

would also be intrigued to read, if I can track down a copy in English, *The Second Spiritual Alphabet*, which Merton tells us is 'for people in active life with little time for prayers'. (p. 165) The last chapter is, not surprisingly, given over to St. John of the Cross and the Dark Night and spiritual crises, and to the keys to discernment especially for spiritual directors.

This is an excellent book, both for the student of Christian spirituality, for the aspiring contemplative, and for anyone who is simply looking for a readable introduction to the great thinkers and writers of Christian spirituality.

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### **The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers**

Jim Forest

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2016

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\$25.00 £17.99

The name Jim Forest is well known to readers of *The Merton Journal* on various fronts. For some, through his wonderful, lavishly illustrated biographies of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and, most recently, Daniel Berrigan. Or Jim's engrossing correspondence with Thomas Merton published in *The Hidden Ground of Love*. Merton's frequently quoted letter to Jim, 'Advice to a Young Activist', is the most frequently published of any of Merton's letters. Or again, for his ongoing support of the Merton Society, giving so generously of his time and talent to speak at various events over the years, including the inaugural meeting in Winchester, twenty-five years ago this December.

Jim Forest's recent book, *The Root of War Is Fear: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers*, was a book begging to be written. Over the years much has been written about Merton's writings on nuclear weapons, war and peace, and related issues. In this excellent book Forest gives us a very well rounded presentation of Merton's thinking on these subjects and,

most uniquely, writing it from the perspective of someone who knew Merton, visited him at the Abbey, and corresponded with him for many years on these very issues. At the same time, Forest was involved at the coalface (or maybe on the battlefield is a more appropriate metaphor) through his work with Dorothy Day and *The Catholic Worker*, The Fellowship of Reconciliation, The Catholic Peace Fellowship, and in more recent years, the Orthodox Peace Fellowship.

As Forest explores issues such as Merton's attitude to acts of nonviolent resistance it is important to remember not just Forest's dialogue with Merton on these issues but Forest's own witness for peace, especially his involvement with the 'Milwaukee Fourteen', a group of Catholic priests and lay people who, in the late sixties, burned draft records as a protest against the war in Vietnam, an act for which Jim was imprisoned for thirteen months.

*The Root of War Is Fear* is carefully structured. In introducing the reader to Merton the man and the monk, Forest notes the impact war had on Merton's life, from his birth during World War I, his entry to the monastery shortly after America's entry into World War II, the death of his only brother in that war, and then Merton's death during the war in Vietnam. He then recounts Merton's turning to the world in the late nineteen fifties and his entry into the peace movement through the publication of his essay in *The Catholic Worker* from which this volume takes its title, 'The Root of War is Fear'.

Forest then moves on to recall his own introduction to Merton's writings, having picked up *The Seven Storey Mountain* at a bus station news stand whilst on leave from the U.S. Navy in 1959. Two years later, by then discharged from the Navy as a conscientious objector, Forest found himself joining the Catholic Worker community in New York where Merton would once again enter his life. Initially through Dorothy Day sharing with Forest some of her own correspondence with Merton and then, as editor of *The Catholic Worker*, being handed a poem by Merton about Auschwitz and being told by Day to write to Merton to tell him the *Worker* would publish it. Later in 1961 Merton's first prose piece to be published in the *Worker*, 'The Root of War is Fear', would be prepared for publication by Forest. This essay, in the words of William Shannon, marked Merton's 'definitive entry ... into the struggle against war' and also the beginning of Forest's extensive correspondence with Merton. The final part of Forest's account of his life's intersection with Merton records his first visit to the Abbey and meeting with Merton in person.

The central part of the book then explores the major areas of Merton's involvement with the peace movement. Forest gives an excellent and

comprehensive overview of these areas whilst prudently drawing on his own correspondence with Merton to show both the public and the private face of this important aspect of Merton's life and thought. In these chapters Forest explores Merton's writings on war and their curtailment by the censors of the Cistercian Order, moving on then to his underground publishing of *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* and *The Cold War Letters*, in the lead up to John XXIII's promulgation of *Pacem in Terris*. In a letter to the Abbot General, Merton noted humorously that it was a good thing Pope John XXIII did not have to submit his encyclical to the Cistercian censors! Forest then moves on to trace the development of the Catholic peace movement, including the founding of the Catholic Peace Fellowship and some of their early struggles, most notably in relation to nonviolent acts of protests, such as the destruction of draft cards. The unfortunate self-immolation of a young Catholic Worker, Roger LaPorte, in November 1965 would cause all concerned, including Merton, much soul-searching.

Forest also explores Merton's involvement both with the larger peace movement through the ecumenical retreat he would host at Gethsemani in 1964 on the spiritual roots of non-violence, and through his contacts with the Second Vatican Council. Through numerous friends and correspondents, Merton had a variety of contacts involved in different ways with the council in Rome. With Merton's influence, both through these contacts and through his writings, Forest describes his as a 'quiet voice at the Vatican Council', calling him an 'invisible council father'. With the publication of *Pacem in Terris* and *Gaudium et Spes*, Merton's thinking in *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, banned by his own order in the early sixties, would become the official teaching of the Catholic Church.

In the final chapters Forest chronicles Merton's writings on issues related to war in the last years of his life, most importantly in relation to the escalating war in Vietnam. He draws the book to a close by providing a commentary on Merton's letter of 'Advice to a Young Activist' and by addressing the question of the relationship of Merton's social writings to his monastic and contemplative life. The answer to this latter question points to one of Merton's great contributions as a spiritual writer. Not only does Merton revive the contemplative life and make meditation and contemplation accessible to ordinary people, but also he clearly demonstrates their relationship to issues of social justice. For too long contemplation and action had been divorced so that Christianity produced millions who were prepared to go to war and hardly any like Franz Jägerstätter who, on grounds of conscience, had refused to serve in the army of the Third Reich. As Merton wrote in *Faith and Violence*, 'If the

Church could make its teachings alive to the laity, future Franz Jägerstätters would no longer give their witness in solitude but would be the Church as a whole reasserting the primacy of the spiritual,' a spiritual life, as both Merton and Forest demonstrate, that permeates every aspect of the Christian life.

Two added bonuses to this volume are the photographic illustrations and the availability of a study guide for the book made available by the Catholic Peace Fellowship. It is an exceptional resource for either individuals or groups who want to delve deeper into this important volume, available at:

<http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/wp/wordpress/resources/study-guide-for-the-root-of-war>

A hundred years after the end of the First World War, and fifty years after Merton's premature death, his thinking, as expounded in this book, remains most prescient, unfortunately so. The superpowers continue to pour ever-greater resources into new and 'better' weapons, blindly ignoring the teachings of Pope John XXIII, the Vatican Council, and Merton's own warnings, one of them used by Forest as an epigram for his timely book:

There is one winner, only one winner, in war.  
The winner is war itself.  
Not truth, not justice, not liberty, not morality.  
These are the vanquished.

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### **We Are All Poets Here**

Kathleen Witkowska Tarr

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In this engaging book the author weaves the story of her own journey of spiritual growth with the writings of Thomas Merton and in particular with his brief visit to Alaska in 1968. The author moved in her early twenties to the remote Alaskan settlement of Yakutat, but she only discovered Merton's writings in her forties whilst she was a mature