

prayer, which is so often overlooked, and suggests that it is not like some long forgotten language but is, in fact, our mother tongue and is connected with who we really are and thus is crucial to our hidden journey. Prayer, Matthews says, is concerned "with being before God, with standing, as Theophan says, 'with the mind in the heart before the face of the living God'" (p. 143).

Throughout this book, Matthews relies heavily, if not always explicitly, on many key areas of Merton's thought. He also brings in a host of other writers as well as examples from his own pastoral experience which go to ground this book in reality and make it very readable, though, at times, his theme seemed a bit eclectic and disjointed. It is an encouraging book and I am sure that Merton would approve of his presentations of prayer as essential to the fabric of life and that all of creation can and should be a part of prayer.

MERTON THE PEACEMAKER

Review of

John Dear

OUR GOD IS NONVIOLENT:

WITNESSES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE & JUSTICE

New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990

113 pages / \$8.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Barbara Sonnenberg**

How ironic that as I write this review George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev are completing their highly successful summit meetings in Washington. How Thomas Merton must be celebrating in absentia! While world leaders are expected to produce high blown rhetoric and exorbitant claims, today's news media is full of comments by ordinary citizens declaring the Cold War to be over. The signing of agreements reducing long range nuclear missiles, cutting chemical weapon stockpiles, and stopping the production of poison gas seem to prove their point. So, if these claims be true, of what interest — other than historical — is a new book on nonviolence?

Perhaps Jesuit peace activist John Dear's unique approach to nonviolence as a personal decision and his



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lifestyle is fair enticement. In his book *Disarming the Heart*, Dear recounted his own struggle to take a vow of nonviolence. Now in *Our God is Nonviolent* he tells the stories of similarly dedicated individuals ranging from Jesus and Mohandas Gandhi to Martin Luther King, Jr., Daniel Berrigan and Thomas Merton. One chapter is devoted to each subject with a light coverage of necessary biographical details and then a zeroing in on the way each lived his or her commitment to nonviolence. Jesus' cross is considered the concrete representation of Roman capital punishment for political dissenters, and to quote the author: "By suffering death rather than inflicting it, Jesus realized in his own body the full power of nonviolence and became a sign of redemption." Gandhi based his nonviolent beliefs equally in Christian and Hindu teachings and wrote: "Jesus was the most active resister known perhaps to history . . . : [By] nonviolence par excellence . . . Jesus . . . became the ransom of the world." Taking a different approach, Martin Luther King, Jr., has written: "I am convinced that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose, and that in the struggle for righteousness humanity has cosmic companionship." Dorothy Day lived in voluntary poverty to fight the greed which she felt fueled war. Her acts of civil disobedience included refusing to take shelter during civil defense drills and joining Cesar Chavez in marching for the rights of victimized farm workers. James and Shelley Douglass founded the Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action to protest the building of nuclear weapons in their Bangor, Washington, area.

"I do not remember anything about Merton," says Dear but then he proceeds to describe him as a prophet and "parish priest" of the peace movement: "Merton's *kenosis* set forth a fire in the church. Here was this monk, famous for leaving the world and its sin, retiring to a life of silence, speaking loudly and boldly to that world with a great spirit of nonviolence, hoping that others too would catch the lightning fires of Pentecostal nonviolence." Extensive quotes from Merton's essay "Blessed are the Meek" rightly provide the basis for describing his nonviolent stand as well as nicely tying in with Dear's summary statement: "God wants to transform all war and injustice into peace and justice, but God wants to work through us to do it."

Notes are conveniently located at the end of each chapter and a valuable list of suggested readings is appended. Two quibbling criticisms: the awkward attempt at non-sexist language (p. 90) and the unnecessary inclusion of the fact that "Her family always voted Republican" in describing a martyred church worker in El Salvador.

Surely this succinct volume conveys a vital message for today's world. As the individuals in this book so pointedly display, God wants to work through his creatures. Have the super power leaders finally received the message of nonviolence from the voices raised through the years, around the world, and still active today? And, even if they have not, have we?

THOMAS MERTON: HIS LIFE & WORKS

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