

PROPHESYING ANOTHER WORLD: OR THE TRANSFORMATIVE MINISTRY
OF DANIEL BERRIGAN – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Prophecyng Another World: Or the Transformative Ministry of Daniel Berrigan
Convener: Taylor Ott, Fordham University
Moderator: Marcus Mescher, Xavier University
Presenter: Daniel Cosacchi, Fairfield University
Presenter: Eric Martin, Fordham University
Respondent: Roger D. Haight, S.J., Union Theological Seminary

In his paper, “The Nonviolent *Spiritual Exercises*: Daniel Berrigan as Practitioner of Ignatian Spirituality,” Daniel Cosacchi draws from Berrigan’s membership in the Society of Jesus for more than seven decades of his life. Cosacchi argues that Berrigan utilized the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius Loyola as a way of forming him to participate in his actions of nonviolent civil disobedience. Cosacchi contends that Berrigan’s second time completing the *Spiritual Exercises*, while a Jesuit tertian, was a major turning point in his life and was one conversion that put him on the path to work for peace and justice over the next number of decades. One underlying current running through Cosacchi’s paper was Berrigan’s membership in the Jesuit order. How did Berrigan become an outsider in this religious congregation? As a means of concluding his paper, Cosacchi posed two particular paths for the Jesuits: First, they might consider allowing more members of the order to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience in the manner of Berrigan; second, they might suspend their involvement with the military through hosting Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs at many of their colleges and universities.

In his paper, “‘The Neutralism of Outer Hell’: Dan Berrigan In (and Out of) the Civil Rights Movement,” Eric Martin uncovers a number of previously unpublished letters penned by Berrigan to highlight Berrigan’s opposition to the racism in the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. In doing so, Martin shows that Berrigan’s writing and activism was an effort to move the church to a rebirth in the area of its response to racism. Martin’s paper advances “our understanding of how Catholics did and did not respond to the civil rights movement and to broaden our understanding of Berrigan as someone motivated not just by war but also [by] racism.” Martin makes clear that Berrigan was greatly influenced by his brother Phil, who moved Berrigan to be more involved with the civil rights movement. Martin’s paper, which draws from Berrigan’s letters throughout, examines the Freedom Rides, Berrigan’s frustration with his ecclesial superiors and their response (or lack thereof) to the civil rights movement, and the March on Washington. Martin concludes that this formative time in Berrigan’s life was the most difficult time for his vocation as a priest and member of the Jesuit order, and that his example ought to be paramount when considering how Catholics today ought to respond to inaction on the part of the hierarchy.

In his response to the two papers, “Daniel Berrigan for Today,” Roger D. Haight, S.J., poses a number of questions to the two presenters to invite further discussion concerning Berrigan’s role in the Jesuit order and the Catholic Church as a whole.

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Haight contends that, when the situation permits it, “theologians can be more publicly critical of bishops,” especially if the episcopal action goes against “gospel values.” As a Jesuit himself, Haight’s conclusion on the order’s potential renunciation of war is important: “I have no doubt that in the long run of cultural evolution such a corporate decision will have to be actualized by human societies for the human race to survive.” He proposes the Jesuits might even make such a renunciation part of their vow formula at some point.

This response introduced a number of interesting question and comments. Some of the topics discussed included how parents might engage in civil disobedience and risk jailtime, which would force them to be away from their children for prolonged periods of time. Other commenters pointed to the Jesuit tradition and suggested further dialogue with the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus. The topic of friendship was discussed throughout the session, not only in the context of the original Jesuits being considered “friends in the Lord,” but also as a helpful approach to responding to social injustice in today’s world. Finally, the session was hopeful that Berrigan might be a model leading the way to the possibility of another world, one more peaceful than our current world.

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