

Tribulations of Two Priests . . .

AMERICA IS HARD TO FIND

By Daniel Berrigan

Doubleday. 191 pp. \$5.95

ABSURD CONVICTIONS, MODEST HOPES

Conversations after Prison

with Lee Lockwood

By Daniel Berrigan

Random House. 277 pp. \$7.95

By GARRY WILLS

"THE DYING LION wounds the earth." J. Edgar Hoover was desperate over Father Daniel Berrigan, and struck out blindly. His best weapon, as always, was some non-criminal weak point in his enemies—in this case, the indiscreet letters, adolescent with radical boast, that were passed back and forth between the imprisoned Father Philip Berrigan (Dan's brother) and Sister Elizabeth McAlister. Hoover's courier was another man whose weakness he was tickling to

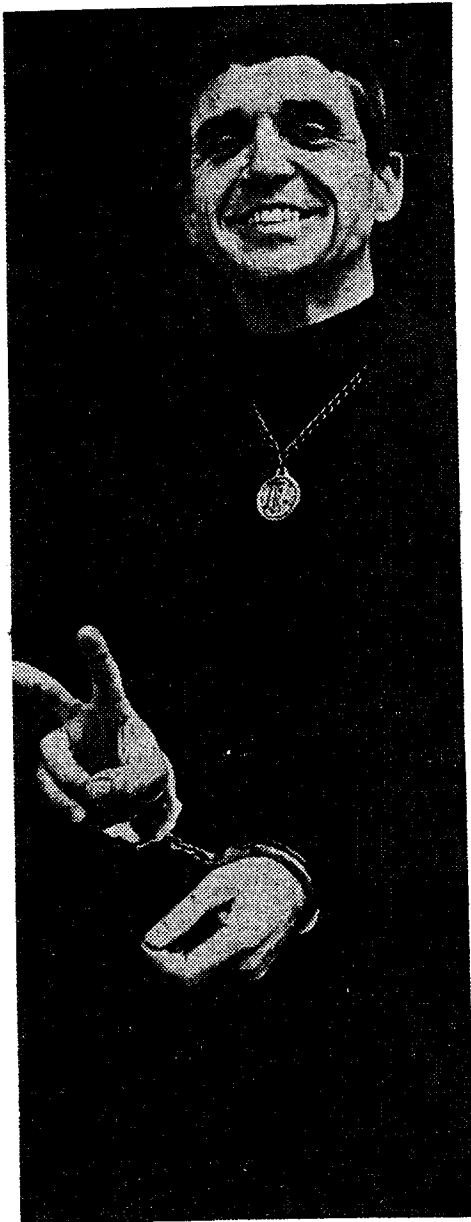
GARRY WILLS is the author of the just published *Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt, Prophecy, and Radical Religion*, as well as *Nixon Agonistes* and other books.

his purpose—in the process indulging his own flaw, vindictiveness.

Dan Berrigan's intention was clear: to summon up new strengths, trying to defend his brother and the moral effort of so many people, all smeared by the last dying swipe of the lion's paw. He has done this with wit, poetry, risk, effrontery, and an astounding hope. America hard to find? No such luck. It is there in the White House, as in Saigon; it flies over Hanoi, and it patrolled the corridors at Philip's trial in Harrisburg. Berrigan's title reflects his own almost naive patriotism: the belief that the heart of America is good, if we could only find it.

That's the best of all the jokes America plays on Dan Berrigan, and vice versa—that he is a patriot, by instinct and on principle, come of a Midwest family that once had four sons at war and—what was felt by his family to be much the same thing—sisters and cousins in Catholic dozens, scattered through various convents and seminaries). He is the rebuffed patriot, endlessly re-wooing, undiscourageable.

And he is as orthodox in theology as he is patriotic in politics. It is a mark of conservative views in America that they should be feared most of all by our deracinated Right. What scares "old line" Catholics in Berrigan is the fact that he takes ancient concepts seriously—expiation, penance, the communion of saints, the two Adams. Just as we all share Adam's burden, we are asked to share in the expiatory sufferings of Jesus. Right-wing Catholics, like their secular fellows, refuse to recognize any compensatory obligation to the deprived, saying they do not believe in societal guilt—as if the notion of original sin were a liberal invention. They praised the winnowing process of competition and the economics of natural selection—as if they had never read the Gospels, in which the last shall be first, and the Best will be crucified. These are themes



that recur, revived, everywhere in Berrigan's writing—all Gospel; therefore scary. *Get him.*

The lengths to which Hoover went to get him, with the grudging cooperation of the Justice Department and the White House, are told in several recent books, most thoroughly in *The FBI and the Berrigans*. Berrigan's own long taped interviews with Lee Lockwood tell what it is

like to live under the shadow of unchecked official might, and what price Berrigan paid (in prison) for tweaking the lion's nose. Berrigan tells as much as he can, at this point, of the legendary four months he spent dodging in and out of public glare and impenetrable shadow (impenetrable, anyway, to the FBI, despite hundreds of agents' efforts). The account of his prison days is an addition to that growing literature on what we do to those we lock up: completing the formation of criminals, getting "tough" enough with them to stamp out what remains of their humanity; breeding jackals to prey later on our national corpse. Berrigan's efforts, and those of this brother—to teach scripture, give counsel, and encourage these men—are described very movingly, each brother holding the other up as a sign of hope:

Some of the young resisters have snuck off their jobs in order to be with me in the library for a half-hour or so, to share the fact that Phil has gone, and gone for good. And suddenly, in the midst of our mourning, here's big Philip in the doorway, grinning like risen Jesus and saying "Anybody got a cup of coffee here?" And we wheel around, looking for all the world like guys who'd been keeping the tomb all week. Here he is again! And we quickly drag him over—embraces, great laughter and all that. They had changed their purported minds, and we had eight hours of grace.

America Is Hard to Find preserves a mixture of Berrigan's messages, poems, taped greetings from underground and behind bars; a breathless period when his prose grew leaner and more lyric; the progress reports of a man who, hoping to find the country he loves, was taking the first steps toward creating it—an incredible exertion. *America is hard to save.*

The FBI and the Berrigans

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mit that crime as part of the general conspiracy that included the kidnaping and bombing.

• In August 1971, the FBI arrested a number of people, most of them Catholic radicals, in the act of raiding federal offices in Camden, New Jersey. Nelson and Ostrow mention the raid, but not that the informer, Robert Hardy, later said the group decided against carrying out the raid; and that he, following the advice of the FBI and the Western White House, assumed leadership of the group and convinced them they should pull it off.

In addition to the investigation, the authors have also written about the philosophy and general background of the Berrigan brothers, Philip, now impris-

oned, and Daniel, who like his brother, had been sentenced for destruction of draft board records.

Strangely—in a book entitled *The FBI and the Berrigans*—the authors haven't interviewed any Berrigans, except for some very brief comments from Father Philip Berrigan: a few one-liners obtained when a marshal wasn't looking during a recess in the courtroom and a few paragraphs he wrote after the defense had rested. Daniel Berrigan's ideas are described in detail through other people's words, but there is no indication that the authors talked to him—despite the fact that he has been out of prison since February.

Most of the lengthy material about the brothers is gathered from other works, principally those of Francine du Plessix

Gray, author of *Divine Disobedience*, and Loy Miller, who wrote a newspaper series on the brothers and the Harrisburg case in 1971.

Also, they tell only the briefest of versions of what happened inside the jury during its two-month sequestration and the one week of deliberations. Surely an exploration of how 12 middle Americans in rural Pennsylvania came to vote 10-2 for acquittal would be significant.

Nelson and Ostrow have the right fix on the case: it was a sad event for the FBI and sadder still for those persons—Sister McAlister, Father Berrigan and other defendants—who had to listen to their expressions of affection for each other, and their occasionally irrational ideas for protest against an irrational

war turned into a blueprint for a sensational, violent crime of which they say their philosophy of nonviolence prohibited serious consideration.

Perhaps the authors are most insightful in their conclusion:

In the Berrigan case there was a special lesson: So powerful had the director of the FBI become that the President of the United States, who frequently reminded his countrymen that he was a lawyer, chose to ignore Hoover's blatant violation of the Bill of Rights. Instead, the Nixon Administration prosecuted in a vain attempt to show the FBI director had his facts right. When a nation that prides itself on being a system of laws—not men—permits itself to be so corrupted, the portents are ominous.