Cistercian Quarterly Studies

Vol. 49, No. 3 (2014)

Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemakers Retreat* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), pp. xxii + 275, paper, $33, ISBN 978–1–62032–377–9.

ON NOVEMBER 18–20, 1964, thirteen individuals from various church backgrounds and vocational paths gathered at Gethsemani Abbey, near Louisville, KY, for a retreat with Thomas Merton on protest and peacemaking. Some of the participants could not remain for even the full two days. Phillip Berrigan arrived somewhat late, and some of the participants were mostly listeners, with few if any contributions. Two liturgies were presided over by Dan Berrigan, in a rather avant-garde fashion. Everything was in English; several Protestant participants read the lessons and preached. And all received communion, quite a radical move for that day, something Merton feared would come down on him if the abbot found out!

Some of those who came were already well known in peacemaking, such as A. J. Muste, who had been involved in the Fellowship of Reconciliation since 1916! Also from the Fellowship and the Church Peace Mission and other activist bodies was John Oliver Nelson. Jim Forest and Tom Cornell represented The Catholic Peace Fellowship, and both had been members of the Catholic Worker movement. Their work as pro-

phetic protestors for the most part lay in front of them, but the Berrigan brothers, priests Daniel and Phillip, were other important Catholics present. W. H. "Ping" Ferry, from the Ford Foundation and the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, was also a principal speaker, adding the voice of French Reformed theologian Jacques Ellul to the retreat conversation. Merton himself brought in the thought of Louis Massignon, priest, theologian, and scholar of the Muslim mystic and martyr al-Hallaj. Methodist Elbert Jean was to have a lifetime of civil-rights activism. Several others who came were both reserved in their participation and likewise less than active members in the civil-rights and anti-war movements later on. Merton, while at the height of his productivity and thinking, would only live another four years. He was on the verge of new horizons when he died in 1968, with a new abbot who actually supported his gifts and his work. John Heidbrink of the FOR, probably the originator of the idea for the retreat, was unable to attend because of illness. Paul Peachey, then executive secretary of Church Peace Mission (and later one of my teachers in sociology at The Catholic University of America), who helped arrange the gathering with Merton, was also unable to attend because of other commitments.

Mennonite John Howard Yoder, who went on to a long and distinguished academic career, was a prominent contributor, providing the most substantial theological underpinning for protest in the work of Christ, especially the cross. Yoder's copious notes along with those from Jim Forest are the main sources of the retreat's documentation, with Forest also recording it in photographs. Over twenty of these are included in the text, truly invaluable images that bring the retreat alive. It is simply not possible to do more than acknowledge the rich detail of the presentations and conversations Oyer was able to glean from the notes, from some interviews, and from other sources.

No manifesto-type document, open letter, or anthology was produced or published. In fact, it might seem as though the retreat was just a momentary encounter, spiritually deep, innovative in that many participants had never been in a monastery before, never spent so much time with a monk, Thomas Merton. While the photography and notes of Jim Forest and John Howard Yoder's notes are the main sources for what was said and done at the retreat, along with a few interviews of surviving

participants, Gordon Oyer does an immense service in several ways in this book. In a personal communication, Jim Forest told me it is like the raising of Lazarus in John's Gospel. He takes a small but most important encounter from fifty years ago, long forgotten, dead and buried in notes, and brings it alive again. Oyer provides an extensive backdrop on peacemaking and protest up to the 1964 retreat, and then from a variety of sources gives rich, personal portraits of the participants. Here again I want to underscore Jim Forest's photos—since he was taking them he does not appear in any of those selected for the book. They show much younger versions of the Berrigans, Yoder, Ferry, and Cornell than I know from later tapes and images. We see Merton energized, concentrated, yet ebullient too. We are reminded of how early this was in the antiwar movement, though far along in the civil-rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was to have visited Merton at his hermitage later in 1968 but this was not to happen.

Oyer gathers from all the sources what were the basic themes that emerged both from the presentations of Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste and the conversations that surrounded these talks. Among these was Merton's challenge: by what warrant or right did one protest? While this sounds somewhat contrived, one has to recall the pressure, in so many of the churches back then, always to approve and bless the government and status quo. Muste brought forth a lifetime of thinking about peacemaking as essential to Christian discipleship. Yoder contributed the witness of the marginalized, oppressed Anabaptists and their subsequent commitment to pacifism and nonviolence as well as a very solid theology of the cross. Ferry brought in the cultural critique of technology of Ellul, as well as his extensive experience with intellectuals concerned with the modern state and culture. Merton shared his monastic experience as well as highlighting Massignon's critique of the French colonization oppression of Muslims. Dan Berrigan had already experienced censure by the Jesuits for his activism. Merton too would experience censorship and prohibition of writing on civil rights and the war.

Thus those gathered had to confront the reality that the institutional church lagged behind and often opposed the civil-rights and peace movements. As the participants had experienced the seemingly impossible, the sharing of the Eucharist across church lines, so did they also

come to recognize the need for unity and community in peacemaking. They also called the larger, quite formidable political, economic, and social forces they had to oppose by the New Testament names: "the powers and principalities." And thus did Merton's at first improbable underlining of the monastic witness and contemplative prayer begin to make sense. More than anything else, and far beyond the imagining of the planners, this brief retreat had been a deep journey into the spiritual foundations of peacemaking and protest. I think the reader will find nothing short of stunning the way Oyer fast-forwards to several activists of the present: theologian Ched Meyers, Jake Olzen from the Catholic Worker, the veteran activist Elizabeth McAlister, widow of Phillip Berrigan, and the retired Episcopal bishop George Packard (most recently active in the Occupy Wall Street events). These four found themselves in great resonance with the themes of the retreat that took place a half century earlier. As early and brief as the retreat was in November 1964, it remains a singular moment in Christian social engagement, especially in the clarifying of the basis for protest and confrontation in Christian sources—the Scriptures, sacraments, prayer, and the fellowship of believers. Not only students of Merton but those of the struggle for social justice by the churches in our times are indebted to Gordon Oyer's recovery of the participants, their words, and their commitments to peacemaking so long ago.

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