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## Review of The Root of War: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers

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**Classics Revisited: *The Root of War: Thomas Merton's Advice to Peacemakers*. Jim Forest. Maryknoll, New York Orbis Books, 2016, paper, 222pp., ISBN 9781626981973**

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I was pondering the current situation of the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine from the perspective of non-violence and social change. In one of my browsing sessions on Amazon, I came across this book. A revelation that reads as if Merton was around thinking about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It also made me recall my relationships through the years with the national and local entities of the Catholic Worker, The Freeze, Sane-Freeze, Peace Action, Fellowship of Reconciliation, and Pax Christi.

I recommend this book to all people who care about the peace message of their belief system. Whether those beliefs are religious, or secular, pragmatic or idealistic, we all care about avoiding war, ending it, and establishing a just peace -- even as we disagree about the best way to do those things.

I believe one can state the essence of Merton's "advice to peacemakers"—violence begets violence; **the way to peace is nonviolence.**

This book was published in 2016. It has 19 unnumbered chapters, perhaps better thought of as 19 encounters between Jim Forest, peace activist, author, and Thomas Merton, monk, author and Church activist. Each engagement between them is presented in a lively, vivid way. There is also, at the end, a Swiftian letter Merton wrote under the pseudonym "Marco J. Frisbee" in 1962. It was not published until its appearance in this book.

This book is but a slice of the larger-than-life life of the person whose name in the world was Thomas Merton, and whose name in the monastery was Father Louis.(Merton, 1978). My own relationship with Merton was that his religious name was my choice for a Confirmation name--"Luigi" in the Latin of the Bishop. This choice, despite the popularity of the song lyric, which became my family's favorite way to tease me at the time, "Alright Louie, drop that gun..." Many years later as an adult I visited the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani, for eight very special days.

This book is an insightful history of the beginnings of the "Catholic left," the era of the Berrigan brothers' inspired divine disobedience. (Polder, et al., 1997). Its focus is on Thomas Merton and his thoughts on war, peace and non-violence. The continuities and changes in his thought are developed in the subtext of the personal engagement of Jim Forest with Merton. Their relationship began when Forest first read about Merton in 1959 and continued until Merton's death in 1968.

Some of the specifics are also mentioned in Forest's autobiography (Forest, 2020), but there they are more autobiographical than biographical.

There are several pictures in each chapter, over two dozen in the book. They bring an important humanness to the text.

Each chapter has long quotes from Merton himself. This is important, as despite his continuous interest in non-violence, his thinking was applied in different circumstances and as a result developed over time.

**1- Jonas in the Belly of a Paradox --** Merton himself recognized that his life was filled with paradox. A contemplative monk withdrawn from the world, whose writings were addressed to that world, while they at the same time informed readers of the fullness of life in the Monastery. (Pennington, 1997). His religious vows required a life of silence, yet his vocation as a writer required him to speak, and later in his too short life, to be deeply engaged with the outside world. It seemed to both Forest and Merton himself that "like the reluctant Jonas, who sought to evade a prophet's role in saving Nineveh, Merton was delivered to the sinful city as by a whale" (Forest, 2016, p.1).

Merton was born in 1915 in France. In 1916 his father brought him to the U.S. to his grandparents on Long Island. Owen Merton, his father, was a native of New Zealand and a serious artist. Merton's mother Ruth was also an accomplished artist, and significantly a Quaker. Owen left France with his family in order to avoid being drafted into the French military. He was a conscientious objector (C.O) to war, a view not legally recognized in France. In the U.S. he nevertheless registered for the draft in 1917. Describing himself as a C.O., and the sole support of his family, he was never called up for service. (p.3). In 1921 Merton's mother Ruth died of cancer. Merton and his father then moved to England. Owen died of a brain tumor in 1931 making Thomas an orphan. Merton's younger brother, John Paul, had remained with his grandparents in New York.

Merton studied at Clare College in Cambridge, England, before returning to the U.S. in 1935 to finish his college career at Columbia. Merton, beginning in 1933 when he visited Rome and its churches, felt the pull of religion. He was baptized in 1938 in Manhattan. Forest describes this decision as "the most important border crossing of his (Merton's) life" (p.5).

Despite seeing paradox as a major theme in Merton's life, Forest also found it "striking to note that a concern for peace runs like a red thread connecting his very earliest writing and his later work." Perhaps this is less striking considering his mother was a Quaker.

This "red thread" was sewed in part by the First World War, later a brief run in with young Nazi thugs (p.4), his learning of the life of St. Francis (ultimately joining the third order, which

prohibited its members to possess or use weapons of war) (p.5-6), and a sense of guilt about the coming of WWII. Merton wrote *My Argument with the Gestapo* during this period, although the book was not published until 1969. Merton actually wrote “All I know is, if anything happens to the world, it is partly because of me.”

He registered for the draft as a C.O. and asked for non-combatant service. There were approximately 25,000 others, of the 34.5 million who registered for the draft, also classified as noncombatants. 12,000 men performed alternate civilian service, and another 6,000 refused to cooperate with the draft and went to prison (p.11).

This first chapter traces Merton's search for his vocation. Should he join the Franciscans? Volunteer with the Catholic Worker Friendship House of Hospitality in Harlem? Or, should he enter the Trappist Monastery in Kentucky? He had visited each location. At the time, he was teaching at a Franciscan College in Olean, New York, St. Bonaventure.

On December 10, 1941 he entered the Monastery of the Trappist Order of priests and brothers. It is in this Order that he spent the rest of his life. He died of an accidental electrocution on December 10, 1968, at a Trappist conference in Bangkok, Thailand. He was fifty-three.

Merton was the author of over 50 books and many articles and letters. There is a short bibliography of his books at the end of this book. (p.217-218). Merton wrote over 10,000 letters in his lifetime. There is an edited selection of these published as *A Life in Letters* in 2008. There are also the seven volumes of his journals in which he made entries beginning in 1939, ending with his death 29 years later. These journal entries have been edited and published in a single volume as *The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals* in 1999. This volume presents a picture of a fully human person with all the usual vices and an extra-large dose of virtues.

In his first book, *Thirty Poems*, published in 1944, (Woodcock, 1997) he wrote of the “hellishness of war” (p.12). It remained a topic of deep concern until his death. His autobiographical book, perhaps his most famous, about his early life and of his entry into the Trappist Monastery, *The Seven Story Mountain* was begun in 1944 and published in 1948. It includes, for instance, reflections on his brother, John Paul, who was killed in action in 1943 during WWII.

This chapter ends with Merton's epiphany when he had the overwhelming insight which “led him to redefine his monastic identity with greater involvement with social justice issues,” including that of nuclear weapons testing and proliferation.(pp.17-18). This occurred on the street corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville. There is a picture in the book of a street sign commemorating this event on page 17.

**2- A Book in a Bus Terminal --** This chapter concerns itself with Forest discovering in 1959 Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* in the bus terminal of the New York Port Authority during a leave from Naval Weather School in Washington D.C.. Forest also read Dorothy Day's autobiography, *A Long Loneliness*, a short time later. By early fall of 1960 Forest had connected through these books with two of the people who guided his way forward.

Much of this chapter focuses on Dorothy Day and the work of the Catholic Worker, (Miller 1974) including Forest's work there, and the Worker's impact on Merton's deepening understanding of war and non-violence. Merton's essay, "The Root of War is Fear" in the October 1961 issue of the *Catholic Worker* has been called the "initial and definitive entry of Thomas Merton into the struggle against war" (p.31). At this point in time, Merton did not deny that violent means of national defense were permissible when nonviolent means are "impractical." But Merton did recognize that "if we strive to save (Christianity) with bombs and nuclear submarines we are going to lose it" (p.32).

Merton's *Journal* entry two days later said "I am perhaps at a turning point in my spiritual life: perhaps slowly coming to ... the resolution of doubts—and the forgetting of *fears*" (p.32). In the same entry he discussed a Jesuit author who had recently referred positively to persons during the early Cold War sitting in their "fallout shelters" with a machine gun to keep others out! Merton wrote "not that self-defense is not legitimate, but... it is not possible to solve our problems on the basis of 'every man for himself' (p.34). In the next issue of the *Catholic Worker*, he elaborated "there are higher ideals we can keep in mind... Let us not forget that the supreme example of nonviolent resistance to evil is the Crucifixion" (p.35). He concluded that a "me-first" attitude was "unchristian."

**3- Meeting Merton --** in December 1961 Merton invited Forest to visit him at the Abbey of Gethsemani. Forest hitchhiked with a fellow Catholic Worker. Merton, or Father Louis, as he was known at the Abbey, was at that time the novice master, responsible for the education and spiritual formation of the newer Trappists. Additionally, he was seeking permission from the Abbot, the authority in the Abbey, to seek greater solitude by separating himself from the group by living in a hermitage, at least part of the time -- permission argued for and eventually granted.

Additionally, during this period, Merton's views on peace were being censored by higher ups in the Order. The censorship was eventually lifted after *Pacem in Terris*, the encyclical of Pope John XXIII in April of 1963, which emphasized the need to separate the interests of the Church from the interests of the nation-state.

The encyclical was so ecumenical and welcoming that my Protestant mother, who in 1940 was forced to be married on the doorsteps of the church, always referred to Pope John as the "Protestant" Pope.

**4- Merton's Collision with Censors --** The long history of censorship in the Catholic Church required that a Catholic writing on theological topics of war and peace, had to be submit their writing to an official censor for scrutiny. The censor then decided whether to declare the writing *nihil obstat*, without error. The local Bishop could then give his *imprimatur*, let it be printed. In addition, the Trappist Order was concerned that its members stay within the tradition of prayer and contemplation of the sacred. Merton's writings, beginning in a sense with his *Catholic Worker* essay "The Root of War is Fear," led to even more censorship. In April of 1992 the head of the entire Order, the Abbott General, forbade Merton to publish any war-related writings.

The chapter contains substantial excerpts of Merton's reflections on the situation, including why he felt he had to obey what he felt to be an unjust order. Strong stuff about commitment and its obligations.

However, as the saying goes, "the ways of the Lord...." The Abbot in charge at the Abbey of Gethsemani understood the prohibition to apply only to book publication. He permitted a limited number of mimeographed copies of the war-related items to be made and distributed to friends; about 500 copies. Very much like Soviet-era Samizdat; copied and recopied until they reached thousands.

**5- Peace in the Post-Christian Era --** This chapter discusses the content, distribution, and impact of Merton's unpublished book with that title (eventually published in 2004). Forest received over 20 copies of the book from Merton, some of which had previously been shared, which he in turn shared with others.

Merton saw Christianity as marginalized; he wrote "what was once called 'Christian society' is more purely and simply a materialistic neo-paganism with a Christian veneer" (p.60). It feels difficult to deny the sad truth that things have gotten worse.

Perhaps even more shocking to many, maybe less so today as we all see the horrors occurring in Ukraine, is Merton's "one fundamental truth: that all nuclear war, and indeed massive destruction of cities, populations, nations and cultures by any means whatever, is a most serious crime which is forbidden to us not only by Christian ethics but by every sane and serious moral code"(p.62). He also asserted that "The Christian is and must be...a peacemaker...bound to imitate the Savior who, instead of defending Himself...died praying for his executioners..." (p.63).

Merton was, I would say, dismissive of the principle of double-effect, which he described as "casuistry" (p.66) because people, especially the Generals, know that "of course" innocents are killed in every war (Kendall, 2000). He also was skeptical about the just war doctrine. Even a just war can turn unjust when unjust means are used, such as saturation bombing of German cities, or

the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Also, when the goal of the war becomes unconditional surrender, the validity of the just war doctrine is at best questionable morality. (p.67).

Merton also put the “just following orders” defense in its proper place; he wrote “this moral passivity is the most terrible danger of our time”(p.68). Happily, the Nuremberg Tribunal established that such a claim was no excuse, had no validity in the laws of war.

Recognizing that Christians are called to “a complete sacrificial offering of our self and our life,” the question becomes “sacrifice in the service of what?” Merton’s answer is “Christian truth” not “our own selfish interests (or) concerns of a wealthy, spiritually indolent society.” Merton specifically pointed to Dorothy Day as a model (p.69).

Merton subsequently, in his *Cold War Letters*, made his view of violent self-defense unequivocal when he wrote “I therefore believe in practice that war must be absolutely banned and abolished today... (p.85). He made it clear that the duty to sacrificial behavior, to resist injustice, aggression, and all evil he had been writing about in the post-Christian era can be and should be discharged nonviolently.

**6- Cold War Letters** -- This collection of 111 letters written by Merton in 1961 and 1962 with the approval of his Abbot as part of his efforts to permit Merton to speak his piece, “peace” may be more accurate. This period can be considered as “the most vigorous, concentrated and productive period of Merton’s writings on war and peace.” Only 81 people received this “strictly confidential—not for publication” item, although approximately 600 copies were produced and given away (p.74).

The letters covered a wide range of topics: “the arms race, the Cold War, the realities of nuclear war, and the temptations to launch a preemptive nuclear strike on the Soviet Union,” among many other matters of concern to Merton, including “his outraged reflections on being silenced” (p.75). Merton rejected the “Cold War mentality” that saw all evil on one side and all good on the other. Rather he favored a “Christ-centered humanism... (that) sees the other, including his enemy ... as another self, no less deserving of the divine mercy than I am” (p.76). In one of the letters he is especially clear that “war is the main enemy and we are not going to fully make sense unless we see that” (p.77).

In other letters Merton decried the failure of Church leadership to challenge Hitler’s war efforts, pointing to the “lonely” witness of Franz Jagerstatter’s conscientious resistance to the draft (Zahn, 1986). Today Jagerstatter is recognized by the Church as a patron saint of conscientious objectors. (p.119, n. 7). Finally, the letters mention several times both Gandhi and Dr. King. In fact, there is an anthology of Gandhi’s thought, edited and introduced by Merton (*Gandhi on Non-violence*

(2007). For too few, Merton's concern that pragmatic rather than ideally inspired nonviolence may "harden the opposition..separate men and drive them in the other direction, away from us and away from peace" is important. (p.81). In that regard he also "stressed the importance of compassion toward those who are enraged by acts of protest" (p.83).

Forest ends this chapter with a quote that sounds like something Orwell would write. These Letters are "biased by a frank hatred of power politics and by an uninhibited contempt for those who use power to distort truth or to silence it altogether" (p.87). Later, trying to live with the emptiness of words, especially around Vietnam, Merton wrote about "double-talk, tautology, ambiguous cliché, self-righteous and doctrinaire pomposity, and pseudoscientific jargon" as blinding people from reality (p.170; see Orwell, 2018).

**7- Pacem in Terris --** This chapter discusses in detail the what and why, and the influences of the Document that began the transformation of Church doctrine on wars and other violent evils: Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) in April of 1963. Forest sums up this powerful preaching: "Pope John flatly declared that war could no longer be considered "a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice" (p.88).

I mentioned earlier its significance to my non-Catholic mother. That was in part explained by the fact that it was the first encyclical addressed not only to Catholics but also to "all people of good will" (p.88).

In 1963 Merton wrote the preface to the Japanese edition of *Seven Story Mountain*. In it he wrote that his life must be considered as a protest against "the lies of politicians, propagandists and agitators" supporters of "racial injustices" and those who engage "in self-righteous and lying forms of tyranny" (p.95).

In what could be a transition to the following chapter Forest wrote: "No longer allowed to write about war and obliged not to comment on nuclear weapons, ironically Merton wrote instead of the deep resistance that was needed in a world that had suicidal tendencies" (p.96).

**8- Building a Catholic Peace Movement --** Not surprisingly when the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) contacted Jim Forest and Tom Cornell, Forest and Cornell sought the advice of Merton. FOR is the oldest peace organization in the US; it began operating here in 1914. Inspired in part by *Pacem in Terris*, and Merton's Root of War essay in the *Catholic Worker*, John Heidbrink, an official at FOR, contacted Merton, Forest and others suggesting working together to launch a Catholic Peace Fellowship. Forest goes into the details of the decision not to move forward with FOR (it was Protestant, and Catholic Bishops would likely be suspicious of such a connection). Nevertheless, recognizing the desirability of such an organization, the decision was made to affiliate with the PAX Society, an established British Catholic peace group.



The chapter reviews a debate about the use of the word “pacifist.” Merton was concerned that it was a word understood by its association with “the Protestant and liberal context of individualism” and thus would not be understood correctly by Catholics (p.99).

Forest himself was active with the Committee for Nonviolent Action-CNVA, and the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, At the time SANE was producing for its own use copies of Merton's *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*.

Merton was positive about the efforts of CNVA to break the sea blockade of Cuba, but he recognized his circumstances put him “out of the game” so to speak. He wrote “...an immense amount of work needs to be done...We have got to work on the theological and spiritual bases for *ahimsa* and tie them in with the Gospel in a way that/leaves no doubt as to the Christian obligation in this regard” (p.103-104).

Merton was concerned that without a sound and solid foundation Catholic peace building could be “used and misused by political elements...” (p.104). It is in this context and at this time that he wrote his Swiftian satire “Marco J.Frisbee” (p.213).

**9- Founding the Catholic Peace Fellowship --** The escalation of the war in Vietnam exposed the limitations of the PAX model. PAX was primarily concerned with organizing annual conferences and publishing a periodical. By 1964 Merton was encouraging the move towards an activist organizing effort like the earlier Peace Fellowship model. The Catholic Peace Fellowship “began taking shape”(p.106). CPF would focus on draft counseling and anti-Vietnam war protests. The War Resisters League-WRL provided office space at reduced rent (p.110-111).

Dan Berrigan, Jim Douglas, Dorothy Day, Eileen Eagan, Marty Corbin, Tom Cornell and others were working with the Vatican Council initiated by Pope John.

**10- The Spiritual Roots of Protest --** *Gordon Oyer's book Pursuing the Spitual Roots of Protest*, published in 2014, is recognized as “a carefully researched, hour-by-hour account” of a retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani to consider the spiritual roots of protest (p. 113, n. 2). Attendance was organized by FOR's John Heidbrink and Merton. Merton worked on the agenda for the three days the invitees were gathered. Not all of the invited could attend. Significantly, not all attendees were Catholic. A complete list is on page 115. It includes A.J. Muste, a Quaker and leader in FOR; John Howard Yoder, A Mennonite scholar who later wrote *The Politics of Jesus*; W.H. Ferry, a Unitarian from the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions; and Philip and Dan Berrigan. Jim Forest and Tom Cornell were also there along with others. The witness of Franz Jaggerstatter under Hitler was an important reference. By what authority did the protester proceed? What kinds of protest goals should be sought? What was the impact of technology on the future of society?

Forest mentions as most memorable, in that context, the thought that “if it *can* be done it *must* be done. “Providently the first copies of Merton’s latest book arrived during the second day of the retreat” (p.121). There were copies for all. Merton explained that the book contained both the “heart” of *Peace in a Post-Christian Era* and an essay on Gandhi.

**11- Burning Draft Cards, Burning Bodies** -- Numbers of opponents of the escalating war in Vietnam defaced or burned their draft cards as a show of defiance. Congress responded by making such activity a felony. David Miller, a member of the Catholic Worker staff, burned his draft card outside an induction center. Subsequently Tom Cornell joined by David Mc Reynolds of the WRL, and others burned their draft cards. Dorothy Day and A.J. Muste expressed approval and support. In the words of Karl Meyer of the Catholic Worker in Chicago (where I met him years later; our paths first crossed in the 50s when I read in *Liberation* magazine of his peace walk to the Soviet Union): “if the penalty for burning a paper card is so harsh, then the possession of the card becomes the universal act of fealty—incense on the altar of Caesar.” (p.127). Merton was initially “bewildered” by draft card burning but later reconsidered the matter.

Subsequently, the dangers of aggressive, even excessive, uncivil forms of disobedience and protest became frightfully obvious. Roger La Porte, a young Catholic Worker volunteer, burned, not his draft card, but himself, in front of the US Mission to the UN. Dorothy Day was stunned and asked by the CPF team to express her feelings. Merton spoke up and took action. He severed connection with the CPF by telegram, followed by a long letter, much of which is reproduced in the book on pages 130-131. Jim Forest wrote to Merton asking him to reconsider. He pointed to all the good work CPF did. Merton “reversed himself, deciding to remain a sponsor” (p.133). Merton’s reasons and thought processes are captured in excerpts of his letters on pages 134-137.

The chapter ends with a brief story that links to Jim Forest’s eventual joining of the Orthodox Church (pp.138-139; see also Forest 2020).

**12- A Quiet Voice at the Vatican Council** -- The Second Vatican Council lasted approximately three years (1962-1965). 2400 Bishops, observers from many other churches, and hundreds of consultant theologians (*periti*) attended. Pope John’s “great hope” was that the Council would “restore the simple and pure lines that the face of the Church of Jesus had at its birth.” Merton was an active, if indirect participant. Letters and his other writings were available to the participants, some of whom fully endorsed Merton’s views. (p.140-141). The leaders of the International FOR, the Catholics Hildegard Goss-Mayr and her husband Jean Goss, were two of Merton’s key links in Rome. They labored to put war, conscientious objection, and non-violence on the agenda. Supportive Cardinals and Bishop succeeded in having the text include a condemnation of indiscriminate tactics in war as a crime against God and humanity. Conscientious objection was recognized as a right that ought to be incorporated into legal systems. Resistance to criminal acts

of war was commended. (p.146-148). Bishop Taylor of Seattle thanked CPF and the Catholic Worker for their role as an “invisible Council Father.”

Merton was well pleased but cautioned CPF and peacemakers generally to avoid actions that were “provocative.” He now recognized the legitimacy of burning draft cards (criminalization was aimed at silencing protest). But at the same time he emphasized his commitment to uniting all people against war; recognizing that “the job is titanic.” (pp.150-151).

**13- Saying No to War, Loving Our Enemies --** The CPF worked to expand its two-page folder for COs. In 1966 it published “Catholics and Conscientious Objection,” a 16-page booklet initially drafted by Foster. Merton was one of the many reviewing readers who suggested changes linking the document more closely to the history of the Church’s thinking on war and violence and the Council. St. Augustine, Saint Martin of Tours, and others were mentioned.

A decision was made, at the urging of Tom Cornell, that formal Church approval be sought. It was surprising to many that the censor reporting to Cardinal Spellman (an active supporter of military defense spending and nationalism) found no error in the text. Others may have been less surprised because Dorothy Day had said often that if Cardinal Spellman asked her to remove the word Catholic from the Worker she would do so; he never did! Similarly, no opposition to the C.O. booklet of the CPF.

About at the same time Merton was writing his essay “St. Maximus the Confessor on Non-violence.” One of its major points of emphasis was the duty to love our enemies. This commandment, requiring “heroic obedience to the word of the Gospel,” while difficult, was nonetheless central, and doable (p.155-157).

**14- Face to Face with Vietnam --** This chapter brings Merton and the reader face to face with Merton’s work to build bridges and friendships with non-Catholic Christians -- Orthodox and Protestant – and with Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Taoists, and Muslim Sufis. Pope Francis has referred to him as “a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions” (p.158).

Merton met a Hindu monk, at Columbia in 1938, who pointed Merton toward Augustine’s *Confessions* and the long-time classic *The Imitation of Christ*. (p.159). In 1966 Merton met a Zen-Buddhist monk from Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hahn: “In meeting Nhat Hahn, Merton had met Vietnam” (p.160).

Between these two events Merton had written *The Way of Chang Tzu* and also much of *Mystics and Zen Masters*. He had also been in touch with D.T. Suzuki, a Japanese exponent of Zen. All of this can be thought of as preparatory steps to his journey to Asia, where he tragically died (p. 166; see Merton, 1975).

Further evidence of his interest in Asian religions is the translation into Vietnamese of Merton's book *No Man is an Island*, which "focused on how war is rooted in our failure to love" (p.164).

Around this time Merton apparently also was working on his several critical essays on Camus (p.167).

**15- Blessed are the Meek ---** Merton's essay with the title of this chapter was written as a CPF booklet "centered on the Christian roots of non-violence; a recurring topic in correspondence between Merton and Forest in 1967." It had in fact been written earlier at the request of Hildegard Goss-Mayr. The CPF edition was dedicated to Joan Baez (p.171).

"The basis of non-violence is the Gospel message of salvation for all men and of the Kingdom of God to which all are summoned... The religious basis of Christian non-violence is... faith in Christ the Redeemer and obedience to His demand to love and manifest himself in us by a certain manner of acting in the world and in relation to other men... this new mode of life is set forth in detail in the Sermon on the Mount"(p.172).

Merton emphasized the transformative power of nonviolent witness. He further emphasized that nonviolent resisters fight "for the truth, common to him and to the adversary... He is fighting for everybody... In obedience to the Gospel, the meek Christian effaces himself and his own interests and even risks his life... Merton saw Christian hope and Christian humility as inseparable"(p.173).

Importantly, Merton distinguished "weak" non-violence as expressing a will to power, while "strong" non-violence is "not for power but for truth." This chapter ends sadly with the thought that "Unfortunately, mere words about peace, love and civilization have completely lost all power to change anything"(p.175).

**16- Joy and Grief --** This chapter is very personal about Jim Forest. He confessed to Merton, or was it to Father Louis, about his feelings of deep enmity towards LBJ and the war. He also confessed about his failed first marriage. He mentioned that Dorothy Day was distressed by this, leading Forest to wonder if he should leave the CPF staff. Forest reproduces two and one-half pages of Merton's supportive response. Forest also mentions requests for prayer in his "painful inner struggles" (p.183).

This chapter has brief reflections on technology, revolution and the new Abbot at Gethsemani. It ends with a picture of Merton's grave (p.189).

**17-18-19** -- The final three chapters can be very briefly summarized. Not because they are unimportant, but because they ought to be read after emotionally engaging with the earlier portions of the book; this in order to appreciate the style and depth of Merton's thinking.

The ten-page chapter titled **Letter to a Young Activist** is from Merton's response to Forest's letter to him expressing anguish at his sense of failure to reach even other Catholics.

And the chapter **A Square in a Patchwork Quilt** is a reminder and reflection that the core or essence of Merton's vocation was lived out in a monastery as a monk. Not as an escape from the world, but rather as Merton writes, "The man who dares to be alone can come to see that the 'emptiness' and 'usefulness' which the collective mind *fears* and condemns are necessary conditions for the encounter with truth" (p.208). These words captured the point Merton affirmed from his study of the play by Ionesco *Rhinoceros* (Merton, 1964).

The last chapter **The Root of War is Fear** emphasizes that fear is very often toxic. The antidote is a "stronger deeper spiritual life... Without it the voice of conscience — and the courage to follow it — will be suppressed" (p.212). The world can be scary. But it is "beautiful, magnificent, mysterious, still undiscovered." The heart of Merton's message is that fear need not rule our lives (p.212).

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**Coda** - How to contextualize this truly engaging book? How to balance its challenging report of the barbarisms humans inflict on each other, with the activism, joy and hopefulness Catholic radicals like Merton seek to bring to their daily lives as peacemakers?

On the wall of a Catholic Worker house there was a quote from Leon Bloy: "Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God." Forest wrote: "In fact, joy and laughter were a significant element in what (Merton) had to say about peacemaking" (p.176).

Pete Seeger's version of "How can I keep from Singing?" came immediately to my mind. David Dunaway wrote in his biography of Seeger "The lyrics summed up his life as well as any could" (Dunaway, 1990, p. 311). Seeger's to be sure; Merton's too? I think so.

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My life flows on in endless song,  
Above earth's lamentations,  
I hear the real, though far-off hymn,  
That hails a new creation.

(Chorus) No storm can shake my inmost calm

While to that rock I'm clinging.  
It sounds an echo in my soul.  
How can I keep from singing?

What though the tempest round me roars,  
I know the truth, it lives there,  
What though the darkness round me close, songs in the night it giveth.

(Chorus)

(Seeger added a closing stanza and chorus during the "red scare")

When tyrants tremble, sick with fear  
And hear their death knells ringing:  
When friends rejoice both far and near,  
How can I Keep from singing?

In prison cell and dungeon vile  
Our thoughts to them are winging.  
When friends by shame are undefiled,  
How can I keep from singing?

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