

Catholics Are Shaken by Berrigan Charges

By DOUGLAS ROBINSON

Accusations that several anti-war Roman Catholic clergy plotted to kidnap a high Government official and bomb Federal installations in Washington have set off a shock wave in the church that apparently will not soon ebb.

In addition to increasing the political and moral ferment in various religious orders and on Catholic college campuses, the charges have forced many rank-and-file Catholics to examine, even momentarily, the "theology of peace."

The church hierarchy—the cardinals, archbishops and bishops—are reluctant to discuss the impact of what has been termed the Catholic New Left, but there is not much doubt that they are extremely aware of the unrest in priestly ranks.

"The Cardinal would rather not be interviewed on this matter since he doesn't quite know which end is up," said Msgr. Eugene V. Clark, the secretary to Terence Cardinal Cook of New York, when asked recently if the prelate would comment on the issue.

Both Are in Prison

"He feels that no matter what he said, it would end up applying to the Berrigans," the Monsignor said.

The Berrigans, of course, are the locus of the Catholic New Left. Both are priests and both are now serving sentences in the Federal Correctional Institution at Danbury, Conn., for participating in the destruction of draft board records at Catonsville, Md., in the spring of 1968.

The Rev. Philip F. Berrigan, a member of the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart, is a bluff, handsome man of 47 years. He stands accused of plotting to kidnap Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's assistant for national security affairs, and to blow up heating tunnels in Federal buildings.

His older brother, Daniel J. Berrigan, 49, who belongs to the Society of Jesus, is an intense man who is able to exercise an almost magnetic hold over his listeners. He is a writer and poet.

It was Father Philip Berrigan and five others—a nun, two priests, a former priest and a student—who were accused of the actual plotting. Father Daniel Berrigan, three nuns, a former priest and a college professor were among those named

as co-conspirators but not defendants.

The charges against the Berrigans and the others were first made public by J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation last Nov. 27 in testimony before a Senate Appropriations subcommittee. Indictments were handed down by a Federal grand jury in Harrisburg, Pa., last month.

Both the Berrigans, in a statement issued by their attorney, William M. Kuntzler of New York, denied the charges, saying that the "objective is a simple but deadly one—to destroy the peace movement by creating caricatures of those who oppose the war in Southeast Asia."

The initial jailing of the Berrigans, the later statement by Mr. Hoover and the indictments caused a flurry in Roman Catholic circles. Many Catholics across the country were put in the position of having to decide whether they did or did not support the Berrigans.

There was another reaction, too. The day after the Hoover testimony last November, several priests, temporarily calling themselves The Hoover Vacuum Conspiracy, destroyed draft records in Union, N. J., and in Jersey City.

A Mixed Reaction

Among the Jesuits of Father Daniel Berrigan's home order, there was a mixed reaction. Some of the older men angrily urged that he be thrown out of the order. Others, primarily the younger priests who have supported the Berrigans, voiced the belief that the charges could not possibly be true.

Some of the younger Jesuit priests in the Northeast, where the Berrigans have their strength, have become private detectives and are sleuthing about trying to find out what really happened.

The official response on the part of the Jesuits, however, has been one of restraint and the enunciation of the belief that a man is innocent until proven guilty.

A spokesman for the General Curia of the Society of Jesus in Rome said that "the case of Father Daniel Berrigan is under judicial process and this is not the time to make any statement one way or the other."

'We Shall See'

"We shall see what evidence is produced," he went on. "The Jesuit Provincials of the New York and New England Prov-

inces have visited Father Dan in prison and have reported to Superior General Pedro Arrupe."

Privately, the spokesman said that if the latest charges were proved, Father Arrupe would have to make a decision on Father Daniel Berrigan's status within the order.

He described the priest as "really a poet in the first place" and as a man who had caused "quite a few headaches in the past." The new charges, he said, came as a surprise to the order, adding that "I hope they came as a surprise also to Dan Berrigan."

The Provincial of the Society of Jesus of New England, the Rev. William G. Guindon, wrote to Father Daniel Berrigan last August volunteering his assistance if he could be of any help to the priest or his brother during their imprisonment at Danbury.

"May I write to welcome you to the New England Province—neither facetiously nor with precious words—but simply as greeting a suffering and prophetic brother in our midst?"

'Fraternal Support'

Father Guindon enclosed a "letter of fraternal support" from the New England Province Forum, a group of Jesuits elected to advise the Provincial on policy matters. The letter had been voted on late last spring.

In addition to the "message of fraternal solidarity," the letter, which was signed by Father Guindon and the Rev. Robert F. O'Brien, chairman of the forum, said that "your actions and your words have touched us."

"You make us confront our own consciences to ask what we are doing to build peace among His people," the letter went on. "For some, your actions are a stumbling block; for others, a challenge to follow. To us, you are a brother Jesuit, part of our hope, part of our joy in sharing life and service."

There has also been reaction on Catholic campuses. The entire winter issue of The Holy Cross Quarterly, edited by a Jesuit, is given over to articles about the Berrigans and their cause. Only one article is outspokenly critical.

Support Voiced for Nun

At Marymont College in Tarrytown, N. Y., the student Senate, representing 1,100 Catholic women, gave a vote of confidence to Sister Elizabeth McAlister, a codefendant in the

kidnap-bomb case. Sister Elizabeth has been suspended with pay from her post as an art history instructor pending the outcome of a trial.

Father Philip Berrigan has received some comfort from the members of his order, the Josephite Fathers. In a letter to him last October, the Very Rev. Matthew J. O'Rourke, Vicar General of the Josephites, voiced his support in the hour of need.

"Your imprisonment remains a testimony to the strength of your convictions and your fidelity to conscience," the letter read in part. "More than this, the direction of your life and your voice have touched us all."

Some Criticism

"None of us can avoid the vital questions of war and peace," the letter continued. "Each of us must face the issue of the rights of conscience as related to responsibilities within our Society. The questions your own decisions have posed for us have helped to clarify both our Christian and Josephite vocation."

It has not been support and comfort for the Berrigans, however, in all quarters. One of their most vocal critics in the Church is the Rev. Andrew M. Greeley, a Chicago priest who writes often on a number of topics.

In the winter issue of The Holy Cross Quarterly, Father Greeley, who is not a Jesuit, compares Father Daniel Berrigan with the "self-righteous fanatics" who have headed other revolutionary movements.

"There isn't much doubt from the various press conferences Father Berrigan participated in before the F. B. I. finally hunted him down that he denies the legitimacy of American society and is calling for its destruction," Father Greeley wrote.

"He does not yet advocate violence though there certainly is a progression in his thought toward that direction," he continued. "But the logic leading toward violence in Berrigan's thinking is inevitable."

"Make no mistake about it. The self-righteous moralism displayed in the Berrigan interviews simply will not tolerate the immorality of those who dare disagree with him. If Daniel Berrigan were in power, I would be in jail—and not for destroying government property either, but because I was immoral."