

Notes from the Underground

by Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

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Analogies are a little like the toeholds one grasps on a steep slope; they enable one to take the next step in a dangerous geography. The next step is the point in question: is it possible? The question, for a climber, cannot be an abstract one; he must create as he goes. And he draws breath, when the air is very thin indeed, from the example of those who went far, who died in the breach, or who made it further.

Danger is within and around. Whatever the quality of the air (it is not high, by all reports) this is of its substance. It is not merely that one is hunted in a perpetual open season; this is taken for granted, part of the game today. Much nearer the point is the possession of one's own life, one's own soul: not to belong to the hunters, not to inhabit their dreams, not to be hung as a trophy on their walls. Resistance is one way of putting it; the pressures one can offer against a foul project, unworthy of man, undertaken in that decrepit chain of command which forges one man to another, a chain gang of slaves, blind in authority, blind in obedience.

Such thoughts arise on the occasion of the anniversary of Bobby Kennedy's death. His faults, which were indeed large ones, died with him, extinguished in blood. The questions raised by his life and dramatized in his murder remain to haunt those who were his friends, who, two years later, have tears to shed for a young life, so brutally extinguished. In a sense which is both true and difficult of understanding, his death was irrelevant to his failure; one could still consider him as having won his prize, gone on to the highest political honour—and changed nothing.

What change could such a man, from the seat of the presidency, have wrought? Granted: no Cambodia, the war ('no longer in the national interest') brought to a close, no Kent State, no Jackson. A changed atmosphere, his friends would claim; more hope available for everyone; the national mind slowly brought back from its distraction, its obsession, its edginess, its failure of confidence and nerve and empathy

There remain, nonetheless, all sorts of nagging doubts haunting those who remember the Kennedy years, the Kennedy team, the descent of brisk Ivy League minds on Washington; the portfolios, the blueprints, the rhetoric. More than four years after John's death, Bobby succeeded in reassembling the scattered brains trust; the style and message of the campaign that followed had a feverish glitter, only slightly tarnished by events, by time, by violence and death and war. What was quite evident as Bobby's campaign unrolled was that the New Turks had no new ideas; they had money and energy and an ambition only slightly tempered by

catastrophe. But had they really learned anything, in the years of powerlessness between John's death and Bobby's Big Try?

We have no persuasive reason to be optimistic, even in retrospect. One remembers how Robert McNamara, one of the inner circle, the icy dependable technician of the war, wept bitterly on a certain public occasion, remembering John Kennedy. Such uncontrolled emotion in so controlled a man invites reflection. Is it ungenerous to recall that, during the Kennedy years, McNamara never, so far as one knows, wept for the children of Vietnam, the death of soldiers, the levelling of villages, the wanton bombing of open cities? No, he wept at the launching of a new aircraft carrier named for his slain friend. As that immense armoured ghost slid down its quay into the oceans of the world, shark-like and combative, baptized into death by the small daughter of the dead president, McNamara wept. Wrong tears, one is tempted to say, wrong occasion.

The same team, the same ethos, a like method. In spite of the hectic excitement of Bobby's western campaign, a nagging reservation lay on the mind. *Déjà vu*; we had been through all this before; time had come down hard on it. There could be no point in resurrecting the old method, its power was gone; we have been through the missile confrontation, the Bay of Pigs, the lies, the wrongness of vision. The bright young men were discredited, their advice was bankrupt. It even made no difference (here our knowledge was undoubtedly cynical and perhaps unfair) that, after John's death, bad politics had been replaced by worse. We knew one thing, learned in the fiery years of betrayal since: the best the Kennedys could offer their country would be the redemption of their own folly; one brother would painfully, and at enormous cost, extricate us from the engulfing swamp into which both had led us, rhetoric flying.

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But could this be called a sane politics? And after Vietnam, what? And who was to confront the Pentagon or to tame (or dismember) the corporate beast? And if the surreal, militaristic sword-rattling were at last stilled and a peace of sorts achieved, and bread and justice available to our people and racist frenzies controlled and generals denied their lusts and Panthers guaranteed their lives and—then what? What was to be our place in the world anyway? Could we dissolve our lethal clotting of the universal bloodstream and dismantle our empire and come upon that modesty which would allow for the survival of the powerless as well as of the powerful—ourselves?

I am struck by the enormous adaptability of the moral frame of man. He survives among multiplying horrors, a feat of no mean moment. More; he is able indefinitely to delay that moment when he will be heard in an irrevocable way, saying his nay to the folly

and power of death. One friend declared to me recently, in all seriousness: 'There are men prepared to blow up — (he mentioned a public facility of some size and importance) if Nixon decides to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam.' Presumably, I was to take courage from such news; my friend was obliquely assuring me that I was not standing alone, that the troops were massing at my back. . . . Now in the struggle of the past six years, my brother and I have been so assured on countless occasions; time and again friends have declared themselves firmly on the move in our direction. They would put up with one more, only one more example of political folly. They would join us if this or that electoral move failed. Their point of no return would be, severally, the bombing of North Vietnam, duplicity at the conference table, the crossing of another frontier, the death of another Panther, the failure of another demonstration. Meantime . . .

A kind of post-Bobby mortician politics. Such men, whether they know it or not, are lingering around the grave of a Leader. Too long a sacrifice, the poet says, makes a stone of the heart. But who will declare the intemperate mourning ended, so that men can wrench themselves away from death (its omnipresence, its seduction, its distraction) and take up again the task of life?

I do not know. But meantime, in Church and State, the struggle for peace is a lonely business. There are few who have gone this way, and they have left us few maps or charts; only a few notes from the underground, or from prison or exile.

But this is not all. I find, here and there, a certain unformulated readiness to face up to the truth of things, to the bad news being pushed down our throats day after day. Even the underground has an audience, a community of support, which is daring the tricky business of aiding and abetting and harbouring. Day after day, people are seeing more clearly the dead-end character of the lives they are being required to lead, according to the canons of public policy and private decency. The news about good men in prison, good men shot down or hunted down, is no longer foreign news; it does not come out of Brazil or South Africa or German history. It is the daily dosage of that perpetual bad policy executed in our own capital; the bringing home of the war, against every device and defence.

Meantime, what will we do with our lives?

Of one thing I am certain, surrounded by the obscurity which inevitably marks an enterprise like this. Something, some indefinable momentous tragedy is being enacted before our eyes, something to be endured, to be lived through, something that will exact courage, steadiness and the modest will to save what can be salvaged of human decency. But what is to be saved, and how?

The answer to that question eludes the dominations and powers,

the king's armies, the king's men. Politicians, churchmen, judges, punishers and rewarders and guardians of values and properties, nearly all of them are moving in the wrong direction, acting on the wrong diagnosis. They cannot keep their own house, they cannot keep their churches, they cannot keep their courts, their schools. They cannot keep the world.

A long meantime, a long hiatus between death and birth, a long loneliness. What might we not create for the future, if we somehow see this period through, live in the breach, consent to be cut down to size, as only the imprisoned or the hunted are cut down, are forced to confront our poverty and wretchedness, are denied access to the public street, to the light of day, to free movement and discourse? Forced to come upon other resources, other ways of communication, other friends?

One must not waste so precious an opportunity.

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In order to bring such things to pass, it is of first import, I would think, to be able to pray.

We were driving into New York on that fateful dawn of 21st April, to leave my brother Philip and David Eberhardt at St Gregory's rectory. They were to spend the day in solitude, preparing for the public event of the night, their 'surfacing'. It was a cheerless dawn, a dose of cold comfort after three glorious days of 'life together'. We pulled up to the kerb, Philip reached around from the front seat to embrace me. Then he said simply, 'My New Testament's somewhere back there. Pass it over, will you?' We did; he took it and went in. Three hours later, the two were led out in handcuffs by the Storm Troopers of Public Order.

Olé, Philip! That paperback testament, thumbed, annotated in a script I remember, dog-eared, always at hand, the crucial book in the right hands; those few sayings, that life and death; the Man we cannot do without!

Now Philip is in prison. There were hearings to reduce sentences (six years for himself and Tom Lewis, for pouring blood on draft files). The sentence of Lewis was cut in half, to run concurrently with the penalty for Catonsville. But in Philip's case, no reduction. In his case, too, as of this date, high security confinement as an added penalty; visitors, mail, movement, under the screws.¹ He must be thought of, not as a common political prisoner, but a hostage on ice, a hot prisoner of war paying in an altogether special way for altogether special gifts, talents, fibre, plain-spokenness, good humour, courage, the glance and light of steel, the play of

¹In a private letter, Fr Berrigan writes: 'Philip finally precipitated a crisis at Lewisburg where he was in high security and being mightily harassed; really kept, as they did not hesitate to tell him, as a hostage for my continued caper. He refused to work, was placed in solitary with D. Eberhardt, and began a fast there. After some two weeks, negotiations and pressure brought some relief, though whether they will consent to his being sent to low security work camp (the legal disposition of all non-violent resisters) still remains an open question. By their standards, he is certainly a dangerous man. . . .'—H.McC.

wit; a better man than his captors, a bigger man than his prosecutors, a juster man than justice and the minions of justice.

What indeed are the public powers to do with such a man? The question arises, a source of unease not merely to the State. In another time and place, Philip might well be in another sort of prison; an ecclesiastical one, perhaps. For it must be admitted that he is simply incorrigible; he cannot make his peace with the powers of this world, he cannot be brought to terms, or bought off or edged around to this or that working compromise. A most discomfiting man! I said to myself, when he had been convicted and refused bail, and it was evident that the long haul of prison was to be his lot; he will never in his lifetime know normal times again.

My heart sank when I said it, knowing it for the truth. It was part of the agony of those months when I was still at Cornell, shuttling uneasily between campus and prison visits, tasting my freedom like gall on the tongue, scarcely comforted by the knowledge that my own jig would some day be up. How much easier now to bear his imprisonment, that of David, Tom, John, the Melvilles, George, Michael Cullen and all the host of the good and gentle and strong—living from day to day as I must, patching up a life as best I may, maybe making it, maybe not . . .

But I started to say: it was that Testament got us both into trouble up to our jaw bones, and beyond. We didn't talk about it much; but we are both hard-core cases, impenitent (as the courts said), unrehabilitable (if there is such a word). Something stubborn as hell, something not to be trifled with or bartered away, a line not to be crossed in us. A territoriality of the spirit. Something in having the original Celtic mad hatter for da, something on the German side; take a good deal of poverty, discipline, the survival tactics develop early. You never know! Where a great deal went wrong, something was bound to go right; it was a law of averages. What went right, then?

The Testament. It kept hitting home. Even the Jesuits put it to you powerfully; you never had another such family, such masters, such a tone and aura of mind. Jesus! He was never quite respectable. He could not be academicized out of existence; the spit and polish of graduate studies, the honours and decorations of mind, university élan, the big play for pride of place. There were always those ragged fools somewhere at the back of the mind, those literalists, fundamentalists really, urging on the ancient clumsy game. Subversive. Hidden springs. Saints. Subjects of awe, declamations, feast days, the Big Ones, almost (never quite) dead; better off dead. But never quite.

There is nothing so hard as trying to convey the nature of those things one lives by. You scoop up the waters where they surface, bathe your face in them, drink them in. What are they like, where do they come from, what do they taste like? What does water taste like?

I know what the man is like who tastes them, draws on them, returns to them. I know what they do for him, how he struggles on where all seems lost, how he can turn his humour, his life—around. Putting the best face on the worst that can happen; and given the times, knowing that the worst inevitably happens; those chickens returning to roost, their bloody tragic cacophony, what they see and can scarcely bear, there in the edge of darkness.

We learned to pray. We never quite unlearned it, never unravelled it. The world, that worked us over so thoroughly, like a tough in a foul alley, never quite got to that pocket. We would come out of the misadventure sans trousers, sans identity tickets, sans honour and good name; sans tomorrow. The bugger had fists and a knife to boot. But so what?

I sit in a backyard on a June day, bucking away at an old typewriter, feeling as though my hands had fallen off at the wrists. What bright words come winging to you now? What happens when the kingdom is pulled from under you?

One is unsure. Is he the last of the pink flamingoes, guarded, fed, watered with fervour and care, almost the last of a species? Or is he the first—of something? a premature morsel, red as calves' liver, gingerly kept under oxygen, the embryonic New Man?

Time will tell, maybe. It will very likely not tell Phil or me, or those others who are trying with all their main, to see something through; something the other end of which is opaque as stone. But there remains, hauntingly, a question of communion, of connexion. We can see no good reason for breaking off from that. We need a tradition, that life-stream, those springs; without them, we were lesser men, we were hardly men at all.

I find it hard to try and conjure up a 'typical day' of Phil at Lewisburg prison. The mind boggles before the image of that free spirit, bound to a clumsy tread-mill. 'Joyous as always', a friend writes, 'even in that place.' Of course. He will be astute as ever to make a point, mindful as ever of the needs and griefs of others, ironic as ever in face of the mad law-'n'-order technicians. He will draw his resolve from a deep well, he will not be broken.

Is one not allowed to mourn the loss of such a man to public life today, to the renewal of the Church in the image of Christ's hope? Of course, of course; one's grief runs very deep, runs over. But I think of him, I think of Bobby Kennedy dead, I think of Ted Kennedy thrashing about in the net of political meliorism (inert ideas, dead language, wrong moves), the last of the decent men. . . . And I am convinced; we have chosen something better, cost what it may, lead where it may. Or I think of churchmen, priests, Jesuits, campaigning for political office; and I think: what part, in God's name, do we have with that?

On the other hand. The political consequences of giving one's life and liberty in a time of public crisis—those are largely unknown,

a *terra incognita* of the spirit. Another way of suggesting: Christianity is largely untried, after the one First Instance, whose life ended with that abrupt levelling of which the law is perennially capable; and whose rehabilitation, they say, was due to an act of God. Or so they say, in documents whose literal truth is debated to this day, and hotly, among believers. In any case, an Exemplar quite literally too hot to handle; that Book burns the hands which dare to open it, strikes blind the man who hears; *Tolle, Lege*.

One is probably correct in resolving to move gingerly among the Big Claims, Imperatives, Absolutes, Imperators, Con-Men Earthly and Celestial, whose flourishing the times so encourage. But were the Pope a hundred times worse than the present tortured incumbent, and the American Chief of State an even more sinister figure of twisted power and intent, the question would still remain—after all distractions and curses and kings and captains. Where is a man to stand? How shall we stand with one another?

It is such a question as to bring a man to his knees, literally. My brother is in prison, I am—where? I know only that an old mould is broken, our lives are reduced in the utmost. We are not permitted to die where we were born, in that landscape, in that country, in that church. The genial and generous American State, that smiles upon its churchmen, grants them life-long exemptions from taxes, from wielding of weapons, from the fury of distant battles—that State has declared an end of patience with men like ourselves. We are no more to be tolerated than other felons; we have crossed a line, and shall pay for it. The hunt is on; justice shall be vindicated.

Only the sorriest of fools would fail to take such a fate seriously. For the hunt is deadly serious, in its intent and method. And whatever the outcome, a question, a personal question, remains; a question of resources. Shall we be able, in such times as deserve the name of nightmare, a nightmare in which we are cast as unlikely actors, shall we retain some semblance of sanity, some hope, some joy? The question pushes hard as a gloved fist, aimed at the face. I know too well, out of the experience of too many years, what I can count on, of myself. The stock-taking is not such as to grant assurance; I will not depress other spirits with the sorry details. But somewhere in our history, in our hearts, one Man lives, beyond all denials and betrayals. He does not die; finally. With Him, we stand; or fall, as the case may come out. We do not know; but He is the flesh and bone of our act of faith.

I tremble, my bones turn to water, when I consider the course upon which my life has entered; and those other lives which are dearer to me than my own, upon whom I have laid a heavy burden of grief. Yes. It must all be taken into account, jot and tittle, accepted, embraced; I dwell in a narrow room, I may not open that door marked 'Tomorrow', I have no more prescience or foreknowledge

than a dumb beast. The majestic Buddha is a dog in the dust; and what was it the servant song said—‘A worm and no man’? Evening falls, the sparrows chatter in the leaves, the green grapes swell in the warm air, the roses hem me in, a baroque glory. What now?

I must return, a dunce to a harsh master, a grown man to the womb of his mother; return, dust to dust. The still point of the turning world. Consider the lilies of the field. Take up your cross.

On Dogmas and World-Views¹

by Hugo Meynell

I want to present a difficulty, and to commend a solution to that difficulty. The difficulty is one which frequently troubles Catholics and (to a lesser extent) other Christians; the solution to it is neither original nor new, but I think deserves wider publicity than it has had up to the present time.

The difficulty is as follows. Catholic Christians, and also many Christians of Protestant or Eastern communions, hold that the assent of believers is demanded to some doctrines, like those of the Trinity and of the divinity of Jesus Christ, which have been solemnly defined by the Church in the past. Now the definitions are couched in terms derived from earlier philosophical world-views. So, if we assent to the doctrines, it seems that we are thereby committed to the world-views which provided the terms in which they were defined.²

It seems that the believer is faced with the following dilemma: to reject the world-views as outmoded and therefore to reject the doctrines; or to accept the doctrines and with them the world-views. No Catholic can really accept either alternative; to accept the second is to be stuck for ever in the conceptual scheme of the ancient world, while to accept the first is, logically, to cease to be a Catholic. ‘Conservatives’ in the Catholic Church tend to emphasize the importance of maintaining the doctrines, and divert attention from the apparent consequence that the outdated world-views must also be retained. ‘Progressives’ tend to emphasize the im-

¹I am grateful to Fr Fergus Kerr, O.P., for his comments on an early draft of this article.

²As Whitehead put it, ‘you cannot claim absolute finality for a dogma without claiming a commensurate finality for the sphere of thought within which it arose. If the dogmas of the Christian Church from the second to the sixth centuries express *finally and sufficiently* [my italics] the truths concerning the topics about which they deal, then the Greek philosophy of that period had developed a system of ideas of equal finality’ (*Religion in the Making*, C.U.P., 1926, p. 130). More recently, Leslie Dewart has stated roundly that ‘no Christian today (unless he can abstract himself from contemporary experience) . . . can intelligently believe that in the one hypostasis of Jesus two real natures are united’ (*The Future of Belief*, London, 1966, p. 150).