

DANIEL BERRIGAN AT CATONSVILLE:  
A STUDY IN THE ETHICS OF  
CHRISTIAN POLITICAL RESISTANCE

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FOR JENNIE

"Caught between two worlds . . ."

It's not madness  
that turns the world upside  
down; it's conscience.

(from the film "The Fixer")

I know all about you: how you  
are neither cold nor hot. I wish you  
were one or the other, but since  
you are neither, but only lukewarm, I  
will spit you out of my mouth.

(Revelation 3:16)

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And of course, thanks to Father Dan Berrigan  
-- the stuff from which heroes are made.

ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with the phenomenon of Christian political resistance. The particular historical event which provides the focus of discussion occurred on May 17, 1968, when Father Daniel Berrigan, an American Jesuit, and eight other persons seized some 300 U.S. Government Selective Service files at Catonsville, Maryland, and burnt them with homemade napalm as a sign of protest against the Vietnam War. The thesis centres on the writings and political activities of Father Daniel Berrigan, and argues that his act of resistance at Catonsville was entirely consistent with his own understanding of what is entailed by a genuine Christian presence in the world. At a wider level, the relationship between politics and a certain form of "politicized" Christianity is explored. The Introduction to the thesis provides the necessary historical and theoretical background to the subject matter.

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## PROLOGUE

### "Decade of Ferment"

And then there was Vietnam. So the first line would read if one were to attempt a panoramic review of American society in the 1960s. In fact, Vietnam and the so-called "violent Sixties" have become almost synonymous in popular imagination. For never had American involvement in a war caused so much civil unrest and mental anguish. The real battlefield may have been a tiny, distant Asian country. But casualties were registered from California to New York.

The Vietnam War was, in many respects, the natural summation of a process which had its roots in a particular conception of the American presence in world affairs. This conception was consistent with a Cold War framework whereby might equaled right, and the enemy was none other than a faceless horde bent on enslaving the world in some collectivist tyranny. The United States became the champion of freedom, the defender of democracy. The menace of Communism -- of cold atheism -- could only be stopped by a clear show of strength. American military and political interventions in many areas of the globe were no longer questioned; they became necessary. Of these, Vietnam stands



as the most prominent and the murkiest. Its only legacy, however, was to be one of dishonour and bitterness.

How does one describe the Sixties? It was a decade of contradictions: of profound change and passing fads, of political activism and psychic withdrawal -- a time when new values were fashioned, or not-so-new values were simply "dusted off". It was most certainly a decade of ferment. It seemed that the entire fabric of American life was at a boiling point. There were moments when one could tangibly feel Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times.

There was this phenomenon called "the Movement" in the Sixties. It had no precise ideology or geography, and there was no membership. It was true to its name: a movement -- nothing less, yet something much more. The Movement's hallmark was protest, and Vietnam was its most perfect moment. Its roots, however, extend back to that recurring nightmare of the American psyche: the confrontation with racism. For it was the Civil Rights struggle, in all its pain and violence, which gave birth to the Movement. Indeed, without the Black American experience in the early 1960s and the stewardship of Martin Luther King, the history of the Sixties would today be written quite differently.

In April 1968, Martin Luther King fell under an assassin's bullet. In June of that year, Robert Kennedy fell prey to the same fate. Five years earlier, on

November 22, 1963, John F. Kennedy, the "Prince of Camelot", had been assassinated. The Sixties were a violent decade. Its heroes, real or imagined, larger than life as they were, provided the myths so essential to the survival of that ephemeral spirit of the times -- a spirit with the taste of a new order of things.

Against this backdrop of social passion and boundless idealism, the Roman Catholic Church entered a new age -- ever so quietly and awkwardly. On December 25, 1961, John XXIII, Roman pontiff for little over three years, convoked the Second Vatican Council. That single event was to shake the very foundations of Catholicism for years to come.

Pope John's inspiration for the Council was one of aggiornamento, renewal or reform, "an openness to the world". The Council, traumatic as it was to countless devout Catholics, exerted a powerful liberating influence on many of the Church's internal structures. Most important, the Council placed Catholics squarely in the marketplace -- in tune with what was happening in the world "out there". Understandably, an identity vacuum ensued. It was a vacuum which called forth a new definition of what is meant to be not only a Catholic, but above all a Christian.

American Catholics rushed to the scene of the action, so to speak. The echoes of the Civil Rights struggle and the distant Vietnam War were reverberating in most segments of the American domestic scene. The challenge of relevant Christianity was there to be answered. Enter Father Daniel Berrigan, Jesuit and American.

## INTRODUCTION

It is important at the outset to outline some of the more prominent themes which, while often unspoken or unwritten, form the basis of this thesis. My work is certainly not exhaustive, nor was it meant to be. My concern is to raise some significant issues, and hopefully provide a perspective for understanding them. My focus is always Daniel Berrigan, the committed Christian and political activist. The 'chunk' which I take from history is the particular act of political defiance (the burning of military draft files) which Berrigan and eight other resisters engaged in at Catonsville, Maryland, on May 17, 1968. Daniel Berrigan is undoubtedly a different man today, and so is the political climate of America. History, as is often claimed, marches on.

### 1. Central Questions

This thesis deals with the phenomenon of political resistance. Specifically, it is concerned with an understanding of political resistance which, in its very essence, is conditioned by a Christian perspective. Christian political resistance is not, of course, an entirely new historical occurrence. From the earliest days of Christianity, there have been those who have felt it their

religious duty to resist political authority -- particularly if such authority was perceived as "immoral" or illegitimate. At times, this resistance assumed a decidedly quietist orientation; other times, violence and/or overt defiance were the means adopted. It is a well-known sociological fact that religion, as much as it is an extension or advocate of a given socio-political order, can also be at severe odds with a certain political system. Such is the theme of this present work. We are not dealing, however, with Christian political resistance at a mass level. Above all, we are concerned with an individual Christian's response to what he considered an unjust political act on the part of a democratic regime. We are concerned with Father Daniel Berrigan and the American war effort in Vietnam.

Daniel Berrigan is a poet, and poets deal in images. This is abundantly clear in all of Berrigan's writings. At a deeper level, however, this concern with images reveals a unique way of understanding the human world and of entering into dialogue with it. Poets tend to be acutely sensitive towards their milieu, whatever be the source or parameters of such sensitivity. In a very real sense, reality is not taken at face value; it is broken, absorbed, coloured and re-arranged in terms of deeper, more universal patterns of meaning. Some call this artistic genius. One

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can also refer to it as the critical spirit of inquiry. Daniel Berrigan the poet and Daniel Berrigan the political resister cannot be separated. Indeed, it would be wrong to try and understand the Catonsville act without also bearing in mind the element of 'poetic license' which was so central to that act, at least from Berrigan's perspective. A poet, by virtue of his creative power, claims certain privileges -- one of which is the privilege of speaking to the collective will of his people. This is what Berrigan did at Catonsville.

As an individual, Berrigan grappled with the fundamental question which every Christian political resister must ask of himself: How shall I, as a responsible citizen, stand as a witness to the moral demands which my faith places upon me? Berrigan's response is what this thesis attempts to analyze. At this point, however, it is wise to discuss some of the more obvious dilemmas which the original question poses for the committed religious resister.

Clear moral choice is never easy given the complexities of contemporary political life. With the proliferation of distinct interest groups and technological and political specialists, each of which claims to possess the better understanding of the exigencies of the polis, the issue of individual responsibility and choice in the

political arena becomes further clouded and diffused. The religious man stands in an especially precarious and difficult position. With his belief in and espousal of a "higher" moral order, which in itself can never be fully proven or rationally broken down, he stands vulnerable to accusations of naiveness, idealism and ultimately, political irresponsibility. Great personal conflict and doubt can and often do ensue. Such conflict is not merely a fine intellectual exercise. Its reality is painful, as witnessed by all those who have said "no" to human warfare and have had to suffer the consequences of death or human ostracism. In a word, the religious believer who opts for political resistance is always confronted with the inescapable question: Given the political obedience of my fellow-citizens, am I right in my refusal to obey and in my appeal to a more universal morality? Or am I, in fact, subject to a false sense of personal righteousness?

At the existential level of concrete political action, the question is perhaps seldom phrased in such stark terms. Its full magnitude, however, remains. In terms of the answers provided, these vary immensely. In any moral decision concerned with political life, there is a basic struggle between a sense of collective responsibility and a sense of individual freedom of choice; a struggle between citizenship and personal moral autonomy. The

particular means of resistance finally embraced are often a reflection of the way in which this fundamental struggle was resolved. For the Christian resister, his political defiance is often, by necessity and by right, a logical outcome of his religious convictions. Otherwise, one could not even speak of a distinctly Christian type of political resistance. A further question must be asked: In resisting the political order, does the Christian re-affirm his personal and spiritual autonomy at the expense of his political citizenship -- or is it rather the very nature of Christian political resistance to bring citizenship and individual moral autonomy into a dynamic whole?

The main line of argument of my thesis could be summarized as follows. Using Daniel Berrigan's act of resistance at Catonsville as an ideal case-in-point, it is clear that Christian political resistance is founded on an ethics which views political life as a human activity subject to the dictates of moral law. It is the Christian's moral responsibility, as a full member of the political community, to decry and resist injustice, regardless of whether or not his "official" Christian community stands behind him. In this sense, genuine Christian political resistance infuses political life with an important element of moral outrage and a spirit of critical reflection. In so doing, the traditional (though not theologically accurate)



Christian distinction between politics and personal salvation, world and spirit, political citizenship and spiritual membership in the Kingdom is rejected. Politics and religion are no longer mutually exclusive spheres of human experience and moral competency.

## 2. Theoretical and Methodological

### Considerations

Apart from the central questions concerning the "why" and "whereto" of Christian political resistance, there are a number of theoretical and methodological considerations which, because of their particular relevance, require some brief elaboration at this point. I refer to the following: 1) the basic distinctions between protest and resistance, and between various forms of political dissent; 2) the consistency of Berrigan's views on war and resistance in light of certain theological and philosophical perspectives on these matters; and 3) the relationship between social justice and political structure, or between human welfare and institutional performance. For the sake of thoroughness, passing reference should also be made to the historical "mood" of the Catholic Church at the time when the act of resistance at Catonsville took place.

Under the general topic of "political dissent", such terms as "protest", "resistance", "civil disobedience"

and "non-violent struggle" are often lumped together without any clear distinctions being drawn between them. Such a failure only serves to confuse what is already a muddled theoretical question. Out of a concern for clarity, it could be said that a fundamental distinction exists between political protest and political resistance. The former refers to a simple act (or acts) of disagreement with a given political option, wherein no systematic attempt is made to unlawfully question or oppose the underlying ideological components of the political order. Political protest can cover a wide span of political activities, from letter-writing and legal appeals to popular rallies and mass demonstrations. Political protest is, in the most general sense, saying "no" to certain actions or decisions of the political structure in the context of an organized opposition, whether individual or group.

Insofar as political protest is "the general", political resistance is "a particular". All resistance is protest, but not all protest is resistance. Political resistance always contains an important element of illegality or sabotage (see Chapter II, Section 1 of this thesis). Catonsville, while certainly a political protest in the sense of being an outcry against continued American involvement in Vietnam, was above all a definite form of political resistance. The nine resisters were clearly intent on ob-

structing the workings of the American military system. They deliberately seized official U.S. Government property and destroyed it by committing arson. They were certainly involved in a conspiracy, by means of which they struck at the very foundations of the American political and military complex. In so doing, Daniel Berrigan and his associates crossed the line from protest to active political resistance.

Civil disobedience, non-violent protest or resistance, violent resistance and even guerrilla warfare all fall at the level of political method or tactics. Each is a form of political protest, to the extent that each expresses an opposition to a given political system. The crucial issue is whether the choice is made in favour of a non-violent or a violent orientation, i.e., between moral persuasion or physical/psychological coercion with the connotation of armed struggle. This becomes especially significant when one bears in mind that political resistance (as clarified above) can have a decidedly non-violent thrust (e.g., Gandhi) or a definite violent character (e.g., the organized underground resistance to the Nazis during W.W. II). Historical circumstances often dictate the choice made.

A further clarification is in order. Most resisters are sincerely convinced that their political stance is what constitutes true patriotism, in the sense that they are devoted to and struggling on behalf of those values

(political or otherwise) which are dearest to the tradition of their people. Daniel Berrigan certainly felt this way. In this work, I do not propose to substantiate the merits of this way of thinking. My concern is to show that such a perception is an important variable in the dynamics which bring someone, Christian or otherwise, to the threshold of active political resistance. Likewise with the question of whether Christian political resistance is necessarily non-violent in character. I seem to suggest such an understanding in this thesis, primarily because my data is drawn from a personage who espouses a non-violent political philosophy. But I am certainly not unaware of the particular violent orientation which a Camilo Torres or even a Dietrich Bonhoeffer would propose. One other point should be noted. Most non-violent political resisters carry an ambivalent attitude towards the legitimation of violence under certain circumstances, particularly in defence of what are considered just causes. This means, in essence, that non-violent resistance (as with violent resistance) cannot deal in absolutes, as certain as the resister may be about the "rightness" of his particular cause. One cannot avoid the necessities of allowing historical conditions to colour the form of political praxis. I would argue that Daniel Berrigan is well aware of this fact, in spite of his confessed total pacifism.

The second general point to be clarified centres on the consistency of Berrigan's own opinions on war and resistance in the light of other theological and philosophical approaches to these matters. In this thesis, I rely extensively upon the views of Thomas Merton and Gandhi -- with minor reference to Catholic socio-political teachings and to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's defence of tyrannicide and political resistance. I have chosen Thomas Merton for a very important reason. Perhaps more than any other prominent American Catholic thinker of the 1960s, Merton addressed himself directly to the moral questions of violence and political dissent which the Vietnam War brought to the fore. The other advantage of Merton's perspective is that it is grounded in traditional Catholic teaching, thereby throwing light on the relationship between Berrigan's own political thinking and his religious heritage. Merton is also Gandhian in his approach, and this makes him especially useful in the present context. With reference to Gandhi's classic theories of non-violence and civil disobedience, I take these as fundamental points of departure. While I do not attempt a comparative analysis between Gandhian teachings and Berrigan's writings on political resistance, I do indicate the shortcomings of Berrigan's approach at a number of points in the thesis.

The reader will also note that I refer to Henry

David Thoreau and to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thoreau was chosen because of the link which he provides in terms of an established American political tradition of civil disobedience in the context of a liberal democratic system. As for Bonhoeffer, it is significant that the man was the 'model' and inspiration for much of Berrigan's political involvement. But here again, it was impossible to engage in a comparative exercise (an entire thesis could be written on the basis of such a comparison). Bonhoeffer's influence must be noted, while at the same time acknowledging the different historical circumstances which both men had to confront. Most importantly, my intent throughout the following work is not to contrast Berrigan to other political and religious activists and thinkers, but to map out the inner logic of the man's political commitment. Other perspectives are helpful insofar as they lend weight and consistency to Berrigan's own political actions.

A third important element in the present discussion is that of the relationship, often precarious and strained, which exists between human welfare and institutional performance. I refer simply to the reasons why the political apparatus has a difficult time coping with certain just human needs, especially in a political system considered democratic and somewhat "open". This basic problem was one which haunted all of political dissent in the Sixties.

Berrigan, among countless others, kept insisting that political decisions, and all that flowed from them, must be based on unquestionable norms of human justice. But the failure of the State to respond adequately disturbed many. We are dealing here with a process of ideological struggle, as much as with a sociological reality. Of course the State and the legal system are always biased. Of course the military-industrial complex is intent on extending and defending its own interests. Any established structure will also resort to the instinct for survival whenever it feels itself threatened, particularly from the inside. The widening of the Vietnam War and the election of Richard Nixon to the American presidency should not have come as surprises to any astute observer of the political scene. But simply because institutional stability and/or control are social truisms does not mean that these cannot be questioned, especially in terms of their particular historical manifestations. An institution, by virtue of being such, does not always think in terms of "the human good" -- just as it was difficult, if not impossible, for the American Selective Service System to question the particular morality of processing young American citizens to die in the Vietnam War. These are facts, almost redundant in their obviousness. Significantly, this thesis is a testimonial to the real possibility of social and political change. It deals with

an individual who was convinced that the political system could perform in terms of the better human good.

Along these lines, it may be helpful to briefly clarify Berrigan's views on the State and on property -- topics which are discussed at length in this thesis. When Berrigan uses the image of "the Beast" to refer to the American State, he is also speaking of the American consciousness or way of life which extends beyond the immediate political structures. Berrigan is convinced that the Vietnam War has so permeated American life that it has had a deadening or beastly influence upon the entire American social fabric. What he does suggest, moreover, is that if the State would change its policies, this immoral influence would be effectively curbed. Berrigan was certain that "a climate of war" at the political level produces a corresponding mood at the social level. As for the State condoning violence, Berrigan would perhaps not be such an idealist as to suggest that violence or coercion (or even injustice) is not innate to any political system. In this particular context, he strongly condemns the use to which political power is put: the imperialist expansion in Vietnam, and the maintenance of racist and inhuman social structures at home. A similar understanding of property is involved. Berrigan certainly does not object to the existence of all forms of State property. The relevant



criteria for deciding which property can or cannot exist is whether or not it is an immediate accessory to an unjust political act. Since he sees compulsory military service, in the context of its use in the killings in Vietnam, as immoral, he sincerely believes that draft files have no legal or moral right to existence. At the Catonsville trial, one of the nine defendants declared that "slum properties have no right to exist" (Chapter II, Section 3). This does not mean that slum properties should be burnt in protest, but that the social conditions which make them necessary should be abolished.

One final historical note must be inserted. At the time of Catonsville, the Catholic Church was in a state of universal effervescence. The "opening to the world" which had been undertaken by the Second Vatican Council was still, in many respects, a fluid and challenging process. Catholics, both clergy and laity, no longer had to limit themselves to Church-related social or political activities. The Council had effectively liberated the Church's restrictive structures, and had sincerely tried to come to grips, in its various proclamations, with the challenges posed to it by the modern world. In the United States, this religious event coincided with a great explosion of social and political awareness. In a significant way, Daniel Berrigan stands at the point of contact. His Catholicism

and his priesthood had been re-defined. His sense of being an American, at a time of acute national questioning, was being refuted in Vietnam and elsewhere. The priest and the citizen merged, for Berrigan could not separate a calling to moral leadership from a calling to civic responsibility.

### 3. The War Effort

The Vietnam War and its aftermath mark a watershed in contemporary American social and political history. It is hard even now, several years later, to gauge the precise impact of the War on the American psyche. Its real influence may yet come to the fore, just as Italy and Germany today seem to be experiencing the latent ravages of their historical encounter with fascism. But from the intense protest and bitter disillusionment which the War engendered, one can certainly conclude that Vietnam left an indelible mark on American political life. Apart from the American Civil War, no other armed struggle has split the American people as much as did the Vietnam War.

When Catonsville hit the American public, the Vietnam War had already been radically escalated. Under the leadership of President Johnson, the American government had committed itself to massive and systematic armament expenditures. Compulsory military service provided the manpower resources required to fuel the war effort. On the

battlefields, the use of napalm and other forms of technological warfare, including aerial bombardment, was a common occurrence. Richard Nixon won the presidency in November 1968, some six months after Catonsville. History has already recorded the full extent of President Nixon's wartime decisions. His policies of escalation and "peace with honour" remain among the central marks of his presidency. One important historical footnote: The Vietnam conflict was not directly President Johnson's doing. The roots of the War extend back to policies actively pursued by Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and especially, Kennedy.

In a sense, the Catonsville burning can thus be historically located at the transitional point between "contained" warfare and massive and protracted armed confrontation in Vietnam. Two elements of the War seem to have been uppermost in the resisters' minds: the intensified use of napalm on the Vietnamese military and civilian populations, and the right of the American presidency to wage a war which had not been declared by the American legislature. It certainly is not accidental that the Catonsville Nine used homemade napalm when burning the draft files. The gesture was intentionally symbolic. Apart from the moral questions surrounding the actual use of napalm during warfare, the Catonsville burning assumes particular significance when one considers that Vietnam was among the first armed con-

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flicts where systematic use was made of this deadly chemical. In terms of the formal "legality" of the War, the Catonsville Nine rejected the right of any American president to commit the nation's resources to a war which was undeclared in any official sense. This does not mean, of course, that resistance would not have occurred had a state of war been declared by the American Congress. But seen from the perspective of a strict teaching such as the Catholic just-war theory, Vietnam was classified as an "unjust" war. It is important to note that this theme of the Vietnam War as "an undeclared war" -- therefore, "an unjust war" -- was central to much of the political protest in the 1960s.

#### 4. Conscription and Resistance

It is difficult to bring together the varied strands which made up the American protest movement in the 1960s, either from a historical or a sociological perspective. Leaving aside the numerous cultural forms which this protest assumed, there certainly was one common focus to all its political activity: the Vietnam War and its most immediate accessory, the Draft. Both form the historical backdrop to the event discussed in this thesis. One should not forget, of course, the great importance of the civil rights struggle in the early and mid-'60s. Unfortunately, one can only touch on this subject given the nature of the present work.

Catonsville and the civil rights struggle do coincide however. As brought out in "The Catonsville Statement" (see Appendix), the resisters saw Vietnam as the logical extension of a government which was racist by nature.

Compulsory military service (the Draft) should be seen in the context of the global expansion of the American imperium subsequent to the great military might which it exhibited in World War II. Universal, male, peacetime conscription made American military and economic expansion, in part, possible. Prior to the Korean War, conscription was never employed in a war which had not been declared by the American Congress, at least in the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, it was almost "voted out" of existence in the post-World War II period. For reasons of military advantage, however, it was retained, and was fully applied in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

During the Vietnam era, until the last years of the War, every American male of 18 years and older was legally subject to the requirements of the Selective Service System, the American Government agency which enforced compulsory military service. All registered persons were classified according to their particular civil status. A 1-A classification meant that the person was liable to be called up for military service, and this was the classification most often

given. Deferments and exemptions were possible, and were often applied for by people who were either opposed to the War or who were, in fact, eligible for such special classifications. The most important deferments were those for students (if they maintained a certain level of academic achievement), and exemptions for ministers and divinity students. Conscientious objectors, while not technically falling under an exemption, would either perform "alternate service" (usually some form of social work) or be inducted as "non-violent participants" (such as the Jehovah's Witnesses).

In summary, the Draft Resistance Movement objected to conscription principally on the following counts:

- a) the Vietnam War was, in fact, an undeclared, illegal war and a war of aggression;
- b) its morality could be placed in severe doubt;
- c) deferments (especially student deferments) tended to favour white, middle-class individuals who could afford to attend university;
- d) the CO classification (conscientious objector) was too stringent and only allowed for refusal to serve on clear religious grounds; and perhaps the most important,
- e) no government could compel its citizens to take up arms when they judged the war in question to be immoral. This last point emphasizes the civil disobedience 'thrust' of American political protest in the 1960s.

The history of the Draft Resistance Movement is extremely complex. In many ways, it was part of the much larger Anti-War Movement which is written boldly across the face of 1960s' American society. The Draft Resistance Movement went from draft card burnings to mail-ins, and from marching to draft file burnings. Many of its early political activities were engineered by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). But it was always the War itself which captured popular imagination. It was the Vietnam War as a whole, and not just the Draft, which so catalyzed mass public protest. The Vietnam Summer of 1967, and the War Moratoriums of Fall 1967 and Fall 1969 were, in the last analysis, the true measure of a resistance which was genuinely public and popular in character. It is in this context that Catonsville itself must be viewed. As much as the nine resisters were questioning the morality of the Draft, they were above all confronting the War.

##### 5. The Nine Defendants

Two important components of the Catonsville episode remain to be discussed. While neither is immediately obvious in terms of the central theme of this thesis, each, in a significant way, helps to place Catonsville in its proper context. To a large extent, one makes Catonsville possible; the other keeps it in the public eye. I refer, of course,



to who the Catonsville Nine actually were, and to why Daniel Berrigan went "underground" after the trial. Neither is really touched upon in the body of this thesis. For methodological reasons, I have "abstracted" Daniel Berrigan from the other eight defendants. This allows both for consistency of subject matter and for the necessary focus without which in-depth inquiry is difficult. As for Berrigan's time in hiding after the Catonsville trial, it transcends the actual historical event with which I am concerned. Its relevance, however, lies primarily in that much of Berrigan's analysis and 'celebration' of the meaning of the Catonsville act was done while he was underground. Also, the fact of even choosing to go underground was a logical culmination of Berrigan's political thinking which sent him to Catonsville in the first place.

Apart from Daniel Berrigan, who were the other members of the Catonsville Nine? They were: Philip Berrigan, a Josephite priest and Daniel's brother; David Darst, a member of the Christian Brothers; Thomas Lewis, a civil rights activist and an artist; Thomas Melville, a former Maryknoll priest active in Guatemala; Marjorie Melville, a former Maryknoll nun also active in Guatemala, and Thomas Melville's wife; Mary Moylan, a registered nurse who had worked in Uganda; George Mische, an American government employee who had worked with the Alliance for Progress in Latin America;

and John Hogan, a former Maryknoll brother also just returned from Guatemala. It is especially significant to note that of the Nine, three were members of a Catholic religious order while three were former members. All had been actively involved in some aspect of civil rights or missionary work, either at home or abroad. At the trial, each declared that he or she had been radicalized in the course of this work. Two of the Nine, Philip Berrigan and Thomas Lewis, had already had a run-in with the judicial system. In the fall of 1967, they and two others poured blood on several hundred draft files at a downtown Baltimore Draft Board. Finally, it should be noted that Thomas and Marjorie Melville and John Hogan had been recalled from Guatemala by their religious superiors for being sympathetic to the guerrilla movement in that country. It is interesting to ask how they could justify their support of such a violent option in light of the essentially non-violent character of their stance at Catonsville. The question, for lack of evidence, remains a hypothetical one.

Shortly before being called to serve a three-and-a-half-year sentence for the Catonsville burning, Daniel Berrigan suddenly went underground. He stayed in hiding for four months, during which he surfaced to make two public appearances and cause much embarrassment for the FBI. Why would Berrigan choose to evade justice, when one of the

cardinal rules of civil disobedience is the willingness -- indeed, the duty -- to accept punishment for acts committed? I would argue that such a dramatic gesture is fully consistent with Berrigan's political philosophy as elaborated in this thesis. It seems that the issue was quite clear for Berrigan. By accepting to serve his sentence, he would thereby be acknowledging the legitimacy of the entire American judicial system. Since he had already stated that this system was tainted because of its association with the war effort in Vietnam, he did not consider its demands to be just. A political tactic was also involved. There can be no doubt that Berrigan chose to go underground in order to keep the Catonsville issue alive and unresolved for the American public. A further explanation is given by Berrigan. He often speaks of "a Jesuit tradition of the underground". In a very real sense, he saw this period of evasion as a way of remaining faithful to the historical tradition of his own religious community and a means of building an underground "community of resistance". Daniel Berrigan was arrested by FBI agents on August 11, 1970. He was sent to the Federal Correctional Institution at Danbury, Connecticut, where he served seventeen months of his sentence.

For purposes of method, this thesis is divided into three chapters -- each of which forms part of a systematic whole. Chapter I is mainly concerned with uncovering and understanding the central religious themes in Berrigan's own writings, his view of politics and the State, his approach to history and of course, his reasons for choosing the particular form of political resistance which he did. It is an attempt at understanding the man "from the inside". It should always be remembered that Berrigan writes in poetic images, and that his style may be obscure and quite intense at times. As much as possible, I have tried to let the man speak for himself. Chapter II focuses on the Catonsville act itself and on the specific political method involved. It is here that I narrow in on some of the ethical dimensions of the Catonsville draft file burning, and that I attempt to delineate the nature of Christian political resistance. The final section of this chapter, "The Liturgy of Catonsville", is an embryonic effort at understanding the burning from the perspective of a religious ritual. Chapter III seeks to answer the question: What is the meaning and relevance of what Daniel Berrigan did at Catonsville? I also raise some of my own problematic concerns with Berrigan's political and religious thinking. In many ways, it is also meant as a summary. The Conclusion to the thesis looks at Daniel Berrigan, "the ethical actor",

in light of some of the concepts encountered in Weberian sociology. Of course, any omissions or errors in this thesis are entirely my own.

## CHAPTER I

### POETRY AND THE QUEST FOR SANITY:

#### THE LANGUAGE OF

#### DANIEL BERRIGAN

When one reads the works of Daniel Berrigan, one is immediately struck by the abundance of poetic imagery. There is a certain seductive passion about the way in which he brings the reader to share the intensity of his convictions and vision. Daniel Berrigan is a poet. His writings, whether they be theological or of a more political nature, are infused with that unique sense of "seeing" proper to one who creates with words. But Berrigan is also a deeply religious man whose tradition is rooted in the Christian scriptures. In Berrigan, the poet and the believer meet. It is important that we obtain some understanding of the complexities yet pristine simplicity of his language if we are to unravel Daniel Berrigan, the ethical actor at Catonsville.

#### 1. 'The Beast': The Apocalyptic View of American Political Life

In the Book of Revelation, series of powerful and mysterious visions are described which constitute, in their

rich symbolism, an essential part of early Christian mythology. A beast rises from the sea.<sup>1</sup> The beast possesses the attributes of evil and "was allowed to make war against the saints and conquer them, and given power over every race, language and nation; and all people of the world will worship it . . .".<sup>2</sup> In the historical context in which Revelation was written, the beast referred to the political supremacy of the Roman Empire. As a type, the beast represents those forces, spiritual or material, which attempt to oppose the Christian message.

When Daniel Berrigan reflected on the American presence in Vietnam, this scriptural image of "the Beast" became, for him, the best way to describe the realities of the crisis. Not that the United States was in Vietnam to oppose Christianity per se. Rather, it was what America was doing in Southeast Asia and to its people which contravened, in Berrigan's estimation, the spirit of the Christian message. This symbol of "the Beast" is a central theme in

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, three "beasts" are described in Revelation. They constitute a sort of triumvirate, an image which forms a caricature of the Christian concept of the Trinity.

<sup>2</sup>"Revelation", The Jerusalem Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966). Chapter 13: verses 7 and 8.

Berrigan's language. Through it, one can discern his perspectives on political life and responsibility.

In Berrigan's writings, "the Beast" is synonymous with two phenomena: the State as epitomized by American military power, and modern technology in the service of war. Together, they form a devastating whole. Berrigan argues that the Vietnam War is exactly the one instance where the United States has taken on the attributes of "the Beast" in inflicting human suffering and total destruction. This becomes a source of shame for him. He writes:

If I were Pablo Neruda  
or William Blake  
I could bear, and be eloquent

an American name in the world  
where men perish  
in our two murderous hands<sup>3</sup>

At a gathering sponsored by the Student Christian Movement in Huddersfield, England in January 1973, Daniel Berrigan talked at length about the Book of Revelation in its applicability to modern times. He spoke of the marks of "the Beast": "So we have a combination of violence, anti-worship and active deceit. I submit that these are great touchstones to the activity of the state today, in our

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<sup>3</sup>Daniel Berrigan, Night Flight to Hanoi: War Diary with 11 Poems (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 135.



regard. To sink violence in a kind of religious awe surrounding technological marvels . . .".<sup>4</sup> "The Beast" is violent, idolatrous and deceitful. So is the modern American State in Berrigan's estimation. Berrigan continues:

I submit that in our country the clue is so evident and so bloody and so immediate as to this activity, that to believer and unbeliever alike, such a book (Revelation) strikes with a force of lightning. The activities of the state, with regard not merely to the people of South East Asia, but to our own people, is a combination of a demand for a religious awe, of deceit and of violence, resulting in this kind of disintegration of consciousness, this breakup of human understanding; the corruption of language and truth; the isolation of good people one from another; the quick tricky formation and breakup of communities almost overnight; the despairing sense on the part of many that they are simply expendable before the Beast, that they are no one, that they are nothing, that both citizenship and faith have been devalued to the point of zero, and that what is actively sought on the part of the state, day after day, year after year, is worship, that is to say, our response to their demand, and their claim of ownership, their claim of life and death over us.<sup>5</sup>

Berrigan then makes an historical point worth noting in the context of American society in the 1960s, when he states that "the thing is verified in our country obviously through the military induction . . .".<sup>6</sup> The Draft thus

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<sup>4</sup>Alistair Kee, ed., Seeds of Liberation: Spiritual Dimensions to Political Struggle (London, Great Britain: SCM Press, Ltd., 1973), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

stands as the most striking and immediate example of "the Beast's" total claim over human lives.<sup>7</sup> At Catonsville, Berrigan will confront the American political system precisely on those grounds.

Historically, the American war effort in Vietnam was certainly the most technologically sophisticated of all times.<sup>8</sup> This very fact can only prove, from Berrigan's perspective, that the United States has become the perfect embodiment of beastly power. Berrigan is highly critical of modern technology -- not so much in and of itself, but rather because of what it can do to man's spirit. When such technology can bring about irremediable destruction or universal annihilation, Berrigan declares it to be immoral because it represents nothing more than "this perversion of the forces of spirit and matter and of their harmonious interaction in

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<sup>7</sup>It is important to note the relationship between U.S. compulsory military service (the Draft) and protest movements of the 1960s. The Draft was perhaps the single most important institution through which the Vietnam War itself could be confronted and "brought home" to the American public. The Draft Resistance Movement became a significant force. Daniel Berrigan's action at Catonsville was an integral part of this resistance movement.

<sup>8</sup>This policy of pure technology in the service of war is especially well documented in the now famous "Pentagon Papers". See The Pentagon Papers (The New York Times Company).

the world".<sup>9</sup> In They Call Us Dead Men, perhaps his most seminal work, Berrigan pursues this line of reasoning and speaks of the preparations for war.

For all of us, this period of war preparation and the expending of ingenuity and resources into war is hard and exhausting indeed. None of us has been left untouched by the angel of death. For the poor, its touch is further poverty; for the affluent, it is neurosis, estrangement, acedia, despair. Technology in military uniform has claimed our laboratories and research centers and universities. Its shadow has lain heavily on the nights and days of our political leaders.<sup>10</sup>

For Daniel Berrigan, "the Beast" is alive and well and living in America. Indeed, "the Beast" is America. Through its deathly presence in Vietnam and its use of impersonal technological warfare, the United States set itself irrevocably on the path of moral guilt. Berrigan views the American political system in clear apocalyptic terms. Evil is rampant, and the times call for decisive action. But what of Americans themselves -- of "the Beast" devouring its own children? And what of the remnant, the chosen few? For apocalypse is both end and beginning. The question: "How are we to live our lives today?"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Berrigan, They Call Us Dead Men: Reflections on Life and Conscience (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 170.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Berrigan, The Dark Night of Resistance (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971), p. 5.

The power of "the Beast", the American State, is founded on violence. Berrigan writes: "The state -- that conglomeration of authority and power -- is innately violent, whether or not it is overtly violent on this or that occasion. It can live by violence and exist by violence".<sup>12</sup> Such institutionalized violence, as manifested especially through modern warfare, gives birth to violent men. The claim of "the Beast" upon the human spirit is total. Berrigan argues that this climate of violence, a climate of war, breaks men; it warps their minds and souls.

A climate of war creates its own horizons, its own justification and method. Subjected to such an atmosphere for a long period of time, men come to accept it as normal and self-evident; they create a logic that suits their state of soul. They create tools of violence as entirely normal methods of dealing with "the enemy"; once created, the tools are used with ever-increasing ease. Peaceableness, communication with others, discussion, public candor -- these are less and less trusted as methods of dealing with human differences. The cold war dictates its own methods and progressively outlaws the possibility of other methods.

Such men live in the dreamworld of the schizoid or the adolescent, their sense of identity victimized by its controlled sources. The stranger becomes the enemy; the enemy is everywhere. His image tends more and more to harden into an absolute, beyond redemption, beyond change, implacable, unappeasable. And almost inevitably, as the complexities of human relationships merge into the single image of the enemy, a complementary image of ourselves arises. We become the beleaguered defenders of all that is good

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<sup>12</sup>Alistair Kee, ed., op. cit., p. 40.

and noble in life, the society that can do no wrong, whose interventions are always governed by superior wisdom, whose military might serves only the good of humanity.<sup>13</sup>

Caught in this vicious and dehumanizing cycle of violence, the essential question becomes one of survival. The struggle takes on life and death proportions. Berrigan poses the question:

How to retain some sort of spiritual integrity, some sort of ability to move and to function as a being with something above the shoulders, when practically everything we were born to believe has come in doubt? When practically every one of those structures we could lean upon as we were meant to, as human beings, to guideposts, to medicine, to law, to health, to school, to churches, are coming down? What the state or the Beast is supplying for us is that kind of omnivorous metaphor of the structure that is devouring instead of serving. How to come upon the truth, and upon sanity, and function with-in all that and not give up, not give up? Of course the definition of the state and the cry that issues from the litter of the Beast is 'Give up, give up.'<sup>14</sup>

But the times remain intensely hopeful. This is the meaning of apocalypse for Berrigan -- a time, an historical moment where as he says, "it seems to me that in a sense the Vietnamese people and the American people are

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<sup>13</sup>Daniel Berrigan, They Call Us Dead Men, pp. 174 and 175.

<sup>14</sup>Alistair Kee, ed., op. cit., p. 41.

in a kind of mutual furnace, where the fires of any possible human future are both destroying and creating people".<sup>15</sup>

In The Dark Night of Resistance, a book written while he was hiding from the FBI, Berrigan strikes at the heart of this question of human survival in the face of violence, war and blind technology -- "the powers of darkness". He presents a dilemma. A clear choice must be made, for man's own future is at stake. The dilemma is an existential one; it has to do with the very meaning of human life as man wants to live it.

How shall we live our lives today? It is scarcely possible, it will be less and less possible, to live them at the center of the web, without being cursed in our humanity, metamorphosed finally into the beast whose activity we take up as our own. The beast who eats men.

It seems to me that two eventualities are in the air, and one of the two will certainly occur, as a fact of history -- and soon. Americans, a certain number of them, will struggle to keep alive a human style and method, to enhance it, rejoice in it, celebrate it; and in doing so, will make it possible for men to be born of men. Or a genetic (which is to say spiritual) catastrophe will occur. The method of the beast will prevail, and beasts will be born of us. I do not know of a more truthful way of putting the question, our destiny, what is to become of us.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Berrigan, The Dark Night of Resistance, pp. 4-5.

Daniel Berrigan gives an answer. Sanity is maintained by saying 'no' to "the Beast" and fully accepting the risks of that choice.

2. Life at the Edge: On Time and  
Saying 'No'

One of the more pronounced motifs in Daniel Berrigan's language is that of "time". Through it, he offers an understanding not only of simple human events, but also of salvation history. The two are, of course, inseparable for Berrigan. What is especially striking, however, is the sense of urgency and imminence with which he perceives the march of time -- and also its inherent humanness.

Time, gentlemen!

a diary of sorts, an idea --

eyes require faces

ears voices

(I hear you)

wrists hands

hands no weapons

poems you<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Daniel Berrigan, False Gods, Real Men (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 23.

Berrigan seems to view time in an almost contradictory manner. On the one hand, there is this ineradicable passion about time as crisis -- "How shall we live our lives today?" On the other hand, we see the poet's soul speak to Berrigan of the gentle, human face of time. What this reveals is an appreciation of time in both its experiential and apocalyptic dimensions. Time is most certainly "present", but it is also (and perhaps most importantly) "future". For Berrigan, present and past form a continuous whole; it is the future (which remains open-ended). The only legitimate (indeed, moral) way to live in the present, according to Berrigan, is to bear a clear responsibility for the future shape of events.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, Daniel Berrigan implicates himself directly in the web of time. His own life and political commitments bear eloquent witness to this fact. Berrigan is acutely aware of the march of human history. For him, history poses a challenge -- a challenge which is Christian in its essence.

We have been practicing, with very mixed success, so simple a thing as concentration; we have been sticking with the pertinacity of bloodhounds to the trail -- to the blood of Christ, another name

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<sup>18</sup>This theme of "responsibility towards the future" will be explored more fully in section three of this chapter.



for history in process, in movement.

We have been trying to remember man; to re-member him, in the rigorous liturgical sense -- to exercise anamnesis, the heart of the eucharistic command and privilege: when you do this, remember me. Which is to say, stay with history, make something of it, by falling within its main lines of action, the breaking of bread, the sharing of wine; make a community whose life will also be available to history.<sup>19</sup>

One remarkable thing about Berrigan's view of history is the importance which he accords to man. To speak of history in terms of the eucharistic mystery is to re-affirm, in a radical Christian sense, the primacy of matter, of flesh and blood. Man stands redeemed, and redeemed in the here-and-now. He is the central actor whose responsibility it is to actualize a human future worthy of his state as redeemed creature. In line with traditional Christian theology, Berrigan imparts a definite salvation theme to human history. Time becomes eschatological. "It is the property of vision to eradicate distinctions between present and future, and to set forth, in a single moment of ecstasy, the future, precisely as present."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), pp. 77-78.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Berrigan, No Bars to Manhood (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970), p. 86.

It is this vision of time, and of human history, as "the future, now" which gives rise to Berrigan's impatience with present social and political arrangements. Man is judged now, for now is the day of reckoning. The present, insofar as man is bound by it, cannot redeem. Francine du Plessix Gray, historian of Catholic radicalism, describes such a theology:

The Berrigans, like all revolutionaries and most martyrs, have little faith in the redeeming power of time. Their theology is Apocalyptic. It sees the day of judgment as thrusting itself continually into the present. Like the Old Testament prophets who wrote in moments of historical crisis, the Berrigans feel that purification is immediate and necessary. Like the early Christians on whom they model their vocations, the Berrigans see the Second Coming -- either man's perfectibility or his destruction -- as imminent in their own lifetimes. It is a view in which there is no time to atone, to reform, to do penance.<sup>21</sup>

Eschatological time reaches beyond the immediate to confront "normal" time. The normality of the present age, as attractive and comforting as it may be, imprisons man. To use Berrigan's imagery: the critical task is one of "re-membering" man and thereby achieving a primal state of creative wholeness. Eschatology plunges into the future

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<sup>21</sup> Francine du Plessix Gray, Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970), p. 117. Reference is often made to the Berrigans or the Berrigan Brothers. It is quite difficult to speak of Daniel Berrigan in isolation from his brother Philip, a Josephite priest. Both men were at Catonsville, and both went through much the same ordeal. In his writings, Daniel often mentions the influence of his brother on his political convictions. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the emphasis is placed entirely on Daniel Berrigan himself.

and views it as a distinct human possibility. But not in any ultimately a-historical sense as exemplified by certain forms of utopia or millenarianism. Rather, an eschatology which, in standing as judge over the present, seeks to redeem it. Berrigan is hopeful. An eschatological sense of time implies a sense of responsibility towards present human affairs. Present and future somehow take on flesh -- are embodied in human activity. "Unless our lives include other lives, we are not conscious at all."<sup>22</sup> For Berrigan, to say 'no' to the present, to resist, is to pronounce a resounding 'yes' in favour of a genuinely human future. That is the meaning of Christian hope.

What, then, are the means of fashioning this human future? How does one live fully in the present while at the same time refusing to bend knee before the face of "the Beast"? Berrigan provides an existential response to what is essentially an existential question. He speaks of risk and of resistance -- of the need to say 'no' with the heart's full consent. Berrigan is quite categorical. The times call for nothing less than heroic action. Unless one chooses to live on the fine edge between present and future, one cannot claim to live anywhere at all. In a particularly

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<sup>22</sup>Daniel Berrigan, No Bars to Manhood, p. 86.

lucid passage from The Dark Night of Resistance, Berrigan affirms this choice and defines its parameters:

To offer a proposition: the state of resistance as a state of life itself. Since like it or not, this is the shape of things. We will not again know sweet normalcy in our lifetime. What seems outré now, outrageous, disruptive of routine and pattern, is simply the obscure shape of things unknown, as far as we can discern any shape at all. (We can.) Shapes we can no longer cringe from, run from (very far), bribe out of sight (for very long). All of which, it seems to me, once the admission is made, clears the air. When the future need no longer be resisted, the true form of resistance can be spread out before us, analyzed, dealt, losing hands and winning. All to the good. It being pernicious and lethal and against the right order of things that we should cling to the past, sanctify what we have known, give our hearts to it, sell our souls. No.

Everything begins with that no, spoken with the heart's full energies, a suffering and prophetic word, a word issuing from the nature and direction of things. No. A time to tear and pull down and root out. A time for burning out the accumulated debris of history, the dark noisome corners of our shrines, a universal spring-cleaning. So that the symbolism of Catonsville may become a permanent method and symbol. Of what?

Of moral process. Not of escalated ethical improvement, or social engineering of American dreams, or exportation of techniques. We have had enough of that; we must speak of something other, closer to the dark roots of our existence, to beginnings, to the heart of things.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Daniel Berrigan, The Dark Night of Resistance, p. 2.

For Daniel Berrigan, resistance is above all a way of being -- a re-affirmation of one's fragile humanity in the midst of an increasingly dehumanizing present. It is also a way of radically actualizing the future. Resistance is midwife. This permanent state of "life at the edge" between now and tomorrow is how Berrigan defines a Christian's lifestyle, today. But Berrigan is no cold ascetic or naive revolutionary too removed from the pulse of modern life to fully understand its inherent contradictions or appreciate its creative potential. Resistance is an act of the spirit, a religious Odyssey. Most importantly, it is political. There no longer exists for Berrigan this impossible chasm between political intercourse and the Christian's calling to a contemplative life.

The time will shortly be upon us, if it is not already here, when the pursuit of contemplation becomes a strictly subversive activity. This is the deepest and at the same time, I think, the most sensible way of expressing the trouble into which my brother and I have fallen. What else have we been up to these several years? We have been trying mightily to avoid the distraction from reality which is almost a stigma of the modern mind.

I am convinced that contemplation, including the common worship of the believing, is a political act of the highest value, implying the riskiest of consequences to those taking part. Union with the Father leads us, in a sense charged with legal jeopardy, to resistance against false, corrupting, coercive, imperialist policy.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, pp. 77 and 78.

Berrigan pronounces an absolute 'no' to man's peaceful co-existence with present social and political forces. Only in "going against" can one "opt for" something -- someone -- born of man. Berrigan issues a call for action. "Does man live only in thought? Where are his hands?"<sup>25</sup> We have seen how passionately the priest-poet speaks of the need to give flesh to our human fears in order to maintain our precious sanity. What of the ethics which guide him on this path to resistance?

### 3. An Ethics of Incarnation and Judgement

Shortly before being incarcerated by the Nazi regime in April 1943, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the following lines as part of a new year's reflection. The words issue from the heart of a man who had deliberately placed himself in the jaws of "the Beast" -- in this case, Hitlerian fascism.

The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live. It is only from this question, with its responsibility towards history, that fruitful solutions can come, even if for the time being they are very humiliating. In short, it is much easier to see a thing through from the

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Berrigan, No One Walks Waters (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 64.

point of view of abstract principle than from that of concrete responsibility. The rising generation will always instinctively discern which of these we make the basis of our actions, for it is their own future that is at stake.<sup>26</sup>

Almost three decades later, Daniel Berrigan, himself an "outlaw" for having refused to serve a three-year sentence on charges of destruction of State property, wrote about the German pastor: "Bonhoeffer burned, sifted, removed. The task of a good man in a bad time was to despise, to put to naught, the tactics of evil power"<sup>27</sup> Two men. Two ordained Christians. Historical circumstances separate them, but a common ethics binds them.

Berrigan draws his sense of ethics from Christian incarnational theology.<sup>28</sup> Within this framework, spirit and matter form an inseparable whole. As God "took on" the human essence in Christ, so the Christian in turn embraces the world. In a poem appropriately entitled "Immanence", Berrigan writes:

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<sup>26</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 42.

<sup>28</sup> This theme of "incarnation" in Berrigan's literary work is well explored in Harry J. Cargas' book, Daniel Berrigan and Contemporary Protest Poetry (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press Services, Inc., 1972), Chapter VI, "Daniel Berrigan: The Poet as Citizen".

I see You in the world ---  
 venturesome children, their cries and gestures,  
 the sharp sad whistle at six, the emptying park,  
 flybitten leaves, embers of the magnificent  
 weathered candelabra, the poplar lanes.<sup>29</sup>

In another remarkable passage, Berrigan further argues for the need to "give flesh" to human experience and hopes. He calls for an incarnational ethics.

The greatness of decisions and ideas is to be measured by their availability, rather than by any striking originality or thrust of power, by their ability to express the unformulated, obscure hopes of many; to seize upon and vitalize human life, a new soul for an old. The aim of great ideas or great art or great policy, is incarnation,<sup>30</sup> embodiment; a new man, a new form, a new community.

Incarnation implies newness -- a radical transformation of existing patterns of being and believing. Change there must be, and again Berrigan contends that only in saying "no" -- in resisting -- can the new be made to come forth. Such action is justified and given meaning only through the redemptive work of God in the person of Jesus. The Incarnation calls the Christian to a life of involvement with his world. Otherwise, change has no sense to it. Neither do ethics and moral passion. Berrigan goes a step further. He speaks of uncertainty as a normal state of affairs.

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<sup>29</sup>Daniel Berrigan, No One Walks Waters, p. 71.

<sup>30</sup>Daniel Berrigan, Consequences: Truth and . . .  
 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), pp. 4 and 5.



Thus, in order to stand with man, it is necessary to speak our no to the anti-men, the moral midgets, the mad powers.

To save the earth and those who dwell upon the earth and those who love and tend the earth, and those who inherit the earth and bequeath the earth to children, and those who contemplate the earth and draw upon its energies and beauty and surprise; in order to make poetry, in order to make love, in order to make sense. It may be necessary to go under the earth. To go underground. To join that vast network of the unborn and the dead. To resign from America, in order to join the heart of man.

I speak, of course, of ~~plain fact~~; of my own case. But it seems to me that every real question opens every other question; every act, if it be genuine (which is to say, both integral with one's own life and with an eye to one's brothers), opens a whole arterial system of analogies.

I mean to say something quite simple and practical. It is useful, indeed inevitable, that our lives endure a certain perplexity. It is neither useful nor inevitable that our lives be stuck fast in moral stalemate.<sup>31</sup>

Berrigan speaks of creation and the search for new possibilities. He is, however, respectful of tradition. Change cannot occur in a vacuum, nor is this desirable. The old harbours the new, and certain timeless human "qualities" must endure.

Certain things will always endure, if change is not to become chaos. There is no need to become dogmatic here, or to compose a new chain of "things to be believed." The real point is living faith, charity, a Christ who is present. And from the human point of view, the retention of good

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<sup>31</sup>Daniel Berrigan, The Dark Night of Resistance, pp. 81-82.

humor, courage, suppleness of heart, openness to conversion, inwardness. Literally everything else is worth sacrificing for these. And these cannot be sacrificed for anything else.

What must be prepared for, and actively experimented with, is the creation of new forms of life. And there is no reason why such experiments, such active tribute to the unknown, cannot be paid within the framework of the old. For the old is a nest of the new; and unsuspected life is always longing to be heard, and to be heard from, within the old.

One will always respect the truth of tradition, at risk of becoming a mere destroyer. On the other hand, the Gospel nowhere urges us to remain within a decaying nest.<sup>32</sup>

Within his incarnational view of the world and of human experience, Daniel Berrigan opts for an ethics which is founded on a genuine acceptance of reality and a deep sense of personal responsibility. Never does Berrigan try to ignore or escape from what he sees as the moral dilemmas of the times. Rather, he confronts them. His plea to "stay with history . . . by falling within its main lines of action" is nothing less than a call for total involvement. Berrigan sees the world as it is -- in all its horror and potential -- and tries to change it. In a letter addressed to young Jesuits, he writes: "Someday we will have our retreat together, and meditate and rejoice in our con-

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<sup>32</sup>Daniel Berrigan, Consequences: Truth and . . .,  
p. 5.

fessing brotherhood. Meantime, struggle. A world is possible in which the murder of children is not an acceptable 'way of life'".<sup>33</sup> Earlier in the same text, Berrigan explores the meaning of this "struggle".

Resistance to the war-ridden, blood-shot state is the form that human life is called to assume today. It is also the simplest, most logical way of translating the gospel into an argot that will be exact and imaginative at once. It is an occasion of rebirth, and a bloody one. It is also a choice. We will either die in our old skins (with all that implies of violated promise, personal despair) or we will come to second birth by giving our lives for others. (I plead guilty here to a fundamentalism that prison tends to hasten.) One gets reborn by saying "No" to the state -- a "No" loud and clear enough to be heard, to trouble Leviathan.<sup>34</sup>

Berrigan speaks of choice and of "giving our lives for others". Indeed, a responsible choice must be made. It is a moral choice -- at once a choice in favour of human life, and a rejection of death as a "normal" and acceptable means of relating to the world and to others. As with Bonhoeffer, Berrigan believes that the sensitive Christian has no alternative but to feel intensely responsible for how the future generation will live in the world they inherit from us. Berrigan chooses personal risk and involvement.

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-129. Emphases mine.

In the play which he wrote based on the actual trial of the Catonsville defendants, he affirms this choice.

My intention on that day  
 was  
 to save the innocent  
 from death by fire  
 I was trying to save the poor  
 who are mainly charged with  
 dying in this war  
 I poured napalm  
 on behalf of the prosecutor's  
 and the jury's children  
 It seems to me quite logical  
 If my way of putting the facts  
 is inadmissible  
 then so be it  
 But I was trying to be concrete  
 about death because death  
 is a concrete fact  
 as I have throughout my life  
 tried to be concrete  
 about the existence of God  
 Who is not an abstraction  
 but is someone before me<sup>35</sup>  
 for Whom I am responsible

There is a clear rejection of all forms of moral dualism in Berrigan's writings and lifestyle. No dichotomy exists between the "public" and "private" spheres of human experience.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Berrigan maintains that man and the world (be it the natural world or the political world) stand together. A moral relationship binds them. This gives rise to an ethics which is at times terribly judgemental and absolute.

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<sup>35</sup> Daniel Berrigan, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 82-83.

<sup>36</sup> Such a perspective stands in marked contrast to Reinhold Niebuhr's well-known ethical distinction.

Man and the world form a moral unity. And man is forbidden to destroy this harmony. The law is a conclusion of his active power of touching reality in history, of forming his future, and of rejecting the chimeras and the moral folly that would threaten his existence. Man conceives of a beginning of the world that coincides with his own beginnings. He can conceive of an end of things that includes his own last day. But he cannot imagine, without doing violence to his being, a world of order or meaning perduring without him. He finds senseless and horrifying the notion of a posthuman universe. That is, no event from within the world, issuing from human minds and executed with human hands can be accepted as ending human existence.<sup>37</sup>

It is in the political field that this non-dualistic approach is perhaps best exemplified. To exist, for Berrigan, means to be totally involved with others. And to be totally involved with others is to be political. Politics is human intercourse. Every man must partake of its exigencies if he is to remain honest and responsible. Berrigan writes: "Political man is a synonym for believing man . . . political man is the natural term of man, his adulthood".<sup>38</sup> For Berrigan, of course, politics has a dialectic to it. One is immersed in politics, while also standing in opposition to it. Witness Catonsville.

Berrigan judges man -- whether it be American involvement in Vietnam, the spread of blind technology or the unabashed belief in racism. Why? Because everything moves

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<sup>37</sup>Daniel Berrigan, They Call Us Dead Men, p. 167.

<sup>38</sup>Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 44.

from, and returns to, man. And Berrigan is severe; he judges absolutely. One does not gamble with the powers of death; one resists. Berrigan's ethics of resistance implies moral judgement, a moral judgement founded on a sense of righteousness. Its inner logic stems from an awareness of the breach in brotherhood between men. In sum, it is a judgement based on Christian love -- a re-affirmation of belief in the essential goodness of man, and a search for community. What Christ has saved, man now wants to make sinful. In Berrigan's sense of eschatological time, the moral question of the present age is a stark and simple one. And the choice is absolute and radical.

The question is whether we shall have a human life or will be progressively denied one -- so gradually and skillfully we are never allowed to notice our metamorphosis into inventive chimps or house-broken dogs.

The question is whether we can bear the death and degradation of others more easily than our own.

The question is whether God is a brother and advocate to those in the breach, or whether He is the implacable, untouchable master of the machine.

The question is a choice between Nazis and men, and where we shall stand.

The question is so simply put, in fact, that a child could choose -- rightly, from the evidence, the faces that summon him in this or that direction -- life or damnation.

The question is whether we can bear to forget our brothers and call amnesia a normal condition of things.

Everything we grew up to believe was firmly in place and unchallenged is dying. Including the church. Including the Jesuits. At a deathbed where faith reigns, prayer and silence are the only worthy responses. We are called, therefore, to this sorrow. The man who gloats over such a scene is a monstrous reject -- he has no healing power nor can he bring anything new to birth.<sup>39</sup>

Even though Berrigan defines present circumstances in terms of an absolute moral choice, he does not necessarily lay claim to moral truth. A choice, whilst the manifestation of certain fundamental "beliefs", is always made in the here-and-now. What concerns Berrigan is that he be in the right place at the right time. "Even though we may be wrong, where we are is right. I'm not interested in this or that issue being right. I'm interested in being in the right place when Christ returns."<sup>40</sup> In a limited sense, we can say that Berrigan's ethical perspective is situational. But the perspective remains apocalyptic nonetheless. Therein lies its particular relevance.

Daniel Berrigan's quest for sanity brought him to Catonsville. There, the believing man and the political man merged as one.

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Berrigan, Lights on in the House of the Dead (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> As quoted in Harry J. Cargas, Daniel Berrigan and Contemporary Protest Poetry, p. 104.

## CHAPTER II

### CATONSVILLE, U.S.A.: CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The date was May 17, 1968. The scene was Local Board No. 33 of the Selective Service System at Catonsville, Maryland. The Vietnam War was now a daily fact of life for Americans. One month earlier, Martin Luther King had been killed. On that day, nine persons -- seven men and two women -- entered the Board which was located in a Knights of Columbus Hall. They quickly seized 378 draft files and burnt them outside with homemade napalm. Thus began one of the most dramatic episodes in the annals of political resistance. At their trial, the Catonsville Nine, as they were to be known henceforth, pleaded innocent to charges of willful destruction of American government property. Among them stood Daniel Berrigan. For him, Catonsville was the logical and perfect outcome of a search for a new political method. It was also the result of an intense spiritual quest.

#### 1. Notes on Christian Political Resistance

It is perhaps best at this point to attempt some working definition of the term "political resistance". Such



a definition, when elaborated on the basis of general applicability, is instrumental in bringing into focus the specific question of Christian resistance. It should be noted, of course, that any theoretical model is valuable only to the extent that it accords with actual life experience.

Generally, political resistance could be defined as an act or a series of acts of overt defiance which imply a clear non-recognition of the power claims of a given political entity or complex of authority. The defiance can be either of a violent or non-violent nature. Non-recognition is either specific in that it is directed at an isolated issue (e.g., the Vietnam War or compulsory military service), or it is general and strikes at the entire power structure (e.g., the Nazi regime or any form of dictatorship). A strong moral judgement drives the resister. A given act or policy of the power structure, or the power structure itself, is viewed as wrong or immoral -- therefore, as undeserving of the allegiance of the citizens. Indeed, true citizenship or patriotism is defined in terms of the willingness to resist. In most instances, political resistance contains an important element of sabotage -- whether this be physically destructive or simply routinely disruptive. In a word, the crucial factor in political resistance is the choice made between a violent or a non-violent method. It

is on this precise question that ideological perspectives are refined and affirmed.<sup>1</sup>

In the introduction to his thought-provoking book, Faith and Violence, Thomas Merton pinpoints the issues which a theology of resistance must grapple with. While Merton argues in favour of the traditional Catholic "Just War" approach to the question of violence, he also believes that our theological language must reflect a more modern reality. Violence today is not simply (and certainly not primarily) a matter of armed struggle. Twentieth century violence is far more subtle -- and by consequence, more deadly.

The theology of violence must not lose sight of the real problem which is not the individual with a revolver but death and even genocide as big business. But this big business of death is all the more innocent and effective because it involves a long chain of individuals, each of whom can feel himself absolved from responsibility, and each of whom can perhaps salve his conscience by contributing with a more meticulous efficiency to his part in the massive operation.

On the other hand we also have to recognize that when oppressive power is thoroughly well-established, it

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<sup>1</sup>This review of the components of "political resistance" rests entirely on my own analysis of the term. No conclusive, quasi-scientific definition is proposed.

does not always need to resort openly to the "method of beasts" because its laws are already powerful -- perhaps also bestial -- enough. In other words, when a system can, without resort to overt force, compel people to live in conditions of abjection, helplessness, wretchedness that keeps them on the level of beasts rather than of men, it is plainly violent. . . . If the oppressed try to resist by force -- which is their right -- theology has no business preaching non-violence to them. Mere blind destruction is, of course, futile and immoral: but who are we to condemn a desperation we have helped to cause!<sup>2</sup>

In a subsequent passage, Merton affirms quite explicitly the non-violent character of Christian political resistance. He does not proclaim non-violence (or, for that matter, pure pacifism) as the sole valid political option for the committed Christian. He speaks of a basic orientation to "conflict-resolution". Violence or force may be most appropriate given certain political dynamics; it should be, however, a rare exception. Conflict will always exist between human beings. We need a new way of dealing with it.

At the same time the violent or coercive approach to the solution of human problems considers man in general, in the abstract, and according to various notions about the laws that govern his nature. In other words, it is concerned with man as subject to necessity, and it seeks out the points at which his nature is consistently vulnerable in order to coerce him physically or psychologically. Non-violence on the other hand is based on that respect for the

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Merton, Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 6 and 7-8.

human person without which there is no deep and genuine Christianity. It is concerned with an appeal to the liberty and intelligence of the person insofar as he is able to transcend nature and natural necessity.

The "nature oriented" mind treats other human beings as objects to be manipulated in order to control the course of events and make the future conform to certain rather rigidly determined expectations. "Person-oriented" thinking does not lay down these draconian demands, does not seek so much to control as to respond, and to awaken response. It is not set on determining anyone or anything, and does not insistently demand that persons and events correspond to our own abstract ideal. All it seeks is the openness of free exchange in which reason and love have freedom of action. In such a situation the future will take care of itself. This is the truly Christian outlook.

In such a confrontation between conflicting parties, on the level of personality, intelligence and freedom, instead of with massive weapons or with trickery and deceit, a fully human solution becomes possible. Conflict will never be abolished but a new way of solving it can become habitual. Man can then act according to the dignity of that adulthood which he is now said to have reached -- and which yet remains, perhaps, to be conclusively demonstrated.<sup>3</sup>

Christian political resistance is fundamentally person-oriented and non-violent in method. It calls for mutual respect and person-to-person dialogue in the solution of conflict. As a general principle, it does not advocate coercion, whether physical or psychological. And what is perhaps more important, Christian political resistance is an

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 27, 28 and 29.

ongoing search for new ways of resolving differences and establishing community -- an active search for alternatives to violence. Significantly then, there is no real difference in terms of actual method between Christian non-violent political resistance and the pure Gandhian type. It is sometimes simply a difference in the degree of emphasis placed on personal religious convictions as the rationale for political involvement. For the Christian, the gospel message can hardly be considered incidental to political activity -- just as it was not for Gandhi. But it can be argued that what should distinguish the Christian from the believer in total and absolute non-violence -- the pacifist -- is the admission that force may sometimes be required, on a limited basis, to confront a corrupt and oppressive power. The Christian admits of the existence of real evil in the world. Non-violence may then not be sufficient.

Daniel Berrigan clearly refuses to acknowledge that force may at times be imperative in the face of certain political dynamics, a position which is more a reflection of the political situation of his times than it is a moral or theological dilemma in Merton's terms. Berrigan's primary purpose at Catonsville was to raise American consciousness about what was happening in Vietnam, not to destroy the foundations of the American political State. He did indeed want the draft abolished. But he certainly was

not about to bomb the Pentagon to make it happen. As much as he may have mistrusted the wielders of power, Berrigan never even remotely questioned their right to life. In a word, violent resistance was not a reality for Berrigan. The times did not dictate its use, and it certainly was not a moral imperative. Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Tyrannicide was perhaps the most effective resistance to the very real evil of Nazism. Or consider the "violent" response of several Latin American Christians to the system of exploitation so rampant on the southern continent. Under similar circumstances, it is difficult to say if Berrigan would retain a tactic of pure non-violence. The fact remains, though, that Berrigan stands in the classic Gandhian tradition of non-violence -- with the important difference being that he evades punishment for acts committed, a problem to which we shall turn later.<sup>4</sup> Non-violence is inherently Christian, just as Christianity is inherently non-violent. Even though Christian love may sometimes call for forceful confrontation, such a response cannot be accepted as normative.

Perhaps the inner spirit of Christian political resistance is in fact best expressed by Bonhoeffer:

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<sup>4</sup>Refer to Chapter III, Section 3 of this thesis.

... there remains for us only the very narrow way, often extremely difficult to find, of living every day as if it were our last, and yet living in faith and responsibility as though there were to be a great future: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land' proclaims Jeremiah (32.15), in paradoxical contrast to his prophecies of woe, just before the destruction of the holy city. It is a sign from God and a pledge of a fresh start and a great future, just when all seems black. Thinking and acting for the sake of the coming generation, but being ready to go any day without fear or anxiety -- that, in practice, is the spirit in which we are forced to live. It is not easy to be brave and keep that spirit alive, but it is imperative.<sup>5</sup>

It is certain that Berrigan would agree. His theology is, in fact, a child of the Bonhoeffer tradition.

## 2. The Politics of Conscience

Henry David Thoreau, American writer and original exponent of the "return to nature" movement, perhaps best articulated the conflict between individual conscience and State in the American political tradition when he wrote in his classic essay, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience":

Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience? -- in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience,

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<sup>5</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, p. 15.

then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. . . . Law never made men a whit more just. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Years later in a British prison in South Africa, Mohandas K. Gandhi read Thoreau's essay and was immediately struck by the eloquence and political truth of its arguments. There can be no doubt that Thoreau's thinking exerted a lasting influence on Gandhi. In January 1922, Gandhi wrote:

I wish I could persuade everybody that civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He dare not give it up without ceasing to be a man. Civil disobedience is never followed by anarchy. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every State puts down criminal disobedience by force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is to attempt to imprison conscience. Civil disobedience can only lead to strength and purity. A civil resister never uses arms and hence he is harmless to a State that is at all willing to listen to the voice of public opinion. He is dangerous for an autocratic State, for he brings about its fall by engaging public opinion upon the matter for which he resists the State. Civil disobedience therefore becomes a sacred duty when the State has become lawless, or which is the same thing, corrupt. And a citizen that barter with such a State shares its corruption or lawlessness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Henry David Thoreau, "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience", in Walden and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience (New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1965), p. 252.

<sup>7</sup>M. K. Gandhi, Non-Violent Resistance (New York: Schocken Books, 1951), p. 174.



Thoreau and Gandhi believe that individual conscience -- in its rights, responsibilities and inviolability -- is the crux and final arbitrator of any political association, as voluntary as such an association may be. Daniel Berrigan shares the conviction of both these men. Not that he is, strictly speaking, a political philosopher. But by virtue of being a political activist in the fullest sense of the word, Berrigan enunciates, though not always coherently, some rather fundamental beliefs about politics. The proof of the philosopher lies in the doing, just as it did for Gandhi.

The preceding chapter discussed Berrigan's views on resistance as at once an existential statement and a political tool. Consistently, Berrigan insists on man's inherent right to disobey any unjust law, to refuse allegiance to government and thereby, to lay claim to a higher law: the law of the moral order, or the law of conscience. Much as any committed resister does, Berrigan asks the central question: "Men disobey, disrupt, break laws. Are they thereby criminals in fact? Or is something deeper and more mysterious at work? Can lawbreaking in certain cases be a function of conscience?"<sup>8</sup> Berrigan's response, of course,

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel Berrigan, No Bars to Manhood, p. 35.

is already implied in his question. Yes, lawbreaking is right, necessary and legitimate. Otherwise, man gives up conscience and his sacred mark as a free and responsible being.

At the level of method, Berrigan argues in favour of the pacifist option. The moral choice(s) made by conscience cannot be considered fully authentic or human unless there is a concurrent rejection of all forms of violence or coercion as valid political means. Berrigan's rationale is partly historical and partly reactive.

The Christian pacifist has a clear option in a world where the great powers and the lackey churches have reached agreements on nationalistic frenzies and policies. Indeed his moral position is only clarified by the mad drift of events. He is now called more strongly than ever to renounce any part in modern war.

The just war theory, evolved at a time when wars were limitable, no longer applies -- to say the least.

One is called to live non-violently, even if the social or political change one worked for is in fact unlikely or even impossible. It may or may not be possible to turn the United States around through non-violent revolution. But one thing is in favor of such an attempt: the total inability of violence, as a social or personal method, to change anything. On the other hand, one notes how a violent society justifies itself by forbidding its people to explore alternatives. So violence proliferates, captivates consciousness with the myth that it is the sole savior, and thus multiplies wars and victims, the boundless litany of human misery.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Daniel Berrigan, Lights on in the House of the Dead, pp. 51 and 52.

One can recall Gandhi's own words: "I have found that life persists in the midst of destruction and, therefore, there must be a higher law than that of destruction. Only under that law would a well-ordered society be intelligible and life worth living".<sup>10</sup>

In what sense, then, can we qualify Berrigan's activities as "the politics of conscience"? And what are the standards by which conscience attains the status of political adjudicator? Both questions are really part of a much larger issue: the relationship between ethics or morality and socio-political dynamics. Berrigan provides a sound perspective on this issue when he states that "the line which is most discernibly growing in attitudes toward existence are those that have to do with life and non-life; those who, on the one hand, would agree that man has a future and that human life is valuable and who are willing to work toward that, and those who don't".<sup>11</sup> It is precisely at the point of a choice for or against life, that conscience becomes politicized -- hence, a potential political leverage.

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<sup>10</sup>M. K. Gandhi, op. cit., p. 383.

<sup>11</sup>James Finn, ed., Protest: Pacifism and Politics (New York: Random House, Inc., 1967), p. 51.

Any discussion of ethics must deal with conscience as a significant human phenomenon. Ethics and morality are, of course, the manifestations of conscience; they do not operate in the abstract insofar as human experience is concerned. While it is possible to believe in the existence of certain "timeless" moral values (the sacredness of human life being the foundation), such values acquire sense and meaning only when responsible human beings live them out. A failure to "live them out" is nothing less than inhuman and irresponsible. Conscience is the force -- a rational yet highly emotional force -- which allows the person to make some basic and serious choices between "right" and "wrong", as conditioned as these sometimes are by historical conjuncture. In the Christian tradition, conscience is regarded in much the same way as faith: a gift freely given by the Creator which must be developed and refined if it is not to be lost. But conscience is not only a spiritual gift. It is also the interaction of countless human influences and shared experiences. Conscience must be informed and able to choose on the basis of certain shared values and objective criteria.

Conscience is man personally implicated in the act of moral choice -- a process rather than a static mental state. In the sphere of political activity where decisions are taken which directly affect the well-being of others,

conscience plays a singularly critical role.<sup>12</sup>

Without elaborating an exhaustive sociological theory of ethics and moral behaviour, one can still readily accept the fact that ethical standards and socio-political structures stand in a dialectical relationship. Any analysis of human consciousness will reveal this. What concerns us at this point is the way in which conscience, the actual "dynamic" of moral-ethical choice, becomes transformed into a valid political means. The key notion, as put forth previously, is that of human choice. Berrigan speaks of "attitudes toward existence" which "have to do with life and non-life". Something quite important is implied here. A genuinely free and responsible individual cannot escape the constraints of choice -- choice made not so much in terms of the self, as choice made in terms of the other. Conscience enlightens this choice and makes it, in fact, possible.

In speaking of "the politics of conscience", one is re-affirming, much as Thoreau and Gandhi did, the natural community of man and the right of the individual to refuse submission to any power structure which breaks such community. Thus is civil disobedience much more of a social act than a strictly personal statement about one's inner

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<sup>12</sup>This discussion of conscience is, by virtue of necessity, sketchy. It is meant more as an introductory statement.

convictions. Conscience is a political "method" insofar as it can confront and deny absolute power claims on human life and freedom, hence giving way to resistance. The full political impact of conscience is, however, best realized when the individual involved is himself free of "guilt by association" -- when he himself stands outside of inhuman power arrangements. This is Berrigan's argument for resistance as a permanent alternative state.

How does one really raise ethical and political questions and explore those questions in a real way -- as contrasted to an academic or an intellectual way? Can someone question gross and blatant injustice from a life-situation that is tied in dozens of ways, often subtle ways, to that injustice? That is to say, it wouldn't have meant much to many of us if Jesus had raised questions of conscience and of God and man from the position of a Pharisee, from the dead center of his society. I can only mention a conviction, one I have tried to follow out, sometimes clumsily and incompletely -- a conviction that one's position in relationship to a given society is terribly important, and bears constant watching.

My point is a very simple one: that we, as active and concerned individuals, are historically valid and useful for the future only in proportion as our lives are tasting some of the powerlessness which is the alternative to the wrong use of power today; and that's where I am. . . . At the edge.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel Berrigan, and Robert Coles, The Geography of Faith (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1971), pp. 94-95.

Conscience is not an end in itself because conscience, no matter how well-informed, cannot lay claim to absolute truth. The person who bases certain political choices on conscience must also acknowledge that his is not the sole moral authority. Such authority may certainly lie outside of him, and it does: in sacred texts and traditions, in political institutions, in cultural values and in simple human wisdom. An appeal to conscience is not an appeal for a theory of pure relativism. It is, on the contrary, an appeal for responsible action in an imperfect yet potentially ideal world. Conscience is accountable to the human person -- and this, for the Christian, leaves one standing alone before God to ultimately answer for one's moral choices and deeds. This is not pietism; it is radical politics.

Berrigan provides some random thoughts to help place the issue in perspective:

An act of faith by modern man might begin by not asking for a clearer situation than the one he is in. I submit that such an act would be practically heroic.

No one dies in the world he was born into; the moral life as a space ship.

The nonviolent man does not announce that something new is going to happen in the future; he announces that something new is currently happening. Or, better still, he is making it happen.<sup>14</sup>

When Daniel Berrigan stood at Catonsville, he was trying to proclaim something "new" -- in essence, that man refuses the claims of unjust power:

3. Choosing Between Property  
and Human Life

On January 25, 1971, Time magazine featured Daniel and Philip Berrigan as its cover story. Even though the intent of the news coverage was to report on the supposed conspiracy to blow up U.S. Government heating systems and kidnap Presidential Advisor Henry Kissinger,<sup>15</sup> the article also gave a personal profile of both men in an effort to understand their motivations. Of Catonsville, Time had the following sardonic comment to make:

Catonsville, for the Berrigans, became something of a litmus for the responsiveness of the American "system." Until the trial, they maintained a kind of naive hope that their message, once heard, would vindicate their actions.<sup>16</sup>

Time, though certainly unwitting, was not far from

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<sup>15</sup>The "conspiracy" was put forward by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. The apparent intent of the bombing and the kidnapping was to force President Nixon to bring about a quick end to the Vietnam War. Philip was named a defendant, and Daniel a co-conspirator. Charges were eventually dropped, and many now believe that the whole episode was orchestrated by Hoover in a show of toughness towards political dissenters.

<sup>16</sup>Time, XCVII, No. 4 (January 25, 1971), p. 16.



the truth: Catonsville was a test, a loud and clear message directed at the American consciousness. Its rate of success or failure in terms of ending the War (an attempt at measurement which misses the central issue) is quite irrelevant. Catonsville was both symbol and statement. It raised some fundamental moral questions about life and death, power and property. These are the questions to which the Catonsville Nine addressed themselves, and which still call for close attention.

Initially, one must ask why Daniel Berrigan chose to go to Catonsville. Implied in the question is a search for the rationale which guided much of American political dissent in the 1960s. The "why" of Berrigan's choice also gives way to a certain elaboration of the expectations which the Nine had with respect to their act, i.e., what were the Catonsville Nine saying, and what did they hope to accomplish through the burning of draft files. In No Bars to Manhood, Berrigan provides an authoritative explanation.

A few years ago, most of us of the Catonsville Nine had not thought so harshly about our social machinery. I, for one, had never before May 1968 violated a civil law. This was one experience that the nine defendants shared in common.

But suddenly, for all of us, the American scene was no longer a good scene. It was, in fact, an immoral scene, corrupted by a useless and wasting war abroad, and a growing, petrifying racism at home. Ours was a scene that moral men could not

continue to approve if they were to deserve the name of men. . . . Catonsville, rightly understood, was a profound "No" aimed not merely at a federal law that protects human hunting licenses. Our act was aimed, as our statement tried to make clear, at every major presumption underlying American life today. Our act was in the strictest sense a conspiracy; that is to say, we had agreed together to attack the working assumptions of American life. Our act was a denial that American institutions were presently functioning in a way that good men could approve or sanction.

I have perhaps suggested enough of the implications of Catonsville, both to reassure and to shatter. To reassure: We were aiming at the law. To shatter: We were aiming beyond the law. We aimed at a social change, in a time of paralysis and dread; our hope was modest and thoughtful. We were not asking for an apocalyptic, overnight change in the character of the law of the land. We were demanding, believe it or not, no more than a minimal observance of the laws that stood upon the books.<sup>17</sup>

These same sentiments were clearly outlined in the original statement which the Catonsville Nine made public on the day of their protest, May 17, 1968.<sup>18</sup>

Two important themes stand out in the Catonsville statement: that of the imperialist base of American political and military power, and that of the "immorality"

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Berrigan, No Bars to Manhood, pp. 39 and 40, and p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Because of the historical importance of "The Catonsville Statement" for this study, it is given in its entirety in the Appendix.

of certain types of property relations. Essentially, both themes are part of a more general message which the resistance movement kept emphasizing: the inherently violent character of the American way of life, whether at home or abroad. We have already seen how Berrigan himself refined this argument in stark poetic terms.

Historically, there can be no doubt that the American political protest movements of the 1960s and the early 1970s were anti-imperialist, at least in rhetoric. The Vietnam War was the focal point, and those who cared enough to rally against it were acutely aware of the severe contradictions and limitations of that familiar tenet which stressed American "might and right". The entire Vietnam episode provided an ideal opportunity to seriously question the very foundations of American foreign policy, and to attack and discredit America's own perception of itself as the natural defender of freedom and democracy. The interesting thing about the Catonsville statement is that it makes the critical link between what the American State argued was its world leadership role and its covert but very real imperialist intentions in Vietnam and elsewhere. Catonsville was, for the Nine, an attempt at unmasking the truth and proclaiming it loud and clear.

But the Catonsville Nine were much more concerned about the human costs of American imperialism than about its

precise economic or political manifestations. Their statement speaks of "victims of American oppression" and "the misery of the poor", in the U.S. and Vietnam and Latin America. There is a clear condemnation of "the triumverate of power in this (American) technocratic empire": the military, business and government. Berrigan himself, on a "forced" visit to Latin America several years earlier, was able to reflect on the human suffering imposed and supported by the American imperialist presence, wherever it be. He wrote:

But the fabric of economy is rotten -- whole areas, mile after mile of families, are entirely out of economic hope. One wonders whether the Church can claim here to be anything but a defender and purveyor of the status quo -- a terrifying thought considering what must lie to the south of us.

The photos we have seen at certain centers show the old church pattern. A bishop blesses the rich patrons who come to "do something" for the poor out of their bounty. A bright spot is the three American girls from the Peace Corps and "Accion" living in the Barrio, and loving it. But who is questioning their presence, and whether they are also blessing a system which must eventually, by one means or another, be changed or toppled?<sup>19</sup>

The central question is raised. At Catonsville, the question was tied in with those particular tools or mechanisms -- outward symbols -- which both support and are

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Berrigan, Consequences: Truth and . . ., p. 101. Emphases mine.

an expression of imperialism: certain forms of property. The issue at hand was none other than American military service files in the context of their use for the Vietnam War.

In no uncertain terms, the Catonsville Nine declare: "We believe some property has no right to exist".<sup>20</sup> Two years later from prison in Danbury, Connecticut, Daniel Berrigan echoed this same conviction: "We continue to believe that certain property arrangements are immoral and anti-human. Destruction of such property may at times of social crisis be an overriding moral obligation".<sup>21</sup> Both statements are quite categorical and provide an insight as to the "why" of Catonsville.

Consistent with much of Berrigan's thought (but by no means in a sort of one-two relationship), the Catonsville resisters adopted a critical, highly moral view of political power, and particularly of the American involvement in Vietnam. This makes eminent historical sense given the mood of 1960s America. But Catonsville was a sort of "mutation",

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix, "The Catonsville Statement", eighth paragraph.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Berrigan, Lights on in the House of the Dead, p. 119.

a political event which went well beyond the self-imposed limits of political protest in the U.S. at that time. It was, of course, a search for ever more dramatic and effective methods of protest. What Catonsville certainly was, though, was a direct and overt affront to the American political and military power structure. And no greater affront could be had than to publicly attack the notion of property itself by destroying one of its most "sacred" forms, State property. Perhaps this explains, in part, the immediate and severe reaction of the American government on the one hand, and the "glorification" of Catonsville by the protest movement on the other. Of property and the Catonsville burning, Berrigan says:

We were trying to say of property that unless it is humanly useful and beautiful, it has no right to exist. . . . This property (State property) symbolizes the will toward death, the power of life and death over people -- hunting licences against human beings. There is a kind of schizophrenia, where the property has become the god, so that the oracle is connected with the keepers of the property. At the trial the prosecutor said, 'What you dare to say is that certain properties have no right to exist.' He asked David Harriss (sic), who died later by fire, 'Do you mean that slum properties have no right to exist?' David said, 'Of course they have no right to exist.' He asked for more examples, and David spoke of gas chambers in Nazi Germany, extermination camps and so forth. But equating the draft board with all this was very shattering for Americans: they had never really seen what they were doing. Yet if in local communities there is a very quiet kind of reintegration of property with human life, that

is one kind of subtle thinking and appreciation which makes property beautiful, simply and humanly available.<sup>22</sup>

A choice must again be made. Does one allow for the existence of certain types of property which, given their use, deny or limit the "sacredness" of human life -- or does one set about to destroy these same property arrangements in the name of a higher morality, thereby condemning the use to which they are put? The choice, for the Catonsville Nine at least, is quite obvious: "some property has no right to exist"; it is wrong, immoral. Such a stance naturally goes hand-in-hand with the Catonsville Nine's outright rejection of the American war effort in Vietnam. Insofar as the very existence of draft files contributes to this war effort, then the draft files cannot be permitted to exist. The logic is one which brings together means and ends as the only proper way to make a valid moral choice. Otherwise, the choice (and subsequent action) has no connection with the reality at hand.

Why, in fact, did Daniel Berrigan and the other Catonsville defendants choose to burn Selective Service files? Surely, they did not expect to stop the Vietnam War

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<sup>22</sup>Alistair Kee, ed., op. cit., p. 70.

by the simple burning of some three hundred draft records. While Catonsville was an obvious act of civil disobedience (hence a political act), it was more "statement" than "direct tool" -- more of a symbol than an attempt at direct political intervention. The Catonsville Nine never expected to put an end to the American involvement in Vietnam. They were certain, however, that what they did would rouse the American consciousness, one way or another. That is why Daniel Berrigan and his companions did what they did at Catonsville. They meant to sting the American collective psyche, to dramatize clearly (and certainly visually) the kinds of human suffering which the abuse of absolute power can bring about. As with most genuine forms of civil disobedience, Catonsville was an attempt at making political power accountable -- accountable to conscience and to certain fundamental human principles. Hopefully, the Catonsville Nine thought, the burning draft files would ignite moral outrage against the warmakers. The measure of success, however, remains quite intangible.

Prophetic or simply idealistic? It would seem that the Catonsville Nine were more than committed political activists. Was Catonsville, in fact, a dramatic yet minor event in the annals of political resistance -- or a baptism by fire? Does not its final meaning lie in the realm of spirit?



#### 4. The Liturgy of Catonsville

The deed was done: openly, defiantly and irrevocably. The perpetrators were summoned and tried. Some managed to stay on the run for a while, occasionally popping up to drive home their message and frustrate the system even more. All eventually ended up behind bars. Catonsville is today little more than a footnote in American history. Yet something very important remains -- something which has to do with the shape of things perhaps yet to come; something to do with free men and responsible power.

In an article from the January 1971 issue of Holy Cross Quarterly, Richard J. Clifford, S.J., writes of the prophetic nature of the Catonsville burning:

The Berrigans' gesture of pouring napalm on draft files and burning them, precisely because it is a symbolic gesture, fits not only the tradition of radical American politics, but also the prophetic tradition of symbolic acts. We need only recall Isaiah walking "naked and barefoot" through the streets of Jerusalem and Jeremiah burying his loincloth at the river bank. Whether we approve or not, the gesture itself concretizes vividly the moral issue of the war for many. It forces us to declare ourselves on the Vietnam war and on war in general. It disturbs the Christian community (and those outside the Christian community) and forces re-examination of old beliefs. Out of the turmoil, perhaps, a new consensus on peace and war will arise.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Richard J. Clifford, S.J., "The Berrigans: Prophetic?", in Holy Cross Quarterly, IV, no. 1 (January 1971), 18.

Theologian Harvey Cox pursues the same theme in another essay:

The action at Catonsville is not without precedent in religious history. For centuries the prophets and seers have immolated property of one sort or another as a means of symbolic expression or protest against unrighteousness. Moses not only burned the idolatrous golden calf but forced the errant children of Israel to swallow its bitter ashes. The prophet Jeremiah smashed a pitcher as a sign of God's anger with his disobedient people. Martin Luther not only burned the papal bull of excommunication but later went on to incinerate the entire corpus of canon law.

The burning of documents which symbolize evil is no innovation for men of faith.<sup>24</sup>

Both the above-quoted excerpts point to the fact that Catonsville, in its various "prophetic" aspects (the destruction of matter considered evil, the "speaking to" conscience through a disturbing symbolic act, the rejection of political idolatry), is a religious event -- indeed, a liturgical happening. Liturgy is communal: the concrete expression of a people's religious experience. Liturgy is time standing almost still. Itself is placed in perspective, actual and projected onto tomorrow. It is a celebration arising from

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<sup>24</sup> "Tongues of Flame: The Trial of the Catonsville Nine," in Stephen Halpert and Tom Murray, eds., Witness of the Berrigans (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.; 1972), pp. 21 and 22.

one's own struggle with the meaning of daily existence. Liturgy happens because we need it -- a roadmark on our way through, the affirmation of something quite precious and quite important: life fully human and fully available to us.

At Catonsville, Daniel Berrigan and his eight companions stood holding hands and reciting the Lord's Prayer around a heap of blazing draft files. They had come to register a public protest. To speak so that all could hear -- and in hearing, perhaps act. It was a ceremony of fire, a purification of conscience and an exorcism of collective guilt. It was Vietnam brought home to Americans. Not only Vietnam, but all that was synonymous with false and corrupt power. The image of the Catonsville burning is a magnetic one. As with all liturgical moments, Catonsville represents the affirmation and celebration of human meaning in this world. A rite of contrition certainly. The Catonsville defendants were declaring boldly: We will not be partners in this deathly exercise. By this burning, we mean to assert the sacredness of human life. We are all guilty. We all have a responsibility to change the course our nation is on.

Is this not, in fact, the spirit which some call "religious"? To borrow a well-known phrase from Karl Marx: The theologians have only explained God, in various ways;

the point, however, for the religious man, is to show that His existence makes a difference.

Daniel Berrigan is such a man. This sense of personal guilt and moral responsibility is brought out vividly in a prose meditation which he delivered at the Catonsville trial. Part of it reads:

All of us who act against the law  
 turn to the poor of the world to the Vietnamese  
 to the victims to the soldiers who kill and die  
 for the wrong reasons for no reason at all  
 because they were so ordered by the authorities  
 of that public order which is in effect  
 a massive institutionalized disorder  
 We say: killing is disorder  
 life and gentleness and community and unselfishness  
 is the only order we recognize  
 For the sake of that order  
 we risk our liberty our good name  
 The time is past when good men may be silent  
 when obedience  
 can segregate men from public risk<sup>25</sup>

Albert Camus puts it differently: ". . . all I ask is that, in the midst of a murderous world, we agree to reflect on murder and to make a choice".<sup>26</sup> The appeal could not be more sincere. Catonsville, May 17, 1968, provides one response. Perhaps prophetic. Certainly just.

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<sup>25</sup>Daniel Berrigan, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>Albert Camus, "Neither Victims nor Executioners", in Peter Mayer, ed., The Pacifist Conscience (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1966), p. 438.

### CHAPTER III

#### JESUIT AND AMERICAN: THE DUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DANIEL BERRIGAN'S MINISTRY

A large part of Daniel Berrigan's charismatic appeal and political impact lies in the fact of his priesthood. Undoubtedly, Catonsville would not have received the attention it did, had it not been for the strong presence of "clerics" amongst the nine defendants. There is something strangely engaging about committed churchmen offering resistance to a political power. People are seldom neutral on such occasions. The significant aspect of Daniel Berrigan's political commitment (as in the case of his brother, Philip) is the way in which priesthood and citizenship complement each other. Throughout all his political activities, and especially at Catonsville, Berrigan clearly saw himself as both a Jesuit priest and an American citizen. He never felt he was betraying either. That precise fact at once placed him in opposition to both Church and State. Therein may lie Berrigan's authenticity as a voice for his times.

### 1. The Priest as Prophet and Exorcist

In their "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests", the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council were keenly aware of the changing role of the priest in the midst of changing times. While they failed (perhaps for wise reasons) to address themselves specifically to the question of the priest's relationship to the political order, the Council Fathers struck a note of openness when they stated the following:

The world which is entrusted today to the loving ministry of the pastors of the Church is that world which God so loved that He gave His only Son for it. The truth is that though entangled indeed in many sins this world is also endowed with many talents and provides the Church with the living stones to be built up into the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Impelling the Church to open new avenues of approach to the world of today, this same Holy Spirit is suggesting and fostering fitting adaptations in the ministry of priests.<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Berrigan, as with most American clerics of the 1960s, was also intensely aware of the changing dimensions of the ministry. But it was not just the ministry as such. It was his priesthood, his vocation which called for an exploration of new ways of being and believing. The "fitting adaptations" were as deeply personal as they were bold and high in colour. In a poem appropriately entitled

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<sup>1</sup>Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., The Documents of Vatican II (New York: The America Press, 1966), p. 575.

"We Are in Love, the Celibates Gravely Say", Berrigan, using the image of Christ's twelve apostles, reflected on the meaning of the priesthood today. His last lines are especially revealing.

The hold Christ up  
like twelve earnest athletes at a trampoline, but  
if I go, I return He says  
skilled in gravity

His continuing declension  
like dew or fiery napalm

or the seeding of streams with trout eggs.  
The twelve earnest orantes hold their hands

safe as stone up to the absent One  
which He presently strikes, forces and fills --  
world, and world's beauty.<sup>2</sup>

Berrigan understood his priesthood in terms of "the world". This was not, however, simply a question of worldly involvement. It went much deeper. To be a priest entailed a certain presence -- a sign that, in spite of all the chaos and madness which is manifest around us, there still exists that space wherein sanity is recovered. Berrigan's priesthood was founded on spiritual strength. It was as much a part of his identity as was his passion for social justice. As a close friend of his writes: "Yet Dan's priesthood was an unshedable fact, as if there were a cathedral dimension to him, a mysterious projection of

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<sup>2</sup>Daniel Berrigan, Selected and New Poems (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973), p. 110. Emphases mine.

there being -- in himself -- a large, safe, candlelit place, a kind of border station between our own routinized Flatland and the bottomless but gravity-held universe".<sup>3</sup>

Being a Jesuit was, of course, especially important to Berrigan. He often took pride in being part of a community whose history was one marked by loyal discipline and great intellectual achievements, as well as by a certain tinge of rebellion. While he was "underground", he wrote to his fellow Jesuits: "I wish to send a word of love to the brethren, who have been for these thirty years my bloodline, my family, my embodied tradition and conscience".<sup>4</sup> Even though the Jesuits themselves were often ambivalent towards their fugitive brother, Berrigan never abandoned them. The need for a sense of community -- a shared identity and tradition -- was simply too strong.

It has been argued by a number of Christian thinkers and activists that Daniel Berrigan is a priest as a priest should be, and originally was.<sup>5</sup> In a perceptive article,

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<sup>3</sup>James H. Forest, "Daniel Berrigan: The Poet and Prophet as Priest", in Witness of the Berrigans, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup>This is brought out in several of the articles contained in Witness of the Berrigans, Stephen Halpert and Tom Murray, eds.



John C. Raines, Methodist minister, writes of both Daniel and Philip Berrigan:

For the activity of the Berrigans is best understood as fundamentally priestly activity. They are attempting to regain an ancient heritage and power: to become practitioners of the healing of souls. They have sensed the demons at loose in the spiritual depths of modern man and society -- the onslaught of absurdity and death. And they have undertaken to recapture the original priestly task and calling -- the struggle of exorcism and liberation. Moreover, they have understood and accepted the traditional price that is demanded of those who would place themselves in the path of the powers of the demonic, of the great Destroying: with inevitably inadequate and failing weapons, to invoke a rebirth of the power of life over death in a time when the spirit may not respond but only disappoint.<sup>6</sup>

In another article from the same collection, Jesuit R. J. Clifford states:

When the biblical prophet speaks, it is not to convince people of the correctness of his position with overpowering arguments. He is a spokesman for God, and God's message can only be received in faith. The prophet therefore does not compel. He invites each person to see himself, his world, and his God in a fresh way.

In deciding whether the Berrigans are truly prophetic, the sensitive Christian need not expect to agree with them in every point. A prophet, after all, is not the whole Church. His message may come out only after dialogue, often painful and even violent, with the whole

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<sup>6</sup> John C. Raines, "The Followers of Life", in Holy Cross Quarterly, IV, no. 1 (January 1971), 69.

Church.

Nor is agreement or disagreement with his message all that a prophet should ask of us. We are to face the same issues he faces, and question ourselves seriously about them. For example, the Fathers Berrigan have forced us to see the war in Vietnam not merely as a foreign policy problem, but as an ethical dilemma that involves each man's conscience. As obvious as the previous sentence sounds, how often do we hear and read that each citizen has a moral responsibility in his country's policies?<sup>7</sup>

Exorcism and prophecy. Healing and confrontation with conscience. These "ancient powers" seem to be central to Daniel Berrigan's own understanding of his priestly ministry. As was discussed previously, Berrigan argues that the classic struggle between life and death, light and darkness, good and evil lies at the very heart of modern America's critical state, as made amply evident through the Vietnam War. This theme of an eternal and almost cosmic struggle between two opposing forces has recurred throughout the history of Western thought -- due, in a certain measure, to the influence of a distinctively dualistic Christian "ethos". While Berrigan clearly rejects such a dualism at the level of concrete political action, he still retains a view of the world -- and of man's own

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<sup>7</sup>Richard J. Clifford, S.J., "The Berrigans: Prophetic?", in Holy Cross Quarterly, 16 and 18.

soul -- as a moral battlefield. Else, why the overpowering image of "the Beast" and the strong apocalyptic language?<sup>8</sup>

It is within this perspective of moral struggle that one must analyze Berrigan's priestly ministry of healing and exorcism. Evil is no abstraction for Berrigan. It is, on the contrary, a very real and powerful force -- a living force. It is not important whether one chooses to personify this evil in terms of the Devil or some such being. The crucial thing is that one acknowledge its corruptible and all-permeating presence, and that one then set about to confront it. Berrigan constantly insists on the need to be "concrete" about evil -- concrete about war, violence and death. These are realities, not abstractions. Only in seeing evil as it is can one repel it and allow the healing process to occur. This is the original meaning of the priestly function of exorcist. But as in all direct confrontations with evil, a heavy personal price is often exacted: insecurity, doubt, fear and the vivid sense of somehow being left wasted and soiled.

The great sinfulness  
of modern war is  
that it renders concrete things abstract<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Refer to Chapter I, Sections 1 and 2 of this thesis.

<sup>9</sup>Daniel Berrigan, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine,  
p. 82.

And in a passage from Berrigan's prison diary:

Hounding us to death; we can only oppose the calm will which is based on faith, on a burning sense of the wrong wreaked by war and war makers, on our willingness to suffer everything they are pleased to heap on us. In effect, by showing the superiority of isolated moral courage to the vast papier-mâché strength of the armed pack. This necessarily brings one face to face with death and its analogates -- not in some intangible or mystical or painless way, but by the literal loss of everything one had presumed as his own. It is necessary to create the future by paying tribute to its coming, to its presence. As though it indeed exerted the pressure on our choices of its nearness, its voice, its call to a new style and way.<sup>10</sup>

Berrigan firmly believes in the final demise of evil. He is intensely hopeful about the advent of both "a new style and way" and "a new man" -- a man delivered, cleansed and healed. It is the Christian's responsibility to lend a hand in this task. The Christian, speaking from within the world, can witness to both present and future. His presence is a prophetic one -- which means he sometimes stands in opposition. Thus does Berrigan also perceive the prophetic dimension of his own ministry as priest.

Believers who take their stand in the world at the same time reserve the right to quarrel with, modify, or even disclaim the world's reasons for its own fidelity. Only such a

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<sup>10</sup>Daniel Berrigan, Lights on in the House of the Dead, p. 135.

stance, that of love of our times and fidelity to faith, can lend us the qualifications for responsible action.

The world's need of Christians could perhaps be defined as a need for spiritual presence and a need for prophecy. The prophecy required of us is one that has undergone the experience of the world and hence can speak out of knowledge and compassion rather than from safety or distance. And the Christian presence must also be carefully understood; it is a presence filled with spirit rather than merely another technique among techniques; it is a sense of man, in fact, which admits to a breakthrough from without.<sup>11</sup>

Daniel Berrigan is, in deference to all else, very much of a political realist. One does not heal man or witness to the future without at the same time making a choice about the present order of things. As Berrigan himself quotes from Bonhoeffer: "The task is not only to bind up the victims beneath the wheel, but also to put a spoke in that wheel".<sup>12</sup> How, then, does this priest-poet define his own political allegiances?

## 2. The Locus of Power: Caesar or God?

In February 1965, Daniel Berrigan, along with other "prominent" civil and church leaders, affixed his name to one of a series of "declarations of conscience" which were

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Berrigan, They Call Us Dead Men, p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> From "The Passion of Dietrich Bonhoeffer", in Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 39.

so widespread in the mid-1960s.<sup>13</sup> Its intent was to encourage non-violent resistance to all military efforts for the Vietnam War -- specifically, through resistance to the draft. This was several years before Catonsville. Berrigan explained his action in these words:

So the question of where believers stand in war-time is of crucial moment, as it could never be in normal times. For in time of war, another god declares himself. His name is total war. He is determined to claim all men and everything that is in man. He claims conscience, consciousness, and community; he claims life and limb. He will have the world devastated, in the image of his own chaos and fury; the destruction of man is his universal and unassailable will.

For those who choose to reject this monstrous idol, there is small space in this world. Total war excommunicates the man of peace. It casts him out of his community, out of the human family, out of his future. It offers him a life of shame and, perhaps, death in disgrace.

Men of maturity and conscience are obliged to judge the actions of their society and to speak up. And where it is necessary, they are obliged to pay the price of their speech, to put their bodies where their words are, to stand in peaceable conflict with the powers of the state.

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<sup>13</sup>This particular "declaration" seems to have been forgotten by historians of the 1960s. Berrigan himself apparently never makes mention of it. The incident is recalled by James H. Forest in his article, "Daniel Berrigan: The Poet and Prophet as Priest", in Witness of the Berrigans.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

Berrigan's keen sense of political realities, while often translated into flowing poetic images, bears the mark of critical insight. As much as he abhorred war and violence from the perspective of moral passion, he was still able to view them with the cool eye of an alert observer. In fact, Berrigan's passion and emotional involvement rest on his ability to dissect and fully understand an issue. With particular reference to the Vietnam War, it is important to note that he hesitated at some length before committing himself to public protest. Moral issues were never, at the outset, black or white for Berrigan; they became so. His protest was never empty, or subject to the winds of passing social outrage. When Berrigan cried out against continued American involvement in Vietnam, he was able to do so with an authoritative voice and a certain moral authenticity. He had carefully considered the political issues involved before joining what many saw as "the bandwagon" of protest. Thus was he able to write about his trip to North Vietnam in February 1968: "In order to make peace, at least a few Americans had to share, at least in some measure, the life and hard times of Hanoi; the terror, the death from the air. . . . He would have to know death firsthand . . . the end of

rhetoric . . . .<sup>15</sup> The significant difference, of course, between Daniel Berrigan and other opponents of the Vietnam War is that Berrigan passed from rhetoric to personal risk.

In his opposition to the war, Berrigan was far from naive about the power dimensions of politics. As is made clear in an earlier reference, he acknowledges that "total war" claims everything: its power being absolute. We have already seen how the Catonsville Nine regarded the Vietnam War as a blatant expression of American imperialism, a show of American military power. Berrigan further condemns the State -- "the Beast", in his own words -- for manipulating power in order to wreak havoc and further its own ends. To a large extent, Berrigan mistrusts any exercise of political power. One can discern here a certain flirtation with anarchism. This becomes an inherent difficulty whenever the individual conscience is raised to the level of "an absolute". It is true that Berrigan still reserves his severest judgement for those who compromise their own

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel Berrigan, Night Flight to Hanoi, p. xiii. In January 1968, Daniel Berrigan and Professor Howard Zinn were invited to Hanoi by the North Vietnamese government to bring three captive American airmen back to the United States. This experience marks a watershed in Berrigan's "radicalization" about the war. Four months later, he stood at Catonsville.



moral principles through subservience to political powers. "Redeem the times! The times are inexpressibly evil. Christians pay conscious -- indeed, religious -- tribute to Caesar and Mars; by approval of overkill tactics, by brinkmanship, by nuclear liturgies, by racism, by support of genocide".<sup>16</sup>

As wary as he is of power in the hands of government, Berrigan does not hesitate to recommend concrete political actions to those who would resist such power. Therein lies his political realism, for he does not underestimate Caesar. While Berrigan affirms man as a political being, he refuses to define politics in the same terms as the official powerholder. Something far deeper is involved.

A hard question arises -- when does opposition to unjust law become the measure of a human, and therefore, moral, and political duty? It seems to us that the time for resistance has come, as surely as your lives and ours have been threatened by senseless obedience to senseless laws. It seems to us that communities must control Selective Service (by putting them out of business); they must encourage and harbor military deserters; they must refuse taxes that are war-related; they must even think of destroying war ordnance and horror weapons, taking every precaution in so doing, to protect human life. Finally, they must strive to bring the business of this nation to a halt, since nothing educates the mandarins like seeing their profits jeopardized. In a word, one must build the peace by first striking at the causes of war and rendering them powerless.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. xviii and xix.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 106.

It is interesting to note how Berrigan underlines the importance of conflict in bringing about a state of peace. Power confronts power.<sup>18</sup>

Not only does Berrigan express outrage about what the American political elite is perpetuating in Vietnam; he also condemns his own church for its moral complicity. By refusing to speak out against the war, the American Catholic Church (along with other Christian churches) lends its tacit support to the military effort. Berrigan asks: "Indeed was not the Catholic Church . . . the greatest single supportive force of the Vietnam War, outside the government itself? Indeed yes".<sup>19</sup> And of American Catholics, he writes:

The American church is in a worse moral position before history than was the German church under Hitler. For German Catholics, access to information on the Jewish question was extremely hard

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<sup>18</sup>The need for a state of conflict has always been emphasized by those who seek to bring about some sort of lasting social change. Witness Gandhi, Martin Luther King and also, Lenin and Camilo Torres. The ultimate question, of course, is whether violence is necessary in the process. Most individual "revolutionaries" throughout history fall on either side of the question. Berrigan himself opts for total non-violence. As was quoted from Thomas Merton earlier: "Conflict will never be abolished but a new way of solving it can become habitual".

<sup>19</sup>Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 51.

to come by; today, the truth about Vietnam is out. Then, protest was forbidden under the heaviest penalties; today penalties, even for conscientious lawbreakers, are comparatively slight.

In the baleful light of the deaths of whole peoples, deliberately and repeatedly inflicted, our neglect of the moral questions raised by wars, our petty concerns about religious renewal, seem to me a blinding form of self-deception: good housekeeping in a plague-tormented city.<sup>20</sup>

The American Catholic Church, at least on the Vietnam question, stands morally bankrupt according to Berrigan.

In this connection, Berrigan offers a perception of religion and of religious activity which is striking in its emphasis on both as catalysts for change. Religion is of course accepted as a significant and meaningful human activity by which man enters in dialogue with his social world. In this very act of dialogue, man stands in opposition; he seeks to re-appropriate and humanize his relationships with his brothers. From the Christian perspective, this is none other than the initial fact and process of redemption. Its logic and impetus are grounded in a painful awareness of the dichotomy between moral exigencies and the limitations and contradictions of the humanly-created social world. Religion thus stands on the threshold between what man actually is and what he could or rather, should be. Berrigan says of religion as a critical

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

agent:

Our sin is to parrot the state by our murderous treatment of one another, or to cherish like a death wish, a cancer in the bowels, our return to the "normalcy" of the state -- which is to say, the society in which murder is the daily round of activity.

If religion is to be a leavening power, it is up to us to be religious -- i.e., to give immediate palpable evidence that (1) we come here in conflict with the state, and (2) we so live here that the state suffers defeat at our hands -- even though it is "winning" elsewhere, in its ordinary body counts.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, Christian faith is " . . . an invitation to walk toward humanness, freedom, contemplation, responsible action in the world. An act of faith that is lived, as it was first lived by the one who issued the invitation".<sup>22</sup>

It would seem natural for Berrigan to experience at times some element of friction between his own calling as priest and his obligations as citizen. Doubt is, after all, almost innate to human choice. And when the choice holds certain public ramifications, the doubt can be quite acute. On the one hand, there is Berrigan, still very much a Jesuit, opting for a radical social ministry. On the

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Berrigan, Lights on in the House of the Dead, pp. 27 and 28.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

other stands Berrigan the contemplative: an angry man with the touch of a poet. A portrait of contrasts? Perhaps so. Yet seldom does Berrigan ever express severe doubts about his political doings. No chasm exists between the religious man and the political man; each complements the other. The only anxiety (and to a lesser extent, bitterness) surfaces during his time in prison: "I am in the mental condition day after day of one who is living with a dying relative or friend, one in terminal illness. The illness is my own, it is the atmosphere, infected with hopelessness, illusions, the last days of a dying mind".<sup>23</sup> Another injury of the war perhaps.

Berrigan locates power in God, not Caesar. His appeal is clear: Do not render unto Caesar, for Caesar has usurped God -- and in so doing, has claimed our lives. Better to heed conscience and confront absolute, false power with refusal. "If Caesar would make of the nation an abattoir, we refuse to be his executioners, his tourists, his do-gooders, his freeloaders. As Jesuits we will disrupt the business of death as usual . . .".<sup>24</sup> The priest

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>24</sup>Daniel Berrigan, America is Hard to Find, p. 131.

and the citizen speak as one. One cannot justify a dual allegiance.

### 3. Citizenship and Moral Witness

At the Catonsville trial, Berrigan was quite explicit about the relationship between his religious beliefs and his political convictions: He declared in no uncertain terms:

May I say  
if my religious belief is not accepted  
as a substantial part of my action  
then the action is eviscerated  
of all meaning and I should be  
committed for insanity<sup>25</sup>

Words could not be more forthright.

It is abundantly clear that this relationship is vital to Berrigan's own sense of personal identity. His resistance, as marginal as it may have been in its actual impact on American official policy, stemmed from a very real personal concern for the moral questions of human life and freedom. The resistance was as deeply religious as it was intensely political. And it was certainly timely. Therein lies the key to appreciating the man's relevance for his times. Daniel Berrigan was able to articulate,

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Berrigan, The Trial of the Catonsville Nine, p. 83.

in bold, quasi-universal terms, the moral dilemmas about Vietnam which the majority of Americans could only suspect. His boldness was made public at Catonsville. Berrigan, reaffirmed the meaning of citizenship as a conscious choice: a right which also implied the responsibility to "go against", whenever public policy violated basic human values. It was a remarkably traditional understanding of political duty. The distinguishing element centres on Berrigan's call for resistance as a permanent way of life, and his reconciliation of such a state with the spirit of the Christian message. It is here that the critics raise their voice.

In a typically polemical article, Father Andrew Greeley, Catholic sociologist and pop theologian, makes the following criticism of Daniel Berrigan's political thinking:

There isn't much doubt from the various press conferences Father Berrigan participated in, before the FBI finally hunted him down that he denies the legitimacy of American society and is calling for its destruction. He does not yet advocate violence though there certainly is a progression in his thought in that direction. But the logic leading towards violence in Berrigan's thinking is inevitable.

Father Berrigan and his "liberal" supporters are apparently quite incapable of grasping the distinction between a society which may do evil things and a society which is basically evil and corrupt. Their failure to grasp such a

distinction makes them poor political leaders and, I fear, very dangerous prophets.<sup>26</sup>

While Greeley is a reputed opponent of Berrigan, and as such can be somewhat sweeping and dogmatic in his criticism, his observations do contain a certain amount of seriousness. Greeley highlights a very real danger inherent to any form of political activity founded on absolute moral claims: the distinct possibility of protest giving way to moral coercion and even, moral terrorism.

There are three fundamental problems with Daniel Berrigan's political stance. First, a very fine line exists between active resistance and the initial stages of overt violence. By evading punishment for acts committed, Berrigan pushes non-violence to the breaking point. Second, the Christian gospel can never be transformed into a political creed. While Berrigan certainly does not engage in this sort of facile exercise, he at times comes close to stretching biblical language to suit a given political reality. One can detect a note of accommodation in his scriptural analysis. Third, a sense of moral or ethical righteousness is empty without the willingness to constantly re-evaluate one's own position. It can be argued that Berrigan's judgement of the "evils" of modern America

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<sup>26</sup>Andrew M. Greeley, "The Berrigans: Phrenetic?", in Holy Cross Quarterly, IV, no. 1 (January 1971), 17 and 19.



may have been absolute to the point of being almost ineffectual.

Berrigan constantly emphasizes the non-violent character of the Christian's political life. Time and again, violence is rejected as a means of initiating social change; violence is immoral. One need not doubt the sincerity of Berrigan's convictions on this matter. What is problematic, however, is his failure to recognize how easily a form of resistance which does not acknowledge some legitimate political power can give way to political violence. The essence of non-violence is conversion: effecting a change of heart in one's opponent. The opponent is never seen as an impersonal force. The opponent is always approached and confronted as a person.

While laying claim to the pure non-violent tradition of Gandhi, Berrigan refuses to operate within the constraints of an established political authority -- in his case, the American State apparatus. Thus he went "underground" after Catonsville rather than stand trial. Such an action is clearly inconsistent with the entire historical tradition of non-violence and to a lesser extent, civil disobedience.<sup>27</sup> This inconsistency represents a lacuna in Berrigan's political thinking. It may well be

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<sup>27</sup> Refer to Chapter II, Sections 1 and 2 of this thesis for some discussion of Berrigan's political method.

that, on closer look, Berrigan is much more of an anarchist than he is a Christian pacifist in the traditional sense. And anarchy can always make room for violence, however limited in scope such violence may be. Would Berrigan have moved towards some form of violence had the Vietnam War been prolonged? The question remains unsettling, and the answer quite uncertain.

In his rejection of violence as a legitimate political method, Berrigan places great importance on resistance as a means of truly living out the message of the gospels. His writings are replete with scriptural images and allusions. He speaks of redemption and apocalypse; of "the Beast" and evil; of community and remnant. Berrigan's reading of scripture is undeniably radical and explicitly political. While there can be no doubt that the teachings of Christ concern politics insofar as this is a prominent sphere of human activity, one must be cautious about any form of personal hermeneutics which would associate the gospel with a political cause. Christianity, by its very essence, clearly rejects any notion of "finality" or "permanency" when it comes to the man-made social order. As intensely historical as it is, Christianity still looks beyond man for true vindication of the historical process. In a word, the gospel has a lot to say about the relationships (political or otherwise) between persons -- but nothing at all about political

ideologies in the strict sense of the word. Therein lies its timeless quality.

This, of course, does not mean that Berrigan plunges into a dogmatic or ideological review of scripture. His political concerns are perfectly consistent with gospel material. The problematic aspect stems from a failure on his part to again recognize the inherent limitations of his own analysis. It may well be that the Apocalypse is not entirely suited to an understanding of the America of the 1960s. Nor that the American State machinery is primeval Evil personified. The gospel, while certainly contemporary in its impact, goes beyond.

As with most critiques of a given social or political order, Berrigan's analysis is marked by a rigorous spirit of protest. He systematically calls into question some of the important foundations of American life: technology, military know-how, patriotism and obedience to law. In itself, this is neither novel nor unusual. What Berrigan certainly does is base his critique on some remarkably clear and absolute moral/ethical claims which are religious in their inspiration. In his judgements, Berrigan can be quite severe. The disquieting element rests in the need which he felt to condemn to the point of rendering his very valid critique almost inapplicable, if not unapt.

Berrigan is fond of drawing parallels between the mood of 1960s' America and that of Nazi Germany. But as any historian or social thinker will note, the parallels can only go so far. It is one thing to live under an absolute fascist regime; quite another to move in a political system which still allows, at least as a norm, certain fundamental freedoms. Political realities are different; political analyses should also be. This is by no means a question of singing the praises of democracy. The American presence in Vietnam was indeed wrong and immoral -- evil, in Berrigan's language. The question: to what extent was this evil, in fact, innate to the American social fabric? Even Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who went further than Berrigan in his protest, was more discerning in his critique.

The above does not constitute, in any way, a denunciation of Berrigan's writings or his work. Its purpose is to point out some problematic areas in the man's political thinking. Berrigan remains a very passionate and courageous Christian, and his appeal merits serious consideration. One certainly cannot accuse him of sitting on the sidelines while the world marches on madly. "Merely to exist is to be in danger of parasitism." Not everyone will agree that Berrigan's words or his acts are virtuous, but it seems unlikely that he will be judged as lukewarm. . . For Berrigan, sucking the world is sinful,

feeding it is virtuous".<sup>28</sup> And good citizenship is precisely this: feeding the world by standing as moral witness to something decent and human. If nothing else, Daniel Berrigan dares at least to ask the questions. Very few Christians are even willing to take that first step.

What then is the final meaning and worth of all that Daniel Berrigan stands for? Perhaps simply this:

The question that is woven in and through everything he has said and done, the question still posed, is an invitation to leave the bleachers, to pull away from the electric-lit television screen, to bury our fears of living an uninsured, non-government-inspected life. As he wrote in the meditation for Catonsville:

When, at what point, will you say No to this war?<sup>29</sup>

Or in the outlaw's own words:

Want nothing small about men -- except perhaps their words, modest and thoughtful and almost inaudible before their deeds. For the rest, bigness; heart, brain. Imagination too; let it take the world in two hands and show us what it's like to BE! Tell us about it, we're hungry. Doesn't the Bible call truth BREAD? We're starved, our smile has lost out, we crawl on a thin margin -- a life, maybe, but so what? Where's the man who says yes, says no, like a thunderclap? Where's the man whose

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<sup>28</sup>Harry J. Cargas, Daniel Berrigan and Contemporary Protest Poetry, p. 105.

<sup>29</sup>James H. Forest, "Daniel Berrigan: The Poet and Prophet as Priest", in Witness of the Berrigans, p. 110.

no turns to yes in his mouth -- he can't deny  
life, he asks like a new flower or a new day  
or a hero even; What more is there to love  
than I have loved?<sup>30</sup>

Seldom has man been more human. . . Seldom has  
Christian been more life-affirming.

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel Berrigan, Love, Love at the End  
(New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1968), p. 114.

## CONCLUSION

Max Weber, sociologist and prophet in his own right, writes the following on the nature of charismatic authority:

Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint. The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent. If they recognize him, he is their master -- so long as he knows how to maintain recognition through 'proving' himself. But he does not derive his 'right' from their will, in the manner of an election. Rather, the reverse holds: it is the duty of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.<sup>1</sup>

To many committed Christians and non-Christians alike, Daniel Berrigan was, and remains, a charismatic figure. Historically, the political confrontation which he and eight others orchestrated at Catonsville has assumed a significant place in American social annals of the 1960s. Daniel Berrigan himself has even attained, in some circles, the stature of archetype -- of a living legend. There can be no doubt that the Sixties, as for

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<sup>1</sup>H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 246-247.

every age, needed its heroes. And charisma, whether attributed to oneself or projected by others, is an integral part of the phenomenon of heroism. But as Max Weber warns, charisma carries its own legitimacy: a legitimacy which cannot be fully demonstrated or proven. And when the charismatic figure expounds certain ethical or moral standards, such legitimacy becomes especially fragile.

It is essential that "the ethical actor", as in the case of Berrigan, possess a large measure of certainty, and even rectitude at times, if his "act" is to carry any significance. A judgement, especially a moral one, is always founded upon a certain definiteness about the matter at hand. As was discussed in the preceding pages, Daniel Berrigan's ethical claim for his action at Catonsville reveals a reading of the Christian gospel which is both judgemental and crisis-oriented. When Daniel Berrigan read the signs of the times,<sup>2</sup> he discerned a "state of siege" of clear moral proportions. In the context of American society in the 1960s, such a perception holds true to a large extent. This perception was, however, so inter-locked with the Vietnam War that it could only be relevant insofar as the War itself remained a relevant

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<sup>2</sup>"Signs of the times" is a phrase found in Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World".



political issue. Daniel Berrigan's moral judgement was an absolute one; Vietnam passed on.

It is perhaps more appropriate to describe Berrigan as a folk hero rather than as a charismatic figure in the strict Weberian sense. Weber, when speaking of charismatic authority, refers to a unique mixture of boldness and vision which is best exemplified by the great leaders of world religions. There is, for the truly charismatic person, a vital sense of "being called" to a mission often obscure in its very nature. The folk hero, on the other hand, can be said to derive his purpose or mission from a specific historical event or series of events. Thus we see Daniel Berrigan at Catonsville in the context of American social and political history of the 1960s. Charisma is seldom innate to the folk hero; it is more often a characteristic attributed to him by others. But charisma there still is, and it must somehow be given an aura of "respectability" -- indeed, a certain relevance.

How relevant, in fact, was Berrigan's "ethical act" at Catonsville? Catonsville, and all that resulted from it, was what made a folk hero out of Daniel Berrigan.

Catonsville was ethical in that it was a moral statement about human life and human responsibility. And it was most certainly a political act, an openly defiant one. But the relevance of Catonsville, and of Berrigan's own

charismatic attraction, was essentially a function of the mood of the times. The destruction of Selective Service files at Catonsville denied State power, in the context of its immoral use, i.e., the "sacrificing" of human lives in Vietnam. Under different circumstances, such destruction would amount to little more than a trivial act. And it is only because of the existence of some larger "movement" of protest and resistance in the Sixties that Catonsville and Berrigan himself assume a certain measure of political sense.

Daniel Berrigan's only failure, if one can call it so, is that he was surpassed by the sheer force of historical events. Thus one could also write the epitaph of the Sixties. The legacy remains nonetheless. For what is history, after all, but an inheritance.

In his essay "Politics as a Vocation", Weber distinguishes between what he refers to as "an ethic of ultimate ends" and "an ethic of responsibility". He states:

We must be clear about the fact that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an 'ethic of ultimate ends' or to an 'ethic of responsibility.' This is not to say that an ethic of ultimate ends is identical with irresponsibility, or that an ethic of responsibility is identical with unprincipled opportunism. Naturally nobody says that. However, there is an abysmal contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of ultimate ends -- that is, in religious

terms, 'The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord' -- and conduct that follows the maxim of an ethic of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one's action.<sup>3</sup>

This important methodological distinction bears a special relevance to the preceding discussion of Daniel Berrigan's action at Catonsville. Indeed, one can draw some significant conclusions in the light of Weber's model of ethical behaviour.

It has been argued in this thesis that Daniel Berrigan, in his political activity (specifically at Catonsville), attempted to resolve the tension which often exists between political responsibility and religious commitment and belief. But his ethics could certainly be characterized by what Weber calls "a New Testament Ethic", i.e., an ethic of ultimate ends. There is, in Berrigan's thought, very little concrete or immediate concern with "the ends" of political activity. In other words, his action at Catonsville was not performed in terms of the real or actual impact which such action would have on the political system. It was not concerned with a particular political end or result in a comprehensive way (raising the consciousness of the people is not an end in the sense

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<sup>3</sup>"Politics as a Vocation", in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, ed., op. cit., p. 120.

of a "rational" -- in Weberian terminology -- instrumental activity), but with a political means or style: moral conduct. It is this element of "morality" which, because it permeates all of Berrigan's thinking, places him on the side of those whose political calling or involvement is defined in terms of ultimate ends. In many respects, and as Weber indicates, such a definition is characteristic of a religious frame of mind.

Weber acknowledges that an invariable conflict exists in the political sphere (or any area of human conduct) between activity guided by an ethic of ultimate ends and one motivated by an ethic of responsibility. This raises the question: Can the religious prophet (as in the case of Berrigan) also be a true political actor, one who views politics as a legitimate human enterprise with its own constraints? I would suggest that the answer is yes, but that there comes a definite breaking point. In a word, the basic tension is never fully resolved. Perhaps the breaking point, at least for Berrigan, is that which Weber highlights: the inescapable and very real dimension of power and violence in politics. An ethic of ultimate ends, when confronted with this reality (as it must be), either turns to nihilism or reverts to mere symbolic statements and gestures, however moral and condemning these be.

The above can perhaps be more clearly expressed, with reference to the subject at hand, in the following manner: Berrigan had little appreciation for the painful political dilemmas surrounding the realities of the Vietnam War. Not being a power-holder, he did not have to answer for the results or outcomes of his political stance. His resistance, however much one may consider it justified, could only remain at the level of an example, a source of political and religious inspiration. In a particularly relevant passage from his essay, Weber makes such an observation. "The believer in an ethic of ultimate ends feels 'responsible' only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not quenched: for example, the flame of protesting against the injustice of the social order. To rekindle the flame ever anew is the purpose of his quite irrational deeds, judged in view of their possible success. They are acts that can and shall have only exemplary value".<sup>4</sup> Daniel Berrigan's political act at Catonsville was, and remains, valuable. Certainly Weber would not deny this. For it is example which often sparks the imaginations of men, and it is the decision to act which redeems them.

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<sup>4</sup> "Politics as a Vocation", op. cit.; p. 121.

## APPENDIX

### "The Catonsville Statement"

Today, May 17, 1968, we enter Local Board No. 33 at Catonsville, Md., to seize the Selective Service records and burn them outside with napalm manufactured by ourselves from a recipe in the Special Forces Handbook, published by the U.S. government.

We, American citizens, have worked with the Poor in the ghetto and abroad. In the course of our Christian ministry we have watched our country produce more victims than an army of us could console or restore. Two of us face immediate sentencing for similar acts against Selective Service. All of us identify with the victims of American oppression all over the world. We submit voluntarily to their involuntary fate.

We use napalm on these draft records because napalm has burned people to death in Vietnam, Guatemala and Peru; and because it may be used on America's ghettos. We destroy these draft records not only because they exploit our young men, but because those records represent misplaced power, concentrated in the ruling class of America. Their power threatens the peace of the world and is aloof of public dissent and parliamentary process. The draft reduces

young men to cost efficiency items. The rulers of America want their global wars fought as cheaply as possible.

Above all, our protest attempts to illustrate why our country is torn at home and is harassed abroad by enemies of its own creation. America has become an empire and history's richest nation. Representing only 6 per cent of the world's people, America controls half of the world's productive wealth and 60 per cent of its finance. The U.S. holds North and South America in an economic vise. In 10 years' time American industry in Europe will be the third greatest industrial power in the world, with only the United States and the Soviet Union being larger. U.S. foreign profits run substantially higher than domestic profits so industry flees abroad under government patronage and the protection of the CIA, military counter insurgency and conflict-management teams.

The military supports the economic system by joining with the business and political sectors to form the triumvirate of power in this technocratic empire. With our annual budget of \$80 billion plus, the military now controls over half of the federal property in the world (53 per cent or \$183 billion). U.S. overkill capacity and conventional weaponry exceeds that of the military might of the entire world.

Peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese have begun in Paris. Along with other Americans we hope a settlement will be reached, thus sparing the Vietnamese a useless prolongation of their suffering. However, this alone will not solve America's problems. The Vietnam War could end tomorrow and yet leave the quality of society and America's role in the world virtually unchanged. Thailand, Laos and the Dominican Republic have already been Vietnams. Guatemala, the Canal Zone, Bolivia and Peru could be Vietnams overnight. Meanwhile, the colonies at home rise in rage and destructiveness. The black people of America have concluded that after 360 years, their acceptance as human beings is long overdue.

Injustice is the great catalyst of revolution. A nation that found life through revolution has now become the world's number one counterrevolutionary force, not because American people would have it that way, but because the rich choose to defend their power and wealth. The masters of the trusts and corporate giants, along with their representatives in Washington, must learn the hard lessons of justice, or our country may be swept away and humanity with it.

We believe some property has no right to exist. Hitler's gas ovens, Stalin's concentration camps, atomic-bacteriological-chemical weaponry, files of conscription,



and slum properties are examples having no right to existence. While people starve for bread and lack decent housing, the rich debase themselves with comfort paid for by the misery of the poor.

We are Catholic Christians who take the Gospel of our Faith seriously. We hail the recent papal encyclical, The Development of Peoples. Quotes such as the following give us hope:

- #23: "No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities."
- #31: "A revolutionary uprising -- save where there is open, manifest and long standing tyranny which does great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country -- produces new injustices, throws more elements out of balance and brings on new disasters."
- #32: "We want to be clearly understood: the present situation must be faced with courage, and the injustices linked with it must be fought against and overcome. Development demands bold transformations, innovations that go deep. Urgent reforms should be undertaken without delay. It is for each one to take his share in them with generosity, particularly those whose education, position and opportunities afford them wide scope of action."
- #47: "It is a question of building a world where every man, no matter what his race, religion or nationality, can live a fully human life, freed from slavery imposed on him by other men or by natural forces: a world where the poor man Lazarus can sit down at the same table with the rich man."

#80: "The hour for action has now sounded. At stake are the survival of so many innocent children and for so many families overcome by misery, the access to conditions fit for human beings; at stake are the peace of the world and the future of civilization."

At the same time, we confront the Catholic Church, other Christian bodies and the synagogues of America with their silence and cowardice in face of our country's crimes. We are convinced that the religious bureaucracy in this country is racist, is an accomplice in war and is hostile to the poor. In utter fidelity to our faith, we indict the religious leaders and their followers for their failure to serve our country and mankind.

Finally, we are appalled by the ruse of the American ruling class invoking the cry for "Law and Order" to mask and perpetuate injustice. Let our President and the pillars of society speak of "Law and Justice," and back up their words with deeds and there will be "Order." We have pleaded, spoken, marched and nursed the victims of their injustice. Now this injustice must be faced, and this we intend to do, with whatever strength of mind, body and grace that God will give us. May God have mercy on our nation.

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