

Books of The Times

D. Berrigan's Artful Capers

By HERBERT MITGANG

AMERICA IS HARD TO FIND. By Daniel Berrigan. 191 pages. Doubleday. \$5.95.

ABSURD CONVICTIONS, MODEST HOPES. By Daniel Berrigan, in *Conversations After Prison With Lee Lockwood*. 227 pages. Random House. \$7.95.

"What a marvelous century it might have been," Daniel Berrigan says toward the end of one of the two Berrigan books in this oblong pulpit today. "What we might have done with our lives!" In prison or out, in print or on some forgotten barricade, the Rev. Daniel Berrigan and the Rev. Philip Berrigan keep flashing signals of peace and telling the world that it still might be a marvelous century. They are living answers to the question, "What hath John XXIII wrought? They took *Pacem in Terris* seriously, and have been in trouble ever since. The Norwegian Parliament has accepted their nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize and, politically remote as that appears, it calls up a parallel to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's Nobel difficulties with his country. Unlike Philip Berrigan, the Soviet novelist is not locked up though his words are. The vision of Daniel delivering a Nobel address while Philip is in a Federal penitentiary would appear as either the ultimate embarrassment or ripoff.

Agents as Birdwatchers

By the same token, the recollection of F.B.I. agents disguised as birdwatchers stalking Daniel Berrigan can be regarded as police work or comic opera. "America Is Hard to Find" includes his notes from the underground, letters from Danbury penitentiary, and random comments and poems about war and peace, Vietnam and the United States. The same subjects are probed in "Absurd Convictions, Modest Hopes," a well-organized series of recorded conversations with Lee Lockwood, the journalist who collaborated with Berrigan on a documentary film, "The Holy Outlaw." Together, the books flesh out the ideas and emotions of the leading activist antiwar priest who regards himself as a political prisoner in the land of the free.

The saving grace is language. Berrigan is a stylist; his putdowns of the Establishment (church, college, country and others in lockstep to the cadences of war) come through readably and even humorously. In a poem, he flies from New York to Cornell by—the perfect name—"Slowhawk airlines." He describes the Air Force as "the *haute bourgeoisie* of the militarized American Seventies, its decisions clean and me-

ticulous: the planning room on high, the charnel house far below." Death is delivered in Vietnam, he writes, as "the last spasm of legitimacy," using "the debased methods of the military Dispos-All." And perhaps his most famous line: "I have burned papers instead of children."

The Cornell caper in which Berrigan escaped under the noses of the F.B.I. agents and informers is disclosed with fresh details. He finds it "delicious" that he borrowed a papier-mâché and burlap figure from the Bread and Puppet Theater and, disguised as one of the 12 Apostles, bobbed out of the college auditorium before thousands, and got away in a panel truck. Lee Lockwood intrudes neatly with telling questions covering some of the same territory. "And you came out on the other side of the looking-glass?" Berrigan replies, "Yes, wondrously. The next thing I remember vividly is speeding through the dark with a deflated puppet in the back, now bereft of me, and three or four of us chortling our way into the woods."

He adds that exposing the F.B.I. by his writings was part of the counterattack he mounted with the only weapon at his command—public knowledge. "I'm sure it was an added embarrassment," he says, "because people were very interested in the fact that the F.B.I. was using the tactics on priests and nuns that they had been using on blacks and students since Kent and Jackson State."

Lesson for the Public

Exposure helped at the Harrisburg trial (Berrigan in a family letter calls it "Harrass-berg") for, as it turned out, a jury in what was considered F.B.I.-Republican-Law-and-Order country would not buy the spectacle of an informer upholding a cockamamie plot supported by the White House and Attorney General. "Absurd Convictions, Modest Hopes" gives new insight about the trial of the Harrisburg Seven.

Philip Berrigan wished it to be more of an antiwar lesson for the public; the brilliant team of defense attorneys felt sympathy for this aim but had a professional obligation to break down Washington's case and free their defendants. The attorneys succeeded and helped to stem the tide against new prosecutions designed to curb dissent. But the teach-in for the public was mild by comparison. The media never recognized the full historic challenge to liberties in the case. While the Government was humiliated, the Vietnam war continued in greater fury, not because of the Harrisburg verdict but in spite of it.

In these freewheeling, provocative books, Daniel Berrigan challenges the reader to link Harrisburg and Vietnam: "Domestic Vietnamization is complete. The pacification of peacemakers is successful. The war has come home. Before the overwhelming American assault on the rights and lives of innocent peoples, we Americans are as powerless and as expendable as the Vietnamese."



The New York Times

The Rev. Daniel J. Berrigan