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Review of *At Play in the Lions' Den*, A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan by Jim Forest

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***At Play in the Lions' Den, A Biography and Memoir of Daniel Berrigan* by Jim Forest.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017. Xiv + 336 pp. \$28 US.**

In 1957 Daniel Berrigan (1921-2016), a thirty-six-year-old Jesuit priest, about to begin teaching New Testament at Lemoyne College in his hometown of Syracuse, New York, published his first book. A book of poetry entitled *Time Without Number*, it won the Lamont Poetry Award and was also nominated for a National Book Award. At the time, he realized that, "Publishers would now take almost anything I chose to compile; the question of quality was largely in my own hands and my own sense of things" (47). In the next four years, he published two more books of poetry and two books of essays. Poetry and writing were only one facet of this extraordinary spirit's gifts. As his younger friend, the Jesuit artist William Hart McNichols put it, Dan Berrigan had been given the "ambiguous favor" of the "Joseph coat" (257).

As the years passed, Dan became best-known as an agent for peace in the United States and internationally. Dan was studying in France in 1954 when Dien Bien Phu fell. From the earliest days of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, Dan looked upon it as the "Americanization of France's failed war in Indochina" (65). In 1998 Irish Nobel Peace Laureate, Mairead Maguire, nominated Dan and his brother Philip Berrigan (1923-2002) for the Nobel Prize. She described them as the "most prominent faith-based voices for peace and non-violence in the U.S." (203).

Jim Forest (b. 1941) first met Dan in 1961 as a twenty-year-old Catholic Worker, recently discharged from the U.S. Navy as a conscientious objector. They didn't really hit it off, however, until 1964 when they met again in Paris at a Fellowship of Reconciliation meeting. They traveled on to Rome where Catholic peace activist Jim Douglass was lobbying for condemnation of nuclear weapons and recognition of Catholic conscientious objectors to war at the Second Vatican Council. Douglass introduced them to Cardinal Bea who encouraged their work for these causes. Continuing north to Prague, they participated in a boring Christian Peace Conference that Dan likened to their being "trapped in a mimeograph machine" (65). One night at a Prague restaurant, Forest, Douglass, and Dan Berrigan resolved to found the Catholic Peace Fellowship when they returned to the U.S. That fall, joined by Tom Cornell, Phil Berrigan, and others, they traveled to Thomas Merton's monastery at Gethsemane, Kentucky, to consider the "spiritual roots of protest." Merton challenged them with the question, "by what right do we protest?" (69). Franz Jägerstätter, beheaded for refusing to serve the Reich in World War II, now beatified and recognized by the Catholic Church as a patron of conscientious objectors, emerged as a recurring icon for their work. At the beginning of 1965, in New York City, with financial help from Hermene Evans and the Berrigan brothers, Forest began full time work for the Catholic Peace Fellowship, speaking, writing, and counseling draft age young men in the cause of Catholic conscientious objection to war. Tom Cornell soon joined him.

Dan Berrigan's life might be written from various perspectives, historical, journalistic, religious, or even poetic. By joining Dan's biography to his own memoir, however, Forest successfully locates Dan's life in the center of the story of the late twentieth-century U.S. Catholic peace movement in which they both participated. Along with Forest's biographies of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, this biography and memoir ensure that the story of the Catholic peace movement will be passed on to future generations.

Whether Dan Berrigan's name is familiar to you or you've never heard of him, this book's thirty-eight unnumbered chapters will bring him to life. Orbis Books has done an excellent lay out job. Each of the large 7 X 9 pages of text is accompanied by black and white photos of Dan's life and often by brief selections from his more than sixty books. Because Dan's life was so long and rich, this review will focus on three aspects of his life that convey the depth of Forest's account: 1) Dan's complex relationship, defining for both of them, with his younger brother Phil; 2) closely related to that relationship, the anatomy of non-violence in the Catholic peace movement, as their lifelong fraternal struggles often had to do with disagreements about the escalation of non-violence to the very edges of violence; 3) Dan's spiritual path to a disarmed life even as ever-present celebrity worked to drive him from that path.

The lives of Dan and Phil Berrigan were inextricably bound together. Dan, the fifth of six Berrigan sons, was born in 1921 in northern Minnesota and named for Daniel O'Connell, Ireland's "Great Emancipator." Phil, the youngest son, came along two years later. When Dan was six and Phil was four, the family moved to Syracuse, New York. The son of Irish immigrants, their father Tom Berrigan worked as a laborer. A man with an explosive temperament, Dan described him as "an incendiary without a cause" (9). The family lived in fear of his eruptions. Born in Germany, their mother Frida Fromhart moved to the U.S. when she was five. "Whatever substance has accrued to our lives," Dan wrote, "whatever goodness, must be laid at our mother's feet" (9). Tom Berrigan considered Dan "the runt of the litter" and a "mama's" boy" (8). Dan looked like his mother. When Forest first met her, he recognized her face as "an older, feminine version of Dan's" (10). Phil was physically and temperamentally more like his father. He reminded Forest of an athlete on a box of Wheaties. A former semipro first baseman, "Phil could have played the stoic and brave town marshal in the television series *Gunsmoke*" (77).

Dan was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1952. In 1955, Phil was ordained for the Josephites, a religious community dedicated to working with African Americans. By 1960, Dan and Phil had developed a "vocational partnership" (53) around civil rights work. Challenging segregation in church and society soon expanded to challenging "Catholic at homeness with war" (60). Throughout their lives, they depended increasingly on one another. When Phil and Elizabeth McAlister decided to get married, Dan gave his full support and preached at their 1973 wedding celebration. Despite their genuine fraternal devotion, however, their inevitable sibling conflicts tended to replay familiar family patterns.

As their January 1971 appearance on the cover of *Time* magazine suggests, Dan and Phil are perhaps best known for their anti-war activities during the Vietnam War and later in the cause of nuclear disarmament. Both were committed to non-violent peacemaking and resistance to war. In 1967, however, Phil broadsided Forest and Cornell with his decision that the Catholic Peace Fellowship's support of conscientious objectors and organizing demonstrations against the war was not enough. Such "petitionary non-violence" had to be replaced by "militant non-violent resistance" (105), "non-violent attacks against the machinery of this war" (106). Nothing short of "prison-risking resistance" (107) counted as "serious" opposition to the Vietnam War. Phil called this "revolution" and withdrew from the Catholic Peace Fellowship. Though Dan did not withdraw from the CPF at this time, Phil was indeed pulling him in the direction of more militant non-violent resistance. On October 27, 1967, Phil and three others poured their own blood on

draft records at Baltimore's central draft board. To Dan such violence against property looked like indirect violence against people. In writing Thomas Merton for guidance, Dan asked, "But will such an action communicate at all???"(108). Merton's caution against "getting involved in a fake revolution" left Dan feeling "torn down the middle by the two people I most admired – Phil pulling in one direction, Merton the other" (110).

By spring 1968, with Phil organizing another draft board raid at Catonsville, Maryland, Dan was still unsure. Didn't such actions "blur the line between violence and non-violence" and alienate more people than they inspired to action? (117) Phil prevailed and Dan took part in the burning of draft records by the Catonsville Nine on May 17, 1968. Forest begins the book with a detailed description of this iconic "action" of the Berrigan brothers that divided the Catholic peace movement. A *National Catholic Reporter* editorial called it "an offensive sort of prank" (119). Feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether rejected it as contributing to "a sectarian ethos" (120). Both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton admired the sacrifice of the protesters but could not endorse their methods. With violence against property, even "manhandling" (121) a draft board clerk, and using their own blood, Phil and his fellow resisters at Baltimore and Catonsville had brought Catholic peace activists to what, after Catonsville, Thomas Merton called "a new borderline situation" which left them "standing at the very edges of violence" (121).

In late September 1968, inspired by Catonsville, the Milwaukee 14 used homemade napalm to burn draft files in downtown Milwaukee. Forest credits Dan with helping him imagine the step of taking part in this action (308). The trial of the Catonsville Nine began two weeks later on October 7 and ended with everyone saying the Our Father following a remarkable exchange between Dan and Judge Roszel Thomsen. Two years later, Dan published his play *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*.

After the sentencing, both Dan and Phil, along with five others, refused to report for imprisonment and went underground. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover put Dan Berrigan on the Ten Most Wanted list. Four months later, 70 FBI agents, accompanied by a Coast Guard cutter, captured Dan at a house on Block Island off the coast of Rhode Island. He was sent to Danbury Federal Prison in Connecticut. Not soon after, Phil was transferred to Danbury. While at Danbury, Dan suffered a severe allergic reaction to a Novocain injection from the prison dentist and almost died. This did not diminish Dan's willingness to do acts of resistance that risked arrest. His friend John Dear estimates that Dan was arrested at least 250 times (267). Nevertheless, it did have a serious effect on his subsequent willingness to do what Phil would consider "serious" jail time. At Danbury the extent of intertwining of Berrigan family dynamics with discussions about the limits of non-violence and raising the level of non-violent resistance came out into the open. Dan suggested that Phil had a "younger brother difficulty with him" (150). As Forest puts it: "Phil had developed a quiet resentment, even jealousy, about Dan's celebrity status, and this needed airing, while Dan at times felt bullied by Phil" (149). In Phil's words, "We had it out, very painfully and sorrowfully" (150).

After their public marriage in 1973, Phil and Liz McAlister moved into a house in west Baltimore. Christened Jonah House, it became their base of operations. "Organizing protests that led to arrest and jail time became Phil's default setting" (219). With the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the focus of resistance began to shift to first strike nuclear weapons. While he

continued to engage in acts of civil disobedience leading to arrest, Dan was reluctant to risk long term imprisonment. In 1980 Phil organized the first Plowshares action at the GE King of Prussia plant outside Philadelphia. He convinced Dan to join the group. Inspired by the prophet Isaiah's proclamation (2:4) "they shall beat their swords into plowshares," they called themselves the Plowshares Eight. Molly Rush, one of the eight, suggested using hammers. They entered the plant and shattered two of the shields manufactured there for first strike missiles. They poured blood on blueprints and equipment. Then they prayed in a circle until they were arrested. In 1982 director Emile D'Antonio made *In the King of Prussia*, the story of the raid and the trial. Singer-songwriters Jackson Browne and Graham Nash provided the music. Actor Martin Sheen played the judge at their trial. The Plowshares Eight played themselves. The Plowshares movement began at King of Prussia. Since 1980, there have been more than a hundred Plowshares actions (234).

"Room for Disagreement," one of the book's most moving chapters, deals with conflict between Dan and Phil, most likely occasioned by escalation of property damage in Plowshares actions. Following a two-week trip to Germany, Phil, whose marriage and resignation from the priesthood had cost him much of his platform and access, told Dan that he felt like an "acolyte" to his older, extraordinarily gifted brother. "Dear brother," Dan wrote in his long response, "there's a certain violence that afflicts you. It reminds me of our father and his way of 'taking it out' on his own. In the old days, I used to cringe from him; and later from you, but no more" (240). Dan's approach to what Forest calls "the deeper issues that troubled them" is deeply insightful, truthful but kind and loving, and clearly the fruit of much prayer. They strike me as having been written by a holy man.

This holiness is one of the most amazing things about Daniel Berrigan's life. At the heart of the whirlwind, lay a peaceful center. Here was an international figure who remained faithful to a spiritual path that led to a disarmed life. A well-known poet and author, prestigious universities invited him for visiting professorships. Leftward leaning celebrities sought him out. Theologian and activist attorney William Stringfellow built Dan his own cabin retreat on Block Island. When the Jesuits wouldn't take ownership of it, Stringfellow set up a trust. Dan's close friends included Thomas Merton, Vietnamese Buddhist monk and exile Thich Nhat Hanh, and Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day. In 1970 he traveled to Hanoi with radical historian Howard Zinn to accept the release of three downed U.S. bomber pilots. While underground for four months after the Catonsville verdict, Dan improvised, consulting with composer Leonard Bernstein on his "Mass," sitting down for conversations with Harvard psychologist Robert Coles that became *The Geography of Faith* (1971), and writing an open letter to the Weather Underground exhorting nonviolence. When Dan then landed in Danbury Federal Prison, Jesuit superior general Pedro Arrupe came to visit him. In 1977 he wrote an open letter in defense of nonviolence to fellow priest poet Ernesto Cardenal. Cardenal had embraced the need for violence in Nicaragua after the Somoza regime destroyed his Solentiname community. The last wish of IRA hunger-striker Bobby Sands in 1981 was to meet Fr. Berrigan. Dan traveled to Ireland in the company of former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark who had led the defense at the trial of the Harrisburg Seven in 1971. As FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had placed Dan on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, so English Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher barred him and Clark from the prison where Bobby Sands fasted.

In 1986 Roland Joffé's "The Mission" won Best Film at the Cannes Film Festival. Based on Robert Bolt's rendition of the story of the tragic end of an eighteenth-century Jesuit mission in the jungles of Paraguay, "The Mission" received seven Oscar nominations. Dan played an intimate role in its creation. With his superior's permission, he spent five months in Latin America consulting on its filming. He worked with Jeremy Irons and Robert De Niro, who both played Jesuits. Though he had a brief role in the film, his most important contribution was his suggestion to refashion Bolt's ending. He complexified it by portraying the mission's destruction at the hands of the colonists as involving a choice between violence, fighting in self-defense, and an active non-violent response, a eucharistic procession marching toward the attackers. Dan later described his participation to Forest as "my best way of saying thank you to the Order for almost 50 years of dullness" (265). When De Niro asked him what it was about Jesuit life that he clung to, Dan replied: "It was the life itself. It was friendship, community, the promise of support for one another, a vision of great work to be done, which those before you had done so well" (265).

Forest's Afterword identifies one of Dan's achievements as "that somehow he held on to remaining a Jesuit" (313). When he was not teaching or traveling, he always lived in a Jesuit community in New York. His Jesuit identity both enabled Dan's celebrity and made it possible for him to use his "Joseph coat" for good. "His greatest gift," however, "may have been the path he, as a priest, opened (or in many cases reopened) to eucharistic life and faith for people who had been estranged from almost everything" (315). The book ends with a moving story of a twenty-four-year-old Forest going to confession to Dan.

In spite of his celebrity, Dan stayed on the path to a disarmed life. Like his fellow Jesuit Pope Francis, Dan took nourishment from his prayer-fed sense of the "flesh and blood real people feel of the gospels" (197). In addition to his love of mystery novels, Dan had a lifelong fascination with the paintings of Caravaggio. His lawyer Joe Cosgrove described how taken he was with descriptions of a lost Caravaggio known as the *The Fenaroli Resurrection*, "a shockingly human" portrayal of the risen Christ: "no shafts of light, ... no immaculate white flowing linen robe but an emaciated, lately dead man blinking into the daylight like a prisoner in rags who had been unexpectedly released." "Imagine," Dan wrote to Phil, "if this were our image of the risen Christ ... a Christ reluctant and broken" (274-75). This was Dan's Christ.

"What is our expectation of Christ?" he asked. He could not separate Christ's activity in the world from his own. "I see him in the gospel and the Eucharist, but also in the faithful – in the mirror of my own mind and the work of my hands ... That is why I am arrested again and again, and will never give up ... So believing, I deny to the politicians, the researchers, the generals, their way in the world ... They will not prevail. My faith in Christ and my faith in my friends allows me to say this" (302, on jail 227, 269). This vision of Christ meant commitment to the works of mercy in a field hospital church. After the Vietnam War, Dan courted heresy on the left by speaking and writing on behalf of the unborn and sitting in at abortion clinics.

By 1978, Dan realized something was missing "in the usual spinning orbit of teaching, writing, and pilgrimaging to the Pentagon to throw ashes and blood at the idols" (242). For the next four years, he accompanied the dying poor as a volunteer at St. Rose Home, a hospice for the destitute in New York City. He was deeply impressed that no money ever changed hands there.

Beginning in 1984, and for the next twelve years until he was 75, he joined his friend William McNichols accompanying AIDS patients at St. Vincent's hospital in New York City, "ground zero for the New York AIDS crisis" (246). Here he became a self-described "listener of last resort" (248). His work at St. Vincent's elicited a painful thought many Catholic pacifists have had about their church: "The pilot who drops bombs on homes and hospitals is lauded as a patriot and model citizen and is welcome to receive communion in any church, but the man who has loved the wrong person in the wrong way is seen as deserving of every agony" (249).

Perhaps, as the homilist at his funeral urged, Dan Berrigan was indeed a Doctor of the Church (303). McNichols described him as looking the "homeless leprechaun" (247) on a New York subway platform. The book's cover captures the person whose story Forest tells so well. The cuffed hand offering the sign of peace, the centered smile, provocatively embody the disarmed prophetic spirit that was Dan Berrigan. In her remarks at his funeral, Liz McAlister recalled: "The gift I walk with most is his practice of talking briefly but deeply at the end of an evening about something in the world and then posing the question: 'What gives you hope these days? What are you doing that gives you hope?'" (305). These are his questions to us.

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