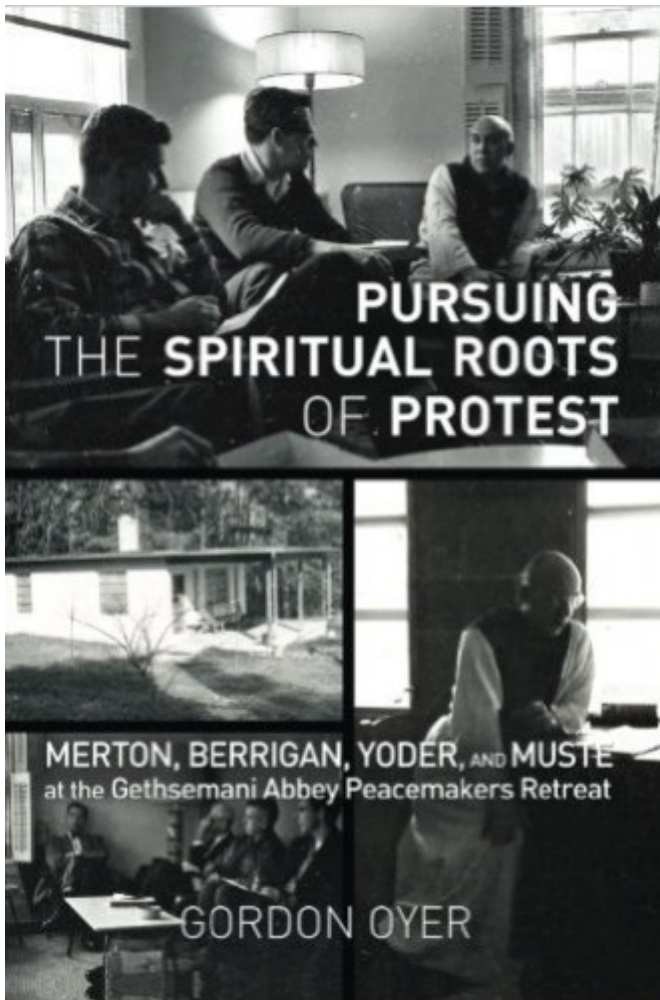


Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest, by Gordon Oyer

Books in the [September 16, 2015](#) issue

In Review



Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest

By Gordon Oyer
Cascade Books

In November 1964, Thomas Merton hosted an unprecedented ecumenical gathering of 13 peace authors and activists—including Catholics Daniel and Philip Berrigan, Mennonite John Howard Yoder, and Quaker A. J. Muste—at the Abbey of Gethsemani,

in Kentucky. The purpose was to explore the theological warrants or spiritual roots for protest and public witness—especially against the increasing violence of modern technological society. Oyer’s narration raises a number of tantalizing questions: What if the abbey had had female housing, which would have allowed the attendance of Dorothy Day? What if Martin Luther King Jr.’s acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize had not prohibited the possibility of inviting him to attend? What if the event had been planned as a more formal meeting with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, as organizer John Heidbrink had proposed? And, perhaps most significantly, why did the retreat fail to galvanize a united protest effort among participants in the years that followed?