
HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

*“We must lose more, suffer more, experiment
more, risk more, trust one another more”*

DANIEL BERRIGAN

It is quite possibly no news at all by now, that my brother Philip and David Eberhardt are in the ‘hole’ at Lewisburg Federal Prison; as nearly as we can learn, they were consigned there on or about July 8. For those unfamiliar with penal arrangements, it may be useful to describe ‘the hole,’ whose existence is not widely discussed in prison guide books. Every prison boasts in one or another form, such a facility; a small isolated cell, with or without mattress and toilet, in which the condign crime of punishment may go forward for indefinite periods. No outside exercise, visitors, contacts, books; often, in winter, no heat (or excess heat, no ventilation); even, in extreme cases, no clothing. Such is the common threat; such often the fate assigned those who prove, in some way or other, recalcitrant against (the words are Philip’s) “rehabilitation experts, under whose care one is transformed into a robot or a drone.”

Philip is declining to be so transformed. His decision may be of some moment, for the church also. As he was the first priest in our national history to become a political prisoner, so now his presence in the hole changes that dungeon literally into a ‘priest hole’—a throwback (throw forward?); in any case an historic link with other periods and other priests. In Elizabethan England, one remembers, Jesuits and others at the mercy of public justice, often hid out in airless pockets for days on end, while pursuivants sacked the premises in search of them.

But now that these men are holed in, it seems necessary to change our language in regard to their situation, as well as that of Bobby Seale and other ‘political prisoners.’ I am suggesting that it is no longer accurate to speak of such men in these terms. Rather, they must be thought of as hostages of war.

A few facts. Philip and David have been kept for some three months, in a high-security prison, against all precedent—which invariably consigns political prisoners to low-security work camps. They have been warned, moreover, that there will be no change in their prison conditions, until I have surrendered or been captured. Moreover, some time before the date when we were to surrender for our Catonsville ‘crime,’ we were told that once we were behind bars, the judge would hold hearings leading to reduction of sentence. Those hearings have since been held in regard to Tom Lewis, and his sentence of six years cut by half; he had surrendered on the appointed day. But Philip’s sentence stands unchanged, because for some ten days, he refused induction into the armed forces of federal justice.

In simple mathematics, Philip is thus paying with three years of his life, for ten days at large—a ration of one hundred days in prison for each day he resisted. This, I submit, is a ratio of punishment to crime which recalls the Nazi or Fascist treatment of hostages of the maquis, the South African or Angolan disposition of captured guerrillas, the Ky bullies moving against Buddhists and students, the U.S. incarceration of Panthers without bail. The war has indeed come home, and Bobby Seale, David and Philip are among the first to be captured behind the lines.

Prior to the latest crisis at Lewisburg, a pattern of repressive treatment was slowly heating up the atmosphere. The facts are known to us by now. Philip was placed under suspicion of organizing a penal strike, his cell was repeatedly shaken down and his personal writing seized, his mail was over-censored, seized, sent back to friends (even to formerly approved correspondents) and used to attempt to trace my whereabouts. A memorandum was issued to guards to watch him as a potentially dangerous organizer. He was subject to shakedown search

FATHER DANIEL BERRIGAN, S.J., convicted for destroying draft records in Maryland, has refused to surrender to the authorities.

of person, in the yard; for what, we are in the dark. He and Eberhardt were singled out for two minor violations, even though they stood in a crowd of prisoners violating the same rule; none of the others was so charged. Finally, the chapel vestry where Philip had vested for Mass, was ransacked; for dynamite, firearms, writings—we have no clue.

Meanwhile, on our family scene back in Syracuse, a kind of watchful 'carrot and stick' technique has continued. Where is that priest? Our home has been constantly patrolled. Shortly after I disappeared, my mother was approached with the suggestion that she inform me by whatever means, that if I were to surrender to the law, "things would go easy with me; not more than a year in prison." This word, while the same authorities were making public threats of further charges against me. (The lady thus approached is eighty-five years of age and supremely cool.) She passed the word, with the added comment; "I hope you will take this information into account." Which I have done, and relayed back my no thank you. Which message in any case must have reached the hunters by now, I presume. . . . Some weeks later, my mother was hospitalized after an accident. A group of agents kept watch night and day at her door, apparently under the impression that I would declare a compassionate furlough, and show up. "Is Mrs. Berrigan dying?" they kept asking the medicos, like long-suffering heirs with visions of sugar plums. Alas no, she is recovering; and yes, I am uncaptured.

Much of the foregoing could be called ludicrous; but there are other overtones to the hunt, some of them sobering in the utmost. In May, the FBI came for George Mische in Chicago; he is another Catonsville member, for a while underground. The pursuers showed up with guns drawn. On June 27, some one hundred agents, supported by the usual technological fleet, junk, talkies, censors and God knows what else, invaded the wedding of two friends in Baltimore, in pursuit of your correspondent. There was no sacred space that day; church, sanctuary, reception room, basements, closets, all received the search-and-destroy treatment. At one particularly frightening moment, when a balloon happened to pop, guns jumped from agents' hips. Which is to say, priesthood and non-violent ethos and non-violent friends aside, what the agents expect is exactly the skills they are used to, trained to. Violence they can deal with, by more of same. It is non-violence that stops them short. I was not at the wedding.

But anyone who would presume, in face of the foregoing, that the FBI is only mildly interested in my capture, is surely ignoring some serious facts. The reason for their continuing interest is not hard to come upon. There is in fact, a surge of public sympathy for such an attempt as mine to counter the war, to counter the death game, to resist the growing repression of peace-makers. People are interested, not only in the fate of

prisoners, but in alternatives to prison. The case of the first priest who stayed out in the cold, who avowed neither to take up arms nor to flee the country, to govern his life by a calculated personal risk, talking and appearing in public on occasion, thereby facing a longer prison sentence at the end; this is a formula which both awakens public response and hottens up the chase.

The day after the Baltimore wedding, a lengthy interview with me appeared in the *New York Times*. Two weeks before, I had filmed a half-hour interview with NBC; I have also met with small groups of local people in many cities, with AWOL's, resisters, ministers and priests, students, professors.

Inevitably, larger questions have come up. I sense, apart from all questions of my survival or fate, a personal and public malaise, running deep and hard. More people than we readily imagine, have reached a stalemate of such proportions as chill the joy and assail the integrity of marriage, work, religion, education of children, the direction and meaning of life itself. Liberal hopes for electoral solutions are largely dashed by the deaths of the saviors. There is a growing realization that, even if the iron cope lowered on the nation by the Nixon engineers is raised, no liberal program, whether of a President Lindsay or Brewster or Burns or Drinan or Gardiner, could long survive the fury of the right; policies of decent reformism, redress of injustice, a more modest role for the military, a less lethal national presence in the world—events since the Chicago convention have passed such men by.

No, we must dig deeper into self-understanding and societal understanding, before solutions worthy of serious scrutiny appear. Which is simply to say, we must lose more, suffer more, experiment more, risk more, trust one another more. The crisis is of such enormous extent and depth, that all solutions based on the sanity and health and recoverability of current structures are quickly proven wrong, untimely, unmanageable, bureaucratically infected; the same old kettle of fish, stinking worse than ever in the boiling juices of change.

And this is where a few of us are trying, as best we may, to come in. From the underground, from prison, the movement might have some light cast on it. I make this statement in the full realization of what it implies; up to the present, there has been very little that could be called, a serious movement at all. There have been moves toward mitigation, moral gestures, protests, civil dissent, sporadic counter-violence. There is a great deal of cultural unrest among youth, controlled readily by the carnivorous national culture, which makes of the hottest and newest egg of invention or art, last week's cold omelette. There have been spasmodic excursions to D.C., drawing enormous migrations of people from their home cotes. But all such happenings have not issued in much; people have undertaken them as moral 'extras,' always with an eye to the great return; back to job, family, business as usual.

I hope I do not appear with such reflections to be putting down the acts and passion of good people. I want only to get at the obscure truth of things. Where are our lives today? Where are we going? How to make a difference? Even good people are quite generally resigned to endure a great worsening and rotting of the public fabric, as long as such calamity does not strip them naked. How to respond, how to start anew? We are commonly determined neither to go naked (no one willingly dismantles his empire) nor to patch up the old garment (reformism is finished, in politics or tailoring). But what might it mean to weave the fabric of life into a new garment, of such cunning and beauty that the wearer himself is transformed by putting it on; from beggar, outcast, bankrupt, alien, loser, prevaricator, imperialist, racist, exploiter—into a new man? What if in new garments, a new creation were to be born?

"There are mountains of suffering yet to be borne," Gandhi wrote at the time of the great Salt March. "What counts for the future is something as simple as suffering fidelity," Bonhoeffer wrote from prison.

I face the fate of my brother and his friends, with a certain tranquility of spirit. Philip and I have never been able simply to stand about wringing our hands at the latest outrage of Nixon or Johnson or their myrmidons. We have chosen our fate; we have not been condemned to it. Therefore, in face of the latest Lewisburg outrage, it appears that our task is not crushed; it is simply unfinished.

What task? We are summoned to act in unison with our friends, to join in conspiracy, in jeopardy, in illegal non-violent actions, to hotten up the scene, wherever we are. Such steps will undoubtedly bring more and more revenge upon some of us; whether in the form of longer prison sentences, harassment of our families, solitary confinement in prison, a hotter chase by the FBI. But none of these is to the point, as Philip and I long ago agreed.

What we seek, acting coolly, politically, out of the truth of our lives and tradition is to pull the mask of legitimacy from the inhuman and blind face of power. We seek at the same time, to open the eyes of more and more of our friends, to bring a larger community of resistance into being. We seek moreover to awaken to the facts of life, those Americans who continue to grasp at the straws of this or that political promise; and so put off, day after day, year after year, the saving act of resistance, allow innocent men to be imprisoned, guiltless men to be kicked out of America, good men to die.

But if even a few men say no, courageously, constantly, clear sightedly, more men will be drawn to say no; fewer men likewise will continue to say yes, and so to lose their manhood, their soul, their brothers.

Which is to say, some men must be stripped naked. Not as an act of egoism, a side show, but as a skeletal

illustration of the state and condition of man today. Some men must willingly dismantle their empires.

I think today of Philip, the *alma domus* of the universe in which he took such pleasure, even exaltation. He loves music, food and drink, friends, the game of life with its checks and counterplays. He has been an inventor of almost every new tool the church has come on in the past decade for her inner renewal, whether of liturgy, social awakening, forms of community. He spoke up early (for a white man) on racism, met the mounting war with all his might. When I think of him, it is of a man infected with *joie de vivre*; he is an incurable carrier of that all but vanquished unease, dis-ease, ease. For years he has traveled among men like a Ulysses, voyaging beyond known landmarks, putting in among strangers, marveling at the variety, beauty, terror of the world, the known and unknown; often near shipwreck, near death, but always and everywhere charting new terrain, bringing others to awakening, to debate, to change of heart.

He loved the world well enough to hear the urgent summons to renunciation, to such discipline of emotions as would make him useful as the times worsened. He was willing to test the proposition that celibacy can be as intense an experience of love as sexual relationship, that the *unum necessarium* commended by Christ could also include the *orbs terrarum*, the cape of good hope, scylla and charybdis, the loves of all men and all things.

In the words of Simone Weil, he put on the universe for garment; for body. Now he is stripped of that garment. He sits or paces in Lewisburg hole, that subterranean box in which society buries, as in its own disordered subconscious, the sweating victims, the untidy raucous voices that above ground or at large, would shout the truth too loud. Is he disposed of, like the dead; or is he only buried more deeply in the veins of his people's existence? Knowing him, I would suggest the latter is nearer the truth.

But what of us? How shall we lead our lives? Everything from Vietnam to Lewisburg suggests to me that men who hope at this point, for other directions than further repression, further wars, more jailings of resisters, are whistling into the prevailing winds. To expect the worst, to prepare our souls, prophetic or cowardly, for the worst, is the only realism worth talking about. For we are going, downhill and pell-mell, into a dark age, a progress led by neanderthals armed to the teeth. What lends a sinister despair to their flight plan is the simple knowledge that they face, as do all who misuse the world, simple extinction. The subhumans are struggling against death, the humans are struggling toward birth. Our lifetime sees the conflict joined. We must expect bloodshed, agony, prison, exile, psychic and physical injury, separation, the rupture of relationships, the underground; these are the symptoms and circumstances that precede a new age, a new mankind.