

effective, and maybe less dramatic, *civil disobedience* that must be sought to regenerate the status quo.

Finally, I had hoped that Daniel Berrigan would have offered some specific proposals; I wanted so much to have some concrete suggestions, but I get the feeling he is more excited by the intellectual and ideological experience of "Looking at Catonsville," at the time of writing, than by a coalition of all the oppressed against "wickedness in high places" and "principalities and powers" of this world which rob us of our rights to be human under God.

The Rev. James E. Gunther
Pres., Ministerial Interfaith Assn.

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir: A popular button reads, "If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem!" My question to Fr. Berrigan, simply put, is, "Are you part of the problem?"

The rhetoric and tactics of the peace movement must bear responsibility for the election of the Nixon Administration. As a black person, I cannot now accept the Movement's claim of anti-racism. If no choice was seen with respect to Vietnam policy, why did the Movement not see the widely different approach of the candidates to the issue of race? If his movement did not act correctly with reference to the choice then at hand, how can it now lay claim to a mystique of such purity and concern for human values? Vietnam is hardly the only moral issue we face; nor is it the most long-standing.

Second, one must inquire whether clearly illegal tactics of resistance effectively communicate legitimate concern or whether they simply discredit the resisters. I suspect the actors may gain a false sense of righteousness at the expense of adversely polarizing opinion. The consequent radicalization of our public affairs seems to me as much a product of the techniques of dissent as of the rhetoric of the Administration.

In short, use of the politics of disruption born out of despair and questionable assumptions of moral superiority may simply invite repression and complicate the problem of developing the institutions and resources we require "to survive in the wilderness of the world."

Ernest M. Howell

Hartsdale, N. Y.

Dear Sir: The Catonsville Nine performed a beautiful and necessary act of witness. They are the free men; we who presume to judge them must recognize that we are the prisoners of the system, because of our

complicity with it. I write this response to Fr. Berrigan's article in a spirit of deep appreciation for his deeds and vision.

At last, a framework for surviving the spiritual agony of our time: *civil disobedience and alternate forms of community*, saying No *and* growing new organs and resources to realize the alternatives.

We have reached a point where there is no more comfort in huddling together inside any of the anti-Establishment movements than there is in imagining that one is part of the silent majority. If Movement people are not intent on forging alternatives, they are merely reflecting the common predicament in a different way. They, too, are engaged in "keeping the soul's terminal sickness a secret" (Josephine Johnson, *The Inland Island*).

I am convinced that a degree of moral isolation from the system is necessary, but I am not convinced that it should take the form of *civil disobedience* in the usual sense. The Catonsville Nine had the luxury of a chosen act, of a public trial, of a decisive and dramatic break with the Establishment. For tens of thousands of others, the drama, if any, was simply saying No to the war machine and facing jail, the stockade, exile and, in some cases, death. The difference is that the vast majority of choices were forced by the draft or by in-service oppression, and that these acts of refusal truly incapacitated the system at root level.

Refusal can take forms which are not *civil disobedience*: a technologist's refusal to do war-related work (what work isn't?), a professional's refusal to work in an institution which does not serve all the people (what institution does?), a student's refusal to be merely trained. . . .

We need new institutions and new forms of community, but these should not be expected to emerge until truly large numbers of people have said No to the system, at a cost of giving up any claim on middle-class professional status and material comfort. They shall have to live as peasants, while using all their skills and resources to make the technology work for the communal welfare.

Fr. Berrigan identifies students and war resisters as the core group of the new world. I see a more basic force in the hundreds of thousands of the middle class whose complicity with the system has gone farther than they can stand, and the millions of poor who are learning not to want the cancer that is middle-class America. They will bring forth the new world out of faith, necessity and desperation. The present system sooner or later will force the choice.

Meanwhile, we would do well to learn to live on rice and beans, and to share the necessities with as

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

Jerome Muhlenberg

Levittown, Pa.

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.

Gerhard A. Elston

June 1970 11