contrasted *communities*, comprised of mutually grounded persons, with *collectivities*—comprised of adrift, fragmented ego-driven individuals. And he especially viewed our deference to modernity's industrial and technological processes as a major force that perpetuated fragmentation and helped extend the power of the mass-mind over individuals.

Non-violence provided a third point of reference that bridges the first two. Merton was drawn to it even before he became a monk. Over time the models of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., amongst others, deepened his grasp of non-violence as a fundamental posture for social relationships. His 1966 essay explicitly names non-violence as the primary means to both seek and express truth through love. And so for Merton (and Gandhi and King), non-violence testifies 'to the truth that is incarnate in a concrete human situation involving living persons whose rights are denied or whose lives are threatened.'<sup>7</sup> This cannot be accomplished through physical or spiritual violence to their personhood that seeks domination over them. We point toward truth and encourage others to encounter it, rather than coerce them to accept it.

Finally, Merton's fourth compass point likewise reflects his commitment to recognize the truth embodied in each person: *solidarity* or *identification* with others, particularly those oppressed and marginalized by the priorities of mass society. This identification with others, something quite distinct from paternalistic benevolence, in turn helps *us* remain grounded in our own personhood and strengthens the role of truth in our social engagement. Merton did not often use the language of 'solidarity'—it's more implicit in his writings than explicit and sometimes couched in mystical terms or in relation to the incarnational work of Christ. But it is there. When preparing to discuss protest at a 1964 gathering of peace activists, he observed: 'The *real* [spiritual] root [of protest is] identification with the underprivileged [and] dedication to their "universe" as "epiphany".'<sup>8</sup>

Viewed together as integrated priorities that support each other,

these four compass points offer a certain symmetry, where non-violence and solidarity serve as core social postures that both point toward the power of truth and toward our shared human personhood and genuine community.

Reading Merton's journals, viewed together with the timing and circumstances of selected published writings and correspondence, permits one to sketch the contours of his journey, and doing so suggests it had four discernible legs. Their boundaries are fuzzy, but each offers a recognizable focus.

### 1957-1960: Expanding Social Insight and Consciousness

This period usually brings to mind his March 1958 experience at Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, described with language that expresses his deepening awareness of solidarity with other humans. Though a profound moment in Merton's life, it reflects more a point along a continuum than an isolated flash from elsewhere.

During these years Merton increasingly cast his gaze outward through a personalist lens, inspired by his reading of, amongst others, Mounier, Marx, Pasternak and Miłosz. Their works highlighted for him the anti-personalist nature of the mid-twentieth century's Soviet and fascist movements. Another noteworthy dynamic that expanded Merton's social insight during this period coalesced around his emerging Latin American connections which exposed him to the region's synthesis of Old World Iberian Catholicism with its indigenous peoples. He likewise wrote during these years of hoping to 'unite *in myself* ... the thought of the East and the West of the Greek and Latin Fathers' to help reconcile Roman and Orthodox traditions,<sup>9</sup> and to 'unite in myself all that is good in both Russia and America'<sup>10</sup>—all expressions of a solidarity with others in service toward reconciling human division. And in his journal during the summer of 1960, Merton confirmed the centrality personalist priorities in his social vision:

To discover *all* the social implications of the Gospel not by studying them but by living them, and to unite myself explicitly with those who foresee and work for a social order — a transformation of the world — according to these principles: primacy of the *person* — (hence justice, liberty, against slavery, peace, control of technology, etc.). Primacy of *wisdom and love* (hence against materialism, hedonism, pragmatism, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

### 1961-1965: Lending Public Voice to Social Movements

The start of this phase of his journey is marked by the publication of Merton's essay 'The Root of War is Fear' in October 1961, followed by his most intensive year of writing about peace.<sup>12</sup> This outpouring eventually prompted censorship by his Trappist order, which felt such commentary was a direct challenge to American and Catholic Cold War wisdom, and was unbecoming of a contemplative monk.

In 1963 Merton received a Pax Medal for his contribution to the peace movement,<sup>13</sup> and he also began to publish articles on race.<sup>14</sup> In November 1964 he hosted the retreat for Christian activists, 'The Spiritual Roots of Protest', which was the only formally sponsored movement event in which Merton directly participated, perhaps a high-water mark in his personal alignment with social movements. The retreat explored spiritual grounding for protest and examined social forces, such as technology, that drove the violence against which they protested.<sup>15</sup>

Four months after this retreat, he confessed to Miłosz an 'innocence of real politics', recognizing how 'fine, simple upright intentions' easily morph into 'ambiguous, sinister' actions. 'It would be quite absurd and most ambiguous to get myself drawn into a movement of one sort or another, and I think the monastic life is a life of liberation from movements.' But he could also state that: 'Still, it is true I do write for pacifist publications.'<sup>16</sup>

That August, after ending his decade-long tenure as novice master, Merton entered into full-time residence at his hermitage, a move which reduced his social interaction and intensified the solitude he had sought for years, which in turn complicated his ability to respond to accelerating changes of the mid-1960s.

### 1965-1966: Conflict and Reassessment

Confusion, conflict, and reassessment typify this journey's third phase, covering just four months that followed mid-October 1965. Dramatic actions — the burning of draft cards, self-immolations, etc — drove a wedge between Merton and his peace activist friends. He described the fast-moving events as revealing 'a kind of political vertigo that could be in part demonic in origin', and added, 'more and more I see that I am simply incompetent to comment on events, as such, ... I am too out of contact, never hear anything until it is all over.' He therefore resolved to limit future writing to 'questions of more or less abstract principle'.<sup>17</sup>

Merton's personal anguish over these events comes through clearly in

journal entries, expressing a 'need ... for the development of a new unexplored consciousness, which has nothing directly to do with the strategies of active movements and the proving of an activist conscience—yet is not alien<sup>18</sup> to their struggles. ... My need for genuine interior freedom is now urgent.'<sup>19</sup>

The gist of his written output during this period encourages non-violent protest that serves as constructive communication which does not alienate, but instead invites others to think deeply; and hopefully it plants seeds of change. It focuses on non-violence as a discipline rather than simply a pragmatic tactic, discouraging ambiguous symbolic acts.

### 1966-1968: Speaking from Solitude with Interior Freedom

During Merton's final three years, he mostly maintained his resolve to further pursue his vocation of deepening solitude and minimize entanglement with movement activism. But he also continued to write incisive commentary on race and the Vietnam War. Although he maintained distance from the mechanics of organized movements, Merton continued close personal relationships with members of the peace movement and the civil rights movement, giving his personal support to many, including Daniel Berrigan and Vincent Harding.

His approach can be summarized in comments given to a conference of nuns at Gethsemani in May 1968: 'The so-called prophetic movements of today are failures because they simply fit into society in another way. ... We live in a society that incorporates dissent into it,'<sup>20</sup> and 'Today's society ... neutralizes protest and can absorb it a lot.'<sup>21</sup> Rather than invest in movements, he advised them 'to be a prophetic community'<sup>22</sup> that becomes a 'sign of contradiction' to the illusions that the world offers;<sup>23</sup> though he sustained his late-1965 commitment to carefully speak on particular social issues 'personally, and not in a parade'.<sup>24</sup>

### Merton's evolving vision

Thomas Merton's understanding of social movements expanded over his final decade, from his early focus on Soviet and fascist totalitarian movements to his embrace of non-violent movements and protests modelled by Gandhi and King; to wrestling with confrontative expressions by US citizens opposing embedded racism and their government's prosecution of an oppressive war. Throughout this journey, Merton remained steadfast to his principles of personalism and Gandhian non-violence; to his confidence in Truth and the spiritual imperative of solidarity with those marginalized. As a consequence, he expressed

greater confidence in the earlier non-violent phases of the civil rights movement than in the unsettling challenges of anti-draft/anti-war civil disobedience that destroyed property designated as government-owned.<sup>25</sup> Yet even then, he supported the personal consciences of those with whom he disagreed,<sup>26</sup> and he refused to condemn the transition many young members of the Black community made from non-violence to Black Power, seeing it as the consequence of the Whites' inadequate response to the non-violent civil rights movement.<sup>27</sup>

Like Merton, we must make our own choices about how we relate to the social movements of our time. His priority focused on transforming society through contemplative disciplines that transform individual consciousness, through free persons grounded in love and truth, and through communities of these persons, rather than through movements seeking political power. But if we truly seek identification with those marginalized and abandoned, we cannot avoid an urgency to reach out and act in solidarity, especially during an era when those who suffer hear offerings of 'thoughts and prayers' as a cynical euphemism for doing nothing. So while Merton's priority of personalist transformation is valid, it does not dismiss his other insight that we must also 'build for one another a world of justice, decent living, honest labor, peace and truth' before personhood can flourish.<sup>28</sup> That requires breaking down entrenched barriers to freedom and personhood, even though simply dismantling those barriers will not *of itself* create free and loving persons. It also requires, as Canadian activist Naomi Klein notes, imagination and a shared vision of what a transformed world can look like.<sup>29</sup> We cannot participate in this by working in isolation nor simply from mere membership in a prophetic community. We also need to invest in broad movements of social transformation.

However, Merton does give us good reasons not to place ultimate hope in movements. They *can* become mired in power games. Oppressive social forces *do* find ways to neutralize dissent and continue on their way. In the US, movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Standing Rock encampment, and others seemingly came and went without accomplishing their goals.<sup>30</sup> Yet when faced with this grim prospect, we might look to a powerful metaphor from Merton's 1964 peacemaker retreat, where they invoked the imagery of water to symbolically remind us of delayed and unpredicted outcomes due more to God's movement than to ours. A key question for the participants was whether they should seek openings 'after the manner of power, or of "water",'<sup>31</sup> the water that

seeps through crevices and crannies to find open space? Remain watchful for 'springs in the desert', they advised, the surfacing of unexpected outcomes that have been forming unseen over a long period of time. During the retreat John Howard Yoder asked them all to remember that 'People who saw water disappearing on the mountainside had no idea it would spring up in the desert.'<sup>32</sup>

The point is that the true power of movements remains subtle, runs deep and broad, and cannot be easily controlled, measured, or quantified. Wall Street's Zuccotti Park was cleared, but the language and imagery deployed by the Occupy movement remains with us. Oil now flows through the Dakota Access Pipeline, but networks of indigenous people that formed to support the Standing Rock movement remain connected globally regarding their rights and responsibilities as protectors of the earth. Police shootings continue, but so do reminders that Black Lives Matter. Even if they prove to be token gestures, gun access has been curtailed in response to student activism following the mass shooting at Parkland, Florida. And although Donald Trump remains in office despite the Women's March following his inauguration, its impact continues to empower women to overturn entrenched abuse.

### Five points of reflection

If and when we engage with such movements to dismantle barriers to personhood, we would do well to remember and learn from Merton's journey; and at least five key points emerge from this study. First of all, Merton aspired to *respond* rather than *react* to events, issues and people, recognizing the limits of his capacity to adequately process the rapidly paced changes around him to discern a meaningful response. That pace has increased exponentially over the past fifty years, so even though most of us are not hermits, it becomes even more important to face the limits of our capacity to absorb and adequately process the meaning of today's chaotic, rapid-fire events before we respond.

Secondly, Merton also grasped that one's relationship to privilege—to what mass society prioritizes and rewards—affects how we seek change. He anchored his primary input at the 1964 peacemaker retreat around the concept of privilege in various forms, and lamented 'the arrogance and stupidity of the privileged'.<sup>33</sup> A year later he noted that the protestor 'who belongs to one of the powerful nations and who is himself in some sense a privileged member of world society will have to be clearly not *for himself* but *for others*, that is for the poor and underprivileged.'<sup>34</sup> Despite

this, however, his deference to the non-violent civil rights movement as a model over and against the efforts of the anti-draft/anti-war peace movement seems to miss the contrast between 'under-privileged' black civil rights protest and 'privileged' US anti-war protest. To be fair to Merton, the destruction of draft cards/records conflates motives of opposing the draft law and opposing the war itself, and Merton interpreted those actions as primarily targeting the draft law. He saw such 'anarchistic' acts as focused more on demonstrating the personal outrage and moral superiority of the protestor than exposing the immorality of the law itself. This sort of ambiguity speaks to his concern that protest should clearly communicate a better way to address the issues in question and should invite rather than alienate those who might otherwise sympathize.

Yet he offers no real guidance for what specific acts the privileged might take to help dismantle the oppression wreaked by their own society upon distant people. Nor does he fully explain how and why he thought civil disobedience toward racist structures by the underprivileged differed substantively from civil disobedience toward militaristic structures by the privileged. At the least, this ambiguity in Merton's journey helps bring into focus one's relationship to 'privilege' when seeking social change. When we stand as privileged, how do we listen, relate, and respond to those suffering marginalization and oppression? To what extent are we willing to sacrifice our privilege and its accumulated benefits in solidarity with those oppressed by forces intent on sustaining that privilege?

A third reflection involves awareness of what Merton called the 'mass mind' that drives western culture—a mass-mind now amplified through social media and artificial intelligence. At one point Merton named this 'the Unspeakable', a void and abyss that lurks behind 'public and official declarations'. He cautioned, 'Those who are at present so eager to be reconciled to the world at any price must take care not to be reconciled with it under this particular aspect: *as the nest of the Unspeakable*.'<sup>35</sup> He encouraged the nuns at Gethsemani to seek the 'factors behind the facts',<sup>36</sup> reminding them that modern society predetermines many of our most important choices, even as it promises an unlimited supply of them. 'It's the freedom to choose your product,' he asserted, 'but not the freedom to do without it.'<sup>37</sup> He paraphrased Herbert Marcuse's warnings about the modern degradation of communication: Our 'language [becomes] compressed into capsules so that it cuts down on any length or

development of thought. You get the facts through the impact of these small packets thrown at you. The rest is by implication.’<sup>38</sup> Thus Merton gives us a truly prophetic description of a 2018 Presidential Tweet.

Next, Merton reminds us how easily this mass mind invades the very movements dedicated to resisting it. As he complained when reconsidering his relationship to movements, ‘the philosophy, if any, behind most of the peace movement is exactly the sort of thing I am protesting against—the rationalistic and utilitarian spirit, the Bertrand Russell type of humanism.’<sup>39</sup> His warnings about the ubiquity of technological and economic measures of success—like quantified, maximized efficiency—suggest those also can become our measures of a movement’s success, distracting from our focus on truth itself and lived experience. Naomi Klein has noted how segments within movements can seek to promote their unique ‘brand’, implying an effort to capture a particular ‘market share’ of activist ‘consumers’.<sup>40</sup> Speaking to a group of nuns in Alaska in September 1968, Merton advised that although there is ‘a great deal of good will in [social] movements ... power takes priority ... [and] you come up against not love, but loveless means.’<sup>41</sup> This concern remains relevant. A recent article titled, ‘Why I’ve Started to Fear My Fellow Social Justice Activists,’ echoes Merton, describing practices that ‘abandon the person ... out of a desire to experience power by humiliating another community member.’<sup>42</sup> As theologian Miroslav Wolf reminds us: ‘The fiercer the struggle against the injustice you suffer, the blinder you will be to the injustice you inflict.’<sup>43</sup> And the personalist Merton would likely have sympathized with activist Lorretta Ross’s distinction that: ‘A group of people moving in the same direction thinking the same thing is a cult. A group of people moving in the same direction thinking different things is a movement.’<sup>44</sup>

This alludes to a fifth reflection: Beware the temptation to construct our identity—our personal sense of worth and virtue—from simply belonging to a movement. Merton asserted that a non-violent resister must not aim ‘to prove to *himself* that *he* is virtuous and right, and that his hands and heart are pure,’ nor seek mainly to ‘justify ourselves in our own eyes and in the eyes of “decent people” through our involvements.’<sup>45</sup> We can also slip into a careerist mindset that seeks personal advance up the ladder of a movement’s hierarchy more than it seeks the truth behind the movement. Jim Forest tells how during the mid-seventies he spoke out against violence committed by the victorious North Vietnamese, only to be criticized by a peace movement that had idolized Vietnamese self-

determination and made the regime immune from criticism. Forest chuckled over being warned by a movement leader that he jeopardized his ‘career’ in the peace movement—as though advocating for peace were a career rather than a calling.<sup>46</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

As we navigate today’s movements, we recognize many issues that echo those Merton faced. His era’s spectre of nuclear destruction has not gone away. Meanwhile, we have added accelerating climate change to the list of humanity’s existential threats. Both of these global, cataclysmic perils suggest that how we have chosen to measure human progress—measures often motivated by hubris, greed and fear—have ironically propelled us closer to our own self-destruction. As Merton understood so well, to survive we must realize that our journeys are really not ours alone. They are intertwined with all humanity, with all of life in *any* form, and with the landscapes on which we all reside together. Although he ultimately sought detachment from the mechanisms of movements that address such threats, his ongoing commitment to speak truth from his heart simply positioned him as a transformative presence in their midst, not outside them. Regardless of our own relationship to the mechanics of current social movements, the legacy of Thomas Merton’s journey with movements both challenges and encourages us to do likewise on our own journeys—to become a transformative presence among the movements that face today’s life-and-death issues.

### Notes

1. Informal comment to author by a personal friend, fall 2017.
2. Ephram Arcement, In *the School of the Prophets: The Formation of Thomas Merton’s Prophetic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), p. 77.
3. Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1960), p. 128.
4. Thomas Merton, ‘Blessed are the meek: The Christian roots of nonviolence’ included in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ed. Gordon C. Zahn (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), p. 209.
5. *Disputed Questions*, p. 142.
6. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962), p. 38.
7. *The Nonviolent Alternative*, ‘Blessed are the meek’, p. 211.
8. Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protests: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), p. 242.

9. Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: The Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 3 1952-1960*, Lawrence S. Cunningham, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 28 Apr. 1957, p. 87.
10. *A Search for Solitude*, 11 Apr. 1958, p. 191.
11. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Journals of Thomas Merton Vol. 4 1960-1963*, Victor A. Kramer, ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 6 June 1960, p. 9.
12. The essay is included in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, ch. 16.
13. See 'In Acceptance of the Pax Medal, 1963' in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, pp. 257-58.
14. Merton published two essays on race in 1963: 'The Negro Revolt: A Review of "A Different Drummer" by William Melvin Kelly' (September 1963, Jubilee) and 'The Black Revolution: Letters to a White Liberal' (November & December 1963, Blackfriars).
15. *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*, e.g. pp. 102-106.
16. Thomas Merton, *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Miłosz*, Robert Faggen, ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), letter to Miłosz, 30 March 1965, pp. 166-70.
17. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious and Social Concerns*, William H. Shannon, ed. (London: Collins Flame, 1990), letter to James Douglass, 6 November 1965, p.161.
18. The published version transcribed this word as 'akin', but examining the original shows it to be 'alien'.
19. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, n.d., p. 342.
20. Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, Sister Jane Marie Richardson, S.L., ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1992), p. 105.
21. *The Springs of Contemplation*, p. 111.
22. *The Springs of Contemplation*, p. 108.
23. *The Springs of Contemplation*, p. 108.
24. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 3 December 1965, p. 321.
25. For example see *Dancing in the Water of Life*, n.d., pp. 340-41: 'Contrast non-violence in civil rights with non-violence in peace movement. ... Doubtless, entirely new approach needed in peace movement.'
26. For example see *Springs of Contemplation*, p. 74.
27. For example see the essay 'From Non-violence to Black Power' included in Thomas Merton, *Faith and Violence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 121-129; the essay 'Note for Ave Maria' included in *The Nonviolent Alternative*, pp. 231-233; Thomas Merton, *The Other Side of the Mountain. The Journals of Thomas Merton, Vol. 7: 1967-1968*, Patrick Hart, O.S.C.O., ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 8 Feb. 1968, p. 51.
28. Included in previous quote - see note 3. *Disputed Questions*, p. 128.
29. [https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi\\_klein\\_how\\_shocking\\_events\\_can\\_spark\\_positive\\_change](https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi_klein_how_shocking_events_can_spark_positive_change) (accessed 3 October 2018).

30. Occupy Wall Street was a protest movement against economic inequality. It occupied Zuccotti Park in New York's financial district for 2 months in 2011. It spawned similar action worldwide including Occupy London which set up a camp adjacent to St Paul's Cathedral. The Standing Rock encampment (2016-2017) was part of the protest against the building of a large oil pipeline from North Dakota to Southern Illinois. In particular it encroached on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.
31. *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*, pp. 115, 247.
32. *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*, p. 156.
33. *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*, p. 242.
34. *The Nonviolent Alternative*, 'Blessed are the meek', p. 212.
35. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966), pp. 4-5.
36. *Springs of Contemplation*, p. 122.
37. *Springs of Contemplation*, p. 110.
38. *Springs of Contemplation*, pp. 120-21.
39. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, n.d., p. 343.
40. [https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi\\_klein\\_how\\_shocking\\_events\\_can\\_spark\\_positive\\_change](https://www.ted.com/talks/naomi_klein_how_shocking_events_can_spark_positive_change) (accessed 3 October 2018).
41. Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton in Alaska* (New York: New Directions, 1989), p. 108.
42. Frances Lee, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/why-ive-started-to-fear-my-fellow-social-justice-activists-20171013> (accessed 3 October 2018).
43. Quoted in Joanne Gallardo, 'Looking back in order to move forward', *The Mennonite*, August 2017, p. 32.
44. Quoted by adrienne mare brown in <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/the-world-is-a-miraculous-mess-and-its-going-to-be-alright-20180327> (accessed 3 October 2018).
45. *The Nonviolent Alternative*, 'Blessed are the meek', p. 208.
46. Jim Forest, interview with author, 29 May 2011.

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His latest book is *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemaker Retreat*. He was one of the keynote speakers at the Society's 2018 Oakham conference. This paper is an edited version of the one he gave. The full version can be found on the Society's website: [www.thomasmertonsociety.org.uk](http://www.thomasmertonsociety.org.uk)