
Catholics

by Pat McSweeney, witness to the Berrigan trial

There are Catholic and there are Catholics

There are Catholics who choose to live in Catholic Worker communities, and there are Catholics who are mesmerized mostly by materialistic perks. There are Catholics who speak and work against US militarism and Catholics who condone the presence of ROTC on Catholic campuses. Contrasts beyond count.

Four Catholics who merit public attention, but who have been sidelined by the mainstream media, both secular and religious, were sentenced in March by Judge James T. Smith, once named “Man for All Seasons” by the St. Thomas More Society of Maryland, a Catholic lawyers group.

One of the four in federal prison is Phil Berrigan, about whom Francis Boyle, widely-respected professor of international law (who was not permitted to testify during the trial) wrote: “Phil is the MORAL CONSCIENCE of our generation. Quite obviously, Smith fully intends to send Phil to prison after this sham of a kangaroo court . . . Phil will probably die in prison. . . Phil’s death in prison will be the mark of Cain on the forehead of Smith forever.”

Phil Berrigan is a married priest, a prophet, who lives and breathes the message of the Gospel more fully than some priests who remain in Rome’s good graces. A veteran of World War II, Phil lives in accordance with American principles that are wantonly betrayed by the economically and politically powerful. Intrepid follower of Christ, he is excluded by some of his own Churchmen. Solid citizen, he’s imprisoned by his country-

men. Endless ironies.

Why prison? On December 18, 2000, four Americans – Philip Berrigan, Susan Crane, Rev. Steve Kelly, S.J., and Elizabeth Walz – took part in an “action” called “PLOWSHARES vs. DEPLETED URANIUM.” Following Plowshares tradition, and complying with Isaiah’s admonition to beat swords into plowshares, the four hammered, and poured blood, onto two A-10

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Peace activist Philip Berrigan, who has already spent nine of the past 30 years in jail for acts of civil disobedience, has been sentenced to another 30 months behind bars for damaging warplanes.

Here is a Christian who truly walks the radical way of the cross. Phil Berrigan overturns the tables of injustice and summons us to love our enemies and worship the God of peace. Like Thoreau, Ghandi, King, and Dorothy Day, Phil Berrigan exemplifies courage. He is both an inspiration and a challenge to everyone. Here is a true hero of our turbulent times.

bombers at an air base in Maryland. The reason these four Americans felt compelled to act, risking arrest, is explained in excerpts from Phil Berrigan’s powerful statement entitled, “The Trial of Depleted Uranium.”

“Lest the reader suffer confusion over the title, let it be said – there isn’t any trial. No indictment, no trial. Nor is there likely to be one. . . .No trial, despite a staggering total of dead in Iraq – as high as two million since 1991 – the harvest of American sanctions and Depleted Uranium. No trial, despite the deaths of hundreds of American veterans of Desert Storm (over 400) victims of cancer, respiratory, liver, and kidney failure. No trial, despite the chronic illness of 110,000 veterans, all of them uninformed about the deadliness of Depleted Uranium. No trial, despite the pitiable appearance of “jellyfish” babies,

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“No trial by the media, no trial by pulpits, no trial on campuses, no trial by politicians, no trial by public opinion. . . .”
“The volume of silence over these hellish weapons is surreal, numbing, stupefying. How to explain it?”

“Certainly, in a 55 year love affair with the bomb, Americans have not measured the cost of this idolatry – spiritual numbing, social denial, moral paralysis. . . . Certainly, the War Department has become a past master at suppressing the media. . . . We still bomb Iraq – monasteries, grain fields, little shepherds and their flocks – but few know about it. The war-makers understand that suppression of key facts, lies, and disinformation leaves the public uncertain and confused. Confused especially about what to do.

“What to do? There’s the rub. . . .How about “loving enemies” as Christ did? . . . How about reminding sick and dying Gulf veterans, in fact all GIs, that the Pentagon judges them expendable? . . .How about a public expression of faith and sanity in a society that appears to have lost both?”

“Such concerns impelled us to cut into Lockheed Martin. . . on December 19. . . to disarm two A-10 Warthogs. These “tank busters”. . . (are) gunships built around a 20 millimeter, seven barrel Gatling gun which spews out 3,900 shells per minute.

“ . . . Arguably the most devastating weapons system yet fashioned, . . . the Warthog is an engine of Hell – it has no right to exist.



“ . . .”Thou shalt not kill!’ is absolutely elementary and pivotal. . . .

“We take no credit for putting Depleted Uranium on trial. God’s law has already found it guilty. International law has already found it a war crime. . . .”

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And so it came to pass that Phil, Susan, Steve, and Liz were behind bars until their trial in March. The evening before the trial, during the Festival of Hope (another Plowshares tradition) Anabel Dwyer, international lawyer and member of the defense team said: “DOD (Department of Defense) reacts viciously to this Plowshares action because P v. DU (Plowshares vs. Depleted Uranium) have exposed the Pentagon purveyors. . . .

“ . . . DOD itself also violates the basic laws of war. . . .which prohibit the threat or use of any weapon that poisons. . . .” The realities of DU and its uses, thus brought to light, allow us to meaningfully articulate what exactly has gone terribly wrong with our society. . . .”

On the second day of the trial, the prosecutor led military personnel through endless hours of irrelevant minutia that spawned inane remarks such as, “Every night we put the aircraft to bed.”

But on the third day, any reference to DU by defendant Susan Crane and expert witness Doug Rokke (Army officer and physicist) evoked a staccato mantra: “Objection!” “Sustained.” “Objection!” “Sustained.” “Objection!” “Sustained.”

Enough was enough. Defendant Susan Crane suddenly stood: “We cannot put on a defense about the dangers of depleted uranium and our rights and duties under international law!” Ignoring the judge’s frantic shouting, Susan went on: “We have been denied our right to testify about these topics. We have been denied our expert witnesses. . . . We will not participate in what amounts to a legal gag order.” Phil Berrigan added: “The courts are identified with the Pentagon and the government. There is no way nonviolent defendants can get a serious hearing in this or any other courtroom.” With the judge shouting, supporters singing, and officers gesturing, the courtroom was cleared.

The jury was not allowed to hear from Doug Rokke because he might have voiced some of the points contained in the following brief excerpts from his courageous statement entitled, “Use of Depleted Uranium: A Crime Against Humanity.”

“Depleted uranium (U-238) is made from uranium hexafluoride, which is the non-fissionable byproduct of the uranium enrichment process. . . . DU munitions, in contrast to previous reports, are neither tipped nor coated with DU but are solid uranium 238. . . .

“Even though medical care, environmental remediation, and DU training are required by law, and by DOD regulations, the United States Department of Defense (DOD) is still refusing: 1) to provide medical care for all DU casualties, and 2) to complete environmental remediation. . . .

“ . . . Reported, and verified, health effects of radioactive and heavy metal poison include: reactive airway disease, neurological abnormalities, kidney stones, kidney

pain, rashes, vision degradation, night vision losses, gum tissue problems, lymphoma and other forms of cancer, neuro-psychological disorders, uranium in semen, sexual dysfunction, birth defects in offspring, and death.

“ . . . The response to this crime against God and humanity is clear: . . . Use of depleted uranium munitions must be banned.”

The fourth day was for sentencing. “The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven” – but not in the courtroom of Circuit Judge James T. Smith, who tripled and quadrupled the prosecutor’s recommendations. Phil got 30 months; Susan and Steve 27; Liz 18. “Liberty and justice for all?” Militarists imprison peacemakers. And we Americans are silent.

For their courage in confronting evil, we salute members of the legal defense team: former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Anabel Dwyer, and Jonathan Katz. For their Christian example, we support Liz Walz, 33, founder of a Catholic Worker House in Philadelphia; Susan Crane 56, mother of two grown sons, life-long friend to the vulnerable; and Steve Kelly, Jesuit, 50, priest for the poor in Sudan and Latin America. They are the kinds of Catholics we were once taught to emulate.

A priest forever, Phil Berrigan, 76, continues his ministry on the “inside,” where he is affectionately called “Pops,” a variation on the “Yes, Father” of his youth.

On the “outside,” his family participates in Phil’s ministry. His wife, Liz McAlister, lives at Jonah House, nerve center of the peace movement. Their two oldest children have finished college; Frida works as a research associate at the World Policy Institute, connected with The New School for Social Research in New York, and Jerry is living and working at the Catholic Worker House in Duluth, Minnesota. Their youngest, Kate, will begin her second year at Oberlin College in the fall.

Jonah House
1301 Moreland Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21216
or email
disarmnow@erols.com
By telephone: 410.233.6238 or 233.4067.
Mail is important! Write to:
Phil Berrigan, #292-139
Roxbury Correctional Institute
18701 Roxbury Road,
Hagerstown, MD 21746

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After the trial, Anabel Dwyer wrote:
“In the indescribable sadness of Phil Berrigan, Susan Crane, Steve Kelly, and Liz Walz caged and in chains, our primary focus should be placed on love and thanks to them. . . .”

We’ve heard it many times over:
“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”
But what can we do? For a start, we can share this information with everyone we know, and contact political leaders and journalists. Jonah House deserves our help. You can write to:

Steve Kelly, S.J. #292-140,
same address as above.

Susan Crane, #916-999
Maryland Correctional
Institute for Women,
Box 535
Jessup, MD 20794

Liz Walz, #995-376,
200 Court House Court,
Towson, MD 21204

Few nations in history have had a prophet of Phil Berrigan’s stature. With iron intransigency he has stood in the breach leading to nuclear homicide. The state has tried to quash his witness time after time: arrests, lockups, long sentences, all the paraphernalia of intimidation.

PEACE IS THE WAY: WRITINGS ON NONVIOLENCE FROM THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION edited by Walter Wink (Orbis Books, 2000, paperback, \$20.00, ISBN 1-57075-315-6)

The Fellowship of Reconciliation, founded in 1914, is the leading ecumenical peace organization in the United States. The 60 essays in this sterling collection have been taken from its magazine. The selections are organized into seven sections on the vision of peace, witnesses for peace, spirit of peace, interracial justice, nonviolence in action, the path of reconciliation, and a concluding essay by Richard Deats, the editorial director of “Fellowship” magazine. The editor is Walter Wink, author of a trilogy of books on powers and principalities. Most of the major players in the creation and practice of 20th century nonviolence are included in this substantive anthology. In the first section

there are essays by M. K. Gandhi (“So long as the spirit of hate persists in some shape or other, it is impossible to establish peace or to gain our freedom by peaceful effort.”); A. J. Muste (“Pacifism is not a tool or an instrument that you can pick up and lay down, . . . It is, itself, a way of life that grows out of convictions, attitudes, and habits . . .”); and Thomas Merton (“Nonviolence is perhaps the most exacting of all forms of struggle, not only because it demands first of all that one can be ready to suffer evil and even face the threat of death without violent retaliation, but because it excludes mere transient, self-interest from its considerations.”).

Some of the most poignant essays were written by those who have modeled the path of nonviolence — Martin Niemoeller, Martin Luther King, Jr., Daniel Berrigan, Dorothy Day, John Dear, Elise Boulding, Joanna Macy, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Henri J. M. Nouwen.