

Daniel Cossachi and Eric Martin, eds.

The Berrigan Letters: Personal Correspondence between Daniel and Philip Berrigan.

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016. Pp. 340. Pb, \$30.

Denise Levertov's (1923–97) poem, "O Taste and See," was often shared in the peace communities gathered by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. Levertov, a Berrigan friend, and fellow poet, invites human beings to live intensely in this poem. When they encounter "grief, mercy, language, tangerine, weather," for example, they are "to breathe them, bite, savor, chew, swallow, transform into our flesh" ([New York: New Directions, 1964], 53). *The Berrigan Letters: Personal Correspondence Between Daniel and Philip Berrigan*, a labor of love by co-editors Daniel Cossachi and Eric Martin, also extends an invitation to living life well. These letters beckon us to "savor" them as much as they challenge us to "transform" our lives. The last few stanzas of Levertov's poem imagine that its reader is "hungry" and is "plucking the fruit of plum and quince trees" (53). *The Berrigan Letters* also speak to those who are hungry, hungry for a life rooted in family, friendship, community, justice, peacemaking, literature, love, and God.

The book cover's captivating photograph of the brothers Berrigan heralds its contents. Bob Fitch, the photographer who focused his artful lens on Philip and Daniel during their time underground after the Catonsville Nine action, captures two radiant faces smiling at one another and a brother's hand resting comfortably on the shoulder of the other brother. The Berrigans, who, in this photo, as Daniel was later to write in *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine* (New York: Bantam, 1971), had just risked a good number of years in prison and the potential fouling of their good names. And yet, and yet (another of Daniel's touchstone phrases) here they are together, founts of joy and laughter, simply dressed in a late fall's barren landscape but offering warmth and shelter to one another. It is a glorious sight for eyes that are wearied by the bombast, glitz, and violence of the American scene these days.

Elizabeth McAlister pens a deeply moving preface to her beloved husband's (Philip) and brother-in-law's (Daniel) letters. McAlister, a courageous activist, an anchor in the Jonah House community, a well-regarded speaker, and writer well articulates why this text is to be a primer for peace activists and beyond. According to McAlister, "whatever the content, the letters bespeak, above all, a profound love of each other; a deep trust in each other's advice, insight, support; and, as their awareness grew that America was not what the history books recorded, their need to walk together on the journey to become men of the gospel and to do all in their power to make oppression, poverty, war, and weapons rare if not obsolete" (xiii). Is there a desire for what McAlister speaks of burning deeply within each of us? Can we continue to build beloved

communities where we learn how to be human, how to love one another, and how to dismantle social structures rooted in greed and violence and which seem intent on killing every last living thing?

One notes, and wonders, too, if the Berrigan correspondence, in part, grew out of a mother's love. McAlister shares that when each of the six Berrigan brothers left home, "his mother [Freda] made it clear that she expected him to write home, to keep in touch" (xiii). Do we see, in Freda's request, the first steps of life deeply rooted in service to all living beings: stand firm in love and community and don't let go? Further, there is an immediate command: Keep in touch with one another, especially with those who count for nothing in our society. Perhaps it is also Thomas Merton, the monk, and writer, who embodies another of the letter's many themes: ground your work in God and love. McAlister makes mention of an inter-denominational (at least within the Christian community) gathering of lay and religious elders and young people hosted by Merton at his Gethsemani Abbey which "set down solid roots and modeled interreligious collaboration for peace work that blossomed in subsequent decades" (xv).

In the well-written introduction to the text, Cossachi and Martin "hope that those who work for the justice, peace, non-violence, love, healing, and mercy of the gospels and prophets will find something in the pages to sustain them" (xxiii). In the manner of Levertov, the work they have produced invites both savoring and transformation. And, in the manner of the Berrigans, they show, through the letters, the cost of trying to be human in inhuman times. In letters written in January of 1972, for example, both Philip and Daniel speak to the heavy-lifting needed to turn the war-making ship around. Daniel cites a sermon of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which speaks to what King hoped would be said at his funeral. King wanted others to remember him as one who gave himself entirely, even to the point of risking death, so that people may be free, may be fed and housed, and may live in a society permeated by peace and well-being. In writing about the upcoming trial of the Harrisburg 8 (later declared mistrial), Philip speaks of "pushing back the darkness of the time" using non-violence, community-building, and the nurturing of hope and love even though one is doing so behind bars for long periods.

Cossachi and Martin provide ample context for the letters using brief introductions for each chronological set of letters as well as liner notes for individual letters. Their efforts are just enough to give the reader a sense of the "who, what, where, and when's" but not too much to distract one from what centers this text: that we are to see what a life rooted in love might look. Daniel describes such a life quite well in a 1985 birthday letter to Phil: "Thank you from my heart for another year, for all of us. For holding fast to the Promise + the