

many people as possible, and to set up schools for survival. Fr. Berrigan is right, though. It is not going to come easy.

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Dear Sir: . . . As an historian, I understand that the poet frequently discerns the conditions and flow of history more accurately than the historian, let alone the political scientist or economist. I differ with Daniel Berrigan not as an historian, but because of different background experiences, both historical and theological. I hope that as we all describe those facets of reality that we see most clearly, we may obtain a better picture of the whole and a better chance to act realistically.

I cannot agree that our options are defined by or limited to the choice of going either to war or to jail (or to live in their shadow)—I have been living in the shadow of both for too long. Perhaps I see more options because I am *not* going through the “personal trauma” of the “dawning realization that practically nothing of traditionally civilized structures is functioning for human welfare.”

I went through that realization as a teenager decades ago in the Europe before W. W. II. Even then, John Steinbeck and Ortega y Gasset helped us see that this inability to function for human welfare was almost as true (in a different way and for different reasons) of American materialistic consumption-oriented structures as it was of Communist and Fascist totalitarianism. Yet I am a U.S. citizen by deliberate choice, and I see some chance of recapturing the values of the founding fathers. Perhaps my Lutheran perspectives helped me not to be surprised by the inherent evil in the structures, as it is now helping me to see remaining potential for good, for a chance to make them respond to the needs of human welfare, as well as utilizing the cracks that appear for leverage.

As a result, I see other things that are “useful” besides civil disobedience. . . . I judge political tactics as much by their “usefulness” as symbols of conviction and action as by their “success.” In that light, civil disobedience, Catonsville, going to jail, are only one kind of many possible symbols. I do not repudiate them: they must become an ever-present possibility for all of us. But I do not think that they remain the only possible choice.

I think Dan Berrigan over-estimates the inherent strength of the system and under-estimates its ruthlessness, looks too exclusively on “the American experience, and . . . movements of the mind and heart that have arisen since the war hotted up. . . .” The sweep of human experience that the collective memory of

the ecumenical community and its sensitized conscience can draw on is far broader than that. His kind of civil disobedience and quiet community formation is vulnerable to total annihilation. We must be wiser in organizing ourselves against the “structures” which we oppose. We must learn how to build different types of communities of alternative styles of life, how to disperse; survive, how to maintain trust across disagreements, how to organize for goals that are long-term and keep up each other’s spirit and strength for the struggle that may be interminable but must not be conceded.

I sense a danger in the thrust toward “withdrawing for a period . . . into . . . small communities,” much as we need them for rest and reflection. It is a danger not so much of self-righteousness as of a desire for a purity that may not be given us in this human situation, of wanting to salve our own conscience rather than accept our share of guilt as part of the cost of facing up to our responsibilities. We are not Asians, and much as I admire the Vietnamese, their “thousand-year period of resistance to invasion” is not too helpful a parallel in the struggle with our own selves and our own kind.

Of course there are occasions when the Christian must “with all his soul, say No,” and so must the Christian community if it wishes to remain faithful. But we must not court martyrdom nor concede the struggle. The ultimate consequences of civil disobedience may mean destruction. I do not run from that, but I want to be secure that all other possibilities have truly been exhausted: Once you have shot your last bolt, there is little to add!

I believe we are engaged in a long-term battle that requires far more demanding strategies and techniques than we have yet disciplined ourselves to pursue, demands more faith in the ultimate lordship of God not only over all men but also over their structures. And where the structures may be falling of their own weight, we must be far better prepared to put alternatives into effect on a broad scale. We have to be sensitive to the “fullness of time” which may suddenly be ripe for actions that may have seemed impossible before.

I doubt that Dan would disagree with much of this—and he is living some of it right now. Whether he ends up in jail or—like Luther—remains “underground,” I trust that he will emerge with more insight, more energy and greater stature as a symbol worthy both of America and the world-wide ecumenical community than might have been possible had he continued in the public front lines where there is great danger but the least overview.

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