What, Then, Must We Do?*

Daniel Berrigan, SJ

After that introduction I feel practically rehabilitated tonight, and will so inform the authorities! Though it was a little difficult listening to that very detailed general confession, in any case it is great to be here. I love the title of the weekend, 'What, Then, Must We Do?' It seems to me that places our two great fellow- and sister-Catholics and their lives and deaths squarely in our own hands. It is so practical and so immediate, so concrete as to be of great help. What we are trying to do with the Plowshares movement ([for which my brother] Philip is in prison tonight along with a Jesuit of my community in New York City, Fr Steve Kelly) is to prepare for Good Friday in New York City with the annual Stations of the Cross which will end up at the notorious *SS Intrepid*, a veritable chamber of horrors anchored in the Hudson river. We will do this for the edification of the public, especially the public of New York City, and the young people, showing forth all the horrors that have developed, both nuclear and conventional, since Hiroshima. They bring children by the hundreds there every day to view the military version of the human being, which proves to be rather inhuman, to say the least. So I would think that the legacy of Merton and of Dorothy ('legacy' I am not totally excited about—it seems to me it's a kind of legal term, and perhaps a little bit inert) has to do with a kind of living example that can be passed on hand to hand and heart to heart.

I confessed at the beginning of the evening to long, long hours of trying to figure out what to say to you tonight, what form it should take. I thought the worst thing I could do would be to present some kind of deadly scholarly paper, which has long been my fate both in

* This paper was presented as the Keynote Address at the Symposium marking the 30th anniversary of Thomas Merton's death and the 100th anniversary of Dorothy Day's birth, Rivier College, Nashua, NH, USA, 3 April 1998.

seminary and afterwards and has induced me again and again to swear before God and the human community I would not repeat. It really came to this: I would reflect with you tonight about certain aspects of friendship with these two great Catholics of our lifetime. It's difficult to speak of them. I think friendship is a very inhibiting factor, against a kind of public appearance and writing. Friendships such as this occur once (or, in my lucky case, twice) in a lifetime. Such friends in this world and after this world remain almost entirely beyond words but I'm going to attempt it anyway.

I was literally speechless for a decade after Merton's death. I expect never to have to undergo such a trauma again; at least I would pray such. I think that I would have to compare that to, let's say, the early death of my own brother (which has not occurred); it would be that close to tragedy for myself. So I would like to recall those lives and deaths. Dorothy Day's death came home to me in New York City as a phone call, a very quiet phone call, it was like a breeze going past my ear. Her death was in the course of nature and was long expected. She had grown very frail, a kind of rays of her former self, and this was acceptable in the human condition. With Merton, of course, it was something entirely different. I want to recall for you a few of the events of that dreadful and fateful year of 1968.

In February a friend, Howard Zim, and myself went to Hanoi to bring back three captured airmen. This was in the midst of Johnson's air war over Hanoi, and Johnson had taken this over with great enthusiasm. We were subjected to so-called carpet bombing of Hanoi while we were trying desperately to get the American prisoners out. In any case, I came back to Cornell and in May went on to Catonsville to burn the draft records, the crime that was referred to later in such compassionate terms. In October we were tried and very shortly convicted, and in December—as though that year had not been difficult enough—came the news that Merton had died. We all remember the occasion when lightning strikes. I had come home on the Cornell campus from a late meeting and something in the air struck me that this was probably the coldest, the most bitter night of the year. And at about 11:30 or towards midnight I had turned on the television to get a weather report and found the end of some statement about a monk in Bangkok, Thailand; and wondering what was up, and with a certain amount of urgency and dark feeling, began phoning the news headquarters in New York City. Finally, I got the news that Merton had died that day in Bangkok. I went out and walked in the bitter cold all night and tried to kind of put my life together again. It was a long time coming.

I thought in the course of the evening I would like to intersperse my reflections with some poems that seems to me to bespeak the lives of these two great Catholics. Merton and Day strike me as blessed with enormous balance of mind and heart; a balance which was in no sense static. I rather thought of it under the kind of image of a high-wire act implying risk and quite persistent undergoing of life, whether on the streets of New York or in the Kentucky woods. And the first poem I dedicate to them tonight is called 'Equilibrium':

> Equilibrium favored word of mystics
> Equilibrium in all save love
> A high wire act you wobble along
> one foot firm one in mid air then both at rest
>
> A land creature perhaps
> a saying adverse elements air water fire
> Some few are skilled breathtakingly
> they run that equator as though riding a burning arrow
> in all things knowledgeable above all in love
>
> regard not only the arrow but
> the gradual spent force of the string let go in consequence
> and how grateful the bow at rest
>
> But oh under pressure like profile and bold breath of creator spirit
> twang
> disequilibrium and torn from thin air a song of songs.

When I think of the two dear friends, I think also of discipline. I think of people who come from somewhere and thereby are unable to go somewhere, my limping definition of discipline. I think of this as a totally un-American experience. And I quote Goethe: 'Those without a thousand years of tradition at their disposal are living hand to mouth.' This is the plight of most of our people, I would submit. We are living (from a spiritual point of view) hand to mouth. We don't really know where the next meal is coming from and meantime the diet is not very invigorating. Because of Merton's Zen proclivities and skills I also think of the Buddhist saying, 'After the vision the laundry is to be done'. And with our two beloved friends in mind the poem is called 'Domestic Weather Report':

> No great miracles for us
> Not even small ones,
> nothing of the sort.
> (They're terra incognita, lunar.)
> Omega doesn't walk there, even anonymous.)
>
> From my brothers, my friends
> I come on a dark clue—

eyes that see,
ears taking note,
the heart heard from,
the tongue, a prisoner of conscience
learning truthful words, and
expedient, silence.

Thus (eventual!) the human, difficult, step by step, hard won
glory.[1]

I thought also of nightmares and even of day-mares. And I thought of lives that are able to offer us signs, signs of truth, signs of ability to hear the truth and to speak it. And then I thought of false signs which all of us, it seems to me, have to endure and exorcise. And I thought that the false signs are marked by fever and frivolity. And the true signs are marked by a kind of passionate consistency which I note in both Thomas and Dorothy. The true signs are marked by a kind of passionate consistency. And this verse is about that. Really about the false signs. As I said, we all have nightmares. It is called, 'America, America':

They all blew away
like candles out of doors
Someone saw a wolf's head
at the window the night
Hurricane Granicar reaped and raved
and all blew away!

Because the wolf's head
talked back, back in its throat
they hurried for a priest
who swore it said distinctly,
'Follow me.'

They impaled the head on a broomstick
Then in the priest's hands it grew
loquacious and avuncular
up street and down they follow
the head in a dark town
Now they have a savior
and not one sign

I thought of the image of Thomas and Dorothy and I thought of the image of roots, roots of things; they went to the root of things. And, therefore, one might say their lives flower, flower in us; roots were very deep. And I thought of the roots of prayer and of sacrament and

1. Daniel Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread: Selected Poems, 1957–1997* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), pp. 402-403.

of the neighbor. It seems to me that's a kind of hyphenated understanding, prayer-of-sacrament-and-neighbor. And this is about that, or that is about this. But the poem is called 'Root':

The square root of reality
escapes us quite.
Whereas
the round root, the tortured root, the root
sharp pointed as an arrowhead—

this I celebrate and fear, and despite fear
keep digging toward, for all the world as though
life depended, or death, or a feverish cry

wrung from the throat of stocks and stones.

No death until
I hold the talisman
and taste—
some say 'beware poison.'
Some
wiser, dare
'Until, you will not live.'[2]

Dorothy, my family knew in her great, great vigor, her younger years. She was really closer to the generation of my mother than my own, but in any case they were great friends. And then I saw her growing frail as I would appear down there for this or that liturgy, or public talk, or homily. Dorothy would always be there but she's gradually receding into the shadows, and I am seeing her now at the side door in the darkness seated, unable to kind of endure the crowds. And there is this ghostly figure. This poem was written about her birthday, I think her eightieth.

But before the poem, I have a story to tell. This is a very delightful memory for myself. I had a kind of second First Mass at The Catholic Worker in New York City. This was after I had gotten out of my 'Federal Scholarship', where, of course, I had improved my life mightily! Very grateful, the government had given me 40 dollars to advance my rehabilitation, and so I was trying to figure out what to do with this money. And various suggestions were offered me—but I won't go into that. I decided to take it down to The Catholic Worker at this Mass and offer it to Dorothy. And so it was done and she was very excited with this little roll of money. She said to one of the young persons by her side, 'Go up to my bed and get the holy water'. So they brought down this little jar of holy water. In front of us all she

2. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, pp. 366-67.

dunked the money in—this was baptism by total immersion—and she held it up, dripping, and she said, 'Now we can use this'. I thought the poem is about a very frail elderly woman. But she is still full of hutzpa. So it is called 'Another Birthday, Imagine!':

> The shadow
> is 64 years long.
> Ungainly it shambles, muttering to itself
> (a shadow, a showdown)
> Grow old! Grow old!
>
> Dawn is up.
> With the man walks
> a smear of shadow.
> He sings to himself
> disowning;
> Darkness
> cast by me, begone from me.
>
> His soul
> he holds like a burning glass before.
> A concentrate of dawn
> burns in him—
> soul, his own.[3]

Dorothy, of course, did not do a lot of jail time; she did some. But she had some wonderful statements to the rest of us about going to jail. She could even yell us out, the voracious kind of eating up of people that short of that, Catholic workers became social workers. That wasn't her notion of where this was all to go. And thank God, of course, that was grabbed and still is by the younger people.

I was very intrigued, there are two Greek words for time. One of them is in the New Testament and one of them is in classical Greek writing—both poetry and drama. The New Testament word for time is *kairos*—it's almost time as a verb. The secular word is *chronos* and the Greeks made a god of *chronos*. This has to do with all these days of making a great deal of the idea of the millennium: *chronos*. Time measured by the stars, mechanical time, time as duration, *chronos*. I almost have to violate the language because it's time as a verb. It's 'right timing'. Jesus frequently describes his own life as governed by *chronos*, the right time. The time for this action, the time not yet come for this. But it's always relative to human existence in this world, intersecting with God's hope, the right timing.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, at one point it is declared that time is a verb.

3. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, pp. 380-81.

I think that is wonderful: time is a verb. Time has to do with 'to do'. I think of my brother tonight, I think of so many prisoners of conscience. I think of time in prison. Time is a very big item in prison, either dead time or very lively time. One powerful kind of transfiguration of time by prisoners of conscience, whether in Northern Ireland, or South Africa or here, has to do with time as a verb, time to do it. Putting time to best advantage, time stretching out to the human community especially in the misery of fellow prisoners. Prisoners speak of doing good time, that means kind of emotionally up; or doing hard time, that means you are either in solitary or in some kind of disgrace or you are really emotionally down. I thought that understanding of New Testament time as an intersection of our freedom with God's was a very good clue to Merton's horarium as a monk and Dorothy's trotting off to Mass every day, time as a verb, time 'to do'. This is a little tribute to that act, a kind of understanding of time:

> Doth I describe it
> what time does to hands and faces
> that old timer shoots a glance that works you over like God in Genesis
> a very image
> then a withered likeness
> or time is a finger pointing, mocking
> look how hands dislocate days memories who's died
> what voices are issuing from one way traffic of souls
> like a hum on a highway
> don't talk gradualism
> that probe,
> time
> has the winning hand
> Genesis verse one
> he flicks the cards face up
> it's a sharks smile
> winner takes all
> and you are like Merton
> struck dumb on an instant
> the sheer skill of it
> the nerve
> and you wear a loser's look
> or like me
> not everything lost
> shirt now shroud later
> another instance,
> time as verb.

Dorothy said, 'Fill the prisons with our people'. She was very, very conscious of *our* people: 'Fill the prisons with *our* people. Not every-

body should be in the prisons, *our* people should. ' She was not being satiric, she was just saying, 'We come from somewhere, therefore we can come out of prison on our feet as we go in on our feet'. So I thought tonight it would be in tribute to her and to all the Catholic Workers since, and all of my friends and my family and yours, to have a few poems about prisoners. I read about a Cuban poet, Quadra, who was held for years under the present regime. Finally, under international pressure, they had to release him but under the condition—if you're ready for this one—that he had to recant his poetry. I always thought poetry was hard enough to cant without recanting. As you can understand the poem gets a little nightmarish. It's called 'I Hope and Pray This Doesn't Happen to Me':

When the poet recanted
they hacked off his fingers
and gave him a signet ring

The poet recanted.
They tore out his tongue
and crowned him their laureate

He was then required
to flay himself alive;
two houses of congress
applauded, they dressed him
in the Aztec cloak of immortals

The poet surrendered his soul
a bird of paradise
on a tray of silver held
in his two hands

His soul flew away;
the poet
by prior instruction
vanished where he stood.[4]

This is about every prisoner in the world. One striking thing is that no matter what volcanic changes in a given culture, everybody old and new, formerly and afterward, believes taking prisoners will improve things. One can only sort of groan about the fall with a capital F. This poem is called 'Poverty':

A prisoner is very poor—
1 face, 2 arms, 2 hands, 1 nose, 1 mouth
also 3 walls
1 ceiling

4. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, p. 236.

10 or 12 iron bars—
then if lucky
1 tree
making it, making it
in hell's dry season

I almost forgot—
no legs!
contraband! seized!
they stand stock still
in the warden's closet.
There like buried eyes
they await the world.[5]

With Holy Week upon us, this poem is a little bit about that. We were tried in 1981 after the first of the Plowshares' actions in Pennsylvania and were, of course, convicted in due time and sentenced to three to ten years. The judge was quite splenetic and determined that we would begin our sentence immediately, so we were parceled out over Pennsylvania. I ended up with another malefactor in the furthest prison westward in Pennsylvania called Western Prison, right outside of Pittsburgh almost on the Ohio border. We were all day long on that transition from near Philadelphia all the way across the state. Prisoners were coming aboard and leaving for various points. It was quite weird. And the imagery that came to me was something about the Stations of the Cross. We were witnessing all the suffering of these poor people. It was almost like a parody of a circus because everyone was shod in bright clothing so you could identify them in various prisons. Sort of doing a Good Friday. The poem is called 'Prisoners in Transit'. (By the way, the prisoners had a name for this transit, it was called 'diesel therapy'.)

They took the prisoners, willy-nilly
on death's own outing
shod like dray horses
jump suits pied like mardi gras
& curses & groans & ten pound shoes
& starts & stops
at every
station of the cross
across Wm Penn's
Sylvania

'Here's where that first trouble-
shooter started his last mile,' the guard yelled
through his bull horn mouth—

5. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, pp. 361-62.

'& here he did a phony fall—
gaining time was all
'& here it was
he rained like a red cloud
& here
we built his everloving ass
an everlasting memorial—

'this mile square Christian tomb
& closed the book

'You may all
come down now
take a 3 to 10 year
close look.'[6]

I'll do just one more of these prison poems, this especially in tribute to Philip. He still has in his possession in prison in Virginia the same bible he carried into prison in 1967. It is all you can imagine, quite battered and underscored. It's the same paperback New Testament. He has it there now. This is about that now, 'My Brother's Battered Bible, Carried into Prison Repeatedly':

That book
livid with thumb prints
    underscorings, lashes—
I see you carry it
into the cave of storms, past the storms.
I see you underscore
like the score of music
all that travail
that furious unexplained joy.

A book! the guards
shake it out for contraband—
the apostles wail, the women
breathe deep as Cumaean sibyls,
Herod screams like a souped up record.

They toss it back, harmless.
Now, seated on a cell bunk
you play the pages slowly, slowly
a lifeline humming with the song
of the jeweled fish, all but taken.[7]

One question occurred to me and maybe has occurred also to you in this business of, 'Where do we go with the noble dead? Where do

6. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, p. 361.
7. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, p. 361.

they carry it, where do they beacon us?'—the question of this weekend. It came to me also in a different form and it was porous, a question like this: 'Who owns the dead?' 'Who can presume to own Merton or Day?' It seems to me that some tactics among survivors only bury the dead twice. We have that kind of awful implication of a second death spoken of in the book of Revelation. This business of the dead being assimilated to our own misuse, diminished use, our own size—ethically, spiritually. There are aspects of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton that remain (I'll use a gentle word) 'problematic' before many elements in the culture and in the church as well. In all the years since Merton's death, for instance, at Columbia University, where he was a student, we have an annual Merton Lecture. Maybe once in all these years the topic of Merton's massive, crucial peacemaking has come up—not even as a main topic, rather by way of reference. One year the Cardinal of New York was invited to give the lecture on Merton. I felt as though I should have spent the evening under the bed with a holy candle. He had favored the church universal with a book commending nuclear war!

I think also of the enormous hypocrisy of Catholic universities and their attempt to marry the military and the Department of Theology. This, it seems to me, reaches a climax at a couple of places. Marquette, which recently hosted a seminar on the one hundredth anniversary of Dorothy's birth and is the repository of The Catholic Worker papers is also enthusiastically accepting military money and has the military marching by while the theologians natter on. In my experience, it matters little these days about the so-called charisma of the founders of religious orders when the topic of the big bucks is dangled before their eyes. No matter the charisma of the founders. Male orders—whether Vincentian, Franciscan, Jesuit, Benedictine and Dominican—all have the military on campus. It seems the larger the theological department—as at Notre Dame and St Thomas in Twin Cities—the larger the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps]. I was proud to note (and I had not known this until recently) that Dorothy wrote a letter to the Benedictine president at St John's in Collegeville refusing to appear on campus because the military was present. That was a great help to me.

I wanted really to quote here, but I'm not sure whether the 'Cold War Letters' of Merton are very well known. You remember there was a bitter period in his life when he was forbidden to publish anything relative to war and peace. He devised this wonderful kind of primitive publishing. I often thought of it as a kind of signal fire, from mountain to mountain, where he sent up smoke signals. He started to

mimeograph letters to private persons all over the world and to send copies of these to his friends. It was prior to this censorship (I would think around 1958) that an article by Merton in *The Catholic Worker* so shook me that I sat down and wrote to this incognito whom I had every reason to believe was not able to answer the letter. He answered immediately. He said in the course of his response, 'Why don't you come down?' And that started it all. Back to these 'Cold War Letters'. Just a couple of quotes here. He seemed haunted by the nuclear specter in days when few of us had begun to realize that a cloud was crossing the sun. His definition of the destruction of humanity is extraordinarily acute: 'Our humanity is already debased and mechanized while we ourselves may remain on earth as the instruments of enormous unidentified forces like those which press us today in a race to the brink of cataclysm.' He was, of course, not merely focusing on the bomb any more than he would today. He was writing about the spiritual implications of possessing, creating, researching and producing a nest egg of hell. And again, it seems to me as close to reality as this night. This is also around 1960: 'I have a ghostly feeling that we are all on the brink of a spiritual defection and betrayal of Christ'—he is always concentrating on that—'which would consist in the acceptance of the values and decisions of callous men of war.'

Such think only in terms of mega-corpses and mega-tons and have not the slightest thought for humanity in the image of God. The truthteller, who has first heard the truth and is now speaking it. It shocked me with a reminder of what Gandhi said immediately after the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. It's along these similar lines. I'll quote, I hope according to his sense, Gandhi: 'It will be fairly easy to tote up the damage to the Japanese people in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We will know the number of casualties, lost property, etc., but it will take more time to tote up the damage done to those who dropped the bomb.' Amen. So we find these two spirits converging on this kind of understanding.

Finally if I could quote this, on the same tenor. This is also one of the Cold War Letters. Rarely did he speak of himself, but here he does:

> I cannot in conscience as a priest and a writer who has a hearing of many people, I cannot devote myself exclusively to questions of devotion, of the life of prayer of monastic history. I cannot act as if we were not in the midst of the most serious crisis in history nor can I write in a manner that encourages people simply to ignore the crisis. It is incomprehensible to me that so many theologians write so much and encourage people to line up with a frankly godless and pragmatic power block. Immense wealth and technical capacity ... is directed to the annihilation of entire nations.

That's so important; after all these years we still have this kind of 'never-never' theology which concentrates exactly on the topics that reassure us that all is well. Questions of 'devotion, life of prayer, monastic history', and 'act as if we are not ...' Well, we can only salute and hope to emulate such extraordinary, acute insight and courage because it had a price attached, obviously.

I was in contact, after Merton's death, with John Howard Griffin, who as you know had written that classical study *Black Like Me*,[8] gone through the South having darkened his skin. He went through the South as a black man and wrote that extraordinary book. Later on he undertook to do the definitive biography of Merton. That's a story in itself; he did not live to finish the book. In the course of it all, he was for several months living in Merton's hermitage, going through his papers and being taken care of by the monks because by then Griffin was quite ill. One day in the springtime, in this quest for deeper understanding of Merton, he was in the cottage during an enormous thunder and lightning storm, and lightning struck the cottage and came down the chimney into the fireplace and struck him. It was eerily like the scene of Merton's own death, repeated. He was saved actually because the wheelchair he was in had rubber wheels. He was thrown to the floor unconscious but survived. I sent him this little poem which he liked and said helped, so he gets into the evening too. It's called 'Consolation', dedicated to John Howard Griffin:

Listen
if now and then
you hear the dead
muttering like ashes
creaking like empty
rockers on porches

filling you in filling you in

like winds in empty
branches like stars
in wintry trees
so far
so good

8. John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: New American Library, 1961).

you've mastered finally
one foreign tongue[9]

Another thing that struck me very much trying to re-evaluate these lives, these connections, was the simple courage of these two in pursuing very different vocations, very different geographies. Most times it seemed the Kentucky woods were another planet removed from the streets of the lower East Side of Manhattan. And yet I think what we can rejoice in is that these two were showing the broad and generous spectrum of the Christian vocation. Once one got beyond the—I don't know what to call it—particularities, the non-essentials, it seems to me the lives converged in depth. And this little poem is as though either of them or perhaps both of them were speaking about courage or endurance or staying with one's convictions. It is called 'Courage and Then Some':

They call me courageous; they take
their measure, not mine;
mine
a face in a crowd, a voice among voices.

If I say no, I learned the numb syllable
from withstanding ancestors
holding the witless infant upright.
From gravity to grace I came
untaught, all beholden.
Walking toward, my measure is
a golden house
where suns shelter at sundown.

Sleeping, my measure is
illimitable death, not proud.[10]

A 'yes' to life in a culture of death. I thought, 'Let's not make them too calm or make your understanding too easy'. I thought now and again from each of them there was a note of rage. It wasn't habitual. A note of rage against the willful insanity of public life. So the poem is called 'Prophecy':

The way I see the world is strictly illegal
to wit, through my eyes

is illegal, yes;
to wit, I live
like a pickpocket, like the sun
like the hand that writes this, by my wits

9. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, p. 205.
10. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, p. 392.

This is not permitted
that I look on the world
and worse, insist that I see

what I see
—a conundrum, a fury, a burning bush

and with five fingers, where my eyes fail
trace—

with a blackened brush
on butcher sheets, black on white
(black for blood, white for death
where the light fails)

—that face which is not my own
(and my own)
that death which is not my own
(and my own)

This is strictly illegal
and will land me in trouble

as somewhere now, in a precinct
in a dock, the statutes
thrash in fury, hear them
hear ye!
The majestic jaws

of crocodiles in black shrouds
the laws
forbidding me
the world, the truth
under blood oath

forbidding, row upon row
of razors, of statutes
of molars, of grinders—

those bloodshot eyes
legal, sleepless, maneating

—not letting me
not
let blood[11]

I'd like to pay a certain tribute especially to Merton and his marvelous pioneering work with Zen. I always thought when I was down there and he was dealing with the young monks that his method was a very nice adaptation of Zen. He was not above leaving them with a

11. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, pp. 230-31.

cold hand which in many cases I suspect took a lifetime to deal with. So walking away from being Mr Fix It or Father Answer or whatever they would think of him as, because it seems to me to have happened to himself. He was quietly in the process of deflating anything like cultural celebrity.

And I remember that it struck me so the first time I met him down there. This guy is not walking around in this dustjacket. A certain integrity shining through here and clarity of language, and all the rest of it. Another aspect of it all, he is not neglecting the human in himself or others in favor of the superhuman. He is not invoking the supernatural because he is suspicious of nature. Something very different is at work during those years with the novices (this is prior to his going off to the hermitage). I heard him so often insisting, 'to become a contemplative was to be open to the world'. And this had to be an understanding from the very start because as he was wont to say, 'It is so very easy for a monk to grow a cabbage between his ears'—not that I ever saw it. He was making a point and it was a very practical point. It resulted in a constant interplay between all sorts of visitors and the young monks, and the accessibility of good reading material, and music. We can't shut the windows and think that in the stale air we are going to invoke or discover God.

He could be tough too, as many of the novices who went on and those who didn't could testify. And I would like to finish with this little tribute to his method. I think it's my attempt to summarize a style of being, a spiritual master rather than any given circumstance with a given individual, monk or otherwise. It's kind of a classical treatment of what happens when a young person comes to a new setting which is bound to be strange and mystifying, countrified and silent and awesome. And he kind of goes wacko for a while and begins to fantasize about holiness. He has to be grounded and he has to be brought back to earth—and I saw Merton doing that. The poem, 'Zen Poem', goes like that:

> How I long for supernatural powers!
> said the novice mournfully to the holy one.
> I see a dead child
> and I long to say, *Arise!*
> I see a sick man
> I long to say, *Be healed!*
> I see a bent old woman
> I long to say, *Walk straight!*
> Alas, I feel like a dead stick in paradise.
> Master, can you confer on me
> supernatural powers?

> The old man shook his head fretfully.
> How long have I been with you
> and you know nothing?
> How long have you known me
> and learned nothing?
> Listen; I have walked the earth for 80 years
> I have never raised a dead child
> I have never healed a sick man
> I have never straightened an old woman's spine
>
> Children die
> men grow old
> the aged fall
> under the stigma of frost
>
> And what is that to you or me
> but the turn of the wheel
> but the way of the world
> but the gateway to paradise?
>
> Supernatural powers!
> Then you would play God
> would spin the thread of life
> and measure the thread
> 5 years, 50 years, 80 years
> and cut the thread?
>
> Supernatural powers!
> I have wandered the earth for 80 years
> I confess to you,
> sprout without root
> root without flower
> I know nothing of supernatural powers
> I have yet to perfect my natural powers!
>
> to see and not be seduced
> to hear and not be deafened
> to taste and not be eaten
> to touch and not be bought
>
> But you—
> would you walk on water
> would you master the air
> would you swallow fire?
>
> Go talk with the dolphins
> they will teach you glibly
> how to grow gills
>
> Go listen to eagles
> they will hatch you, nest you
> eaglet and airman

Go join the circus
those tricksters will train you
in deception for dimes—

Bird man, bag man, poor fish
spouting fire, moon crawling
at sea forever—
supernatural powers!

Do you seek miracles?
listen—go
draw water, hew wood
break stones—
how miraculous!

Listen; blessed is the one
who walks the earth 5 years, 50 years, 80 years
and deceives no one
and curses no one
and kills no one

On such a one
the angels whisper in wonder;
behold the irresistible power
of natural powers—
of height, of joy, of soul, of non belittling!

You dry stick
in the crude soil of this world
spring, root, leaf, flower!

trace
around and around
and around—
an inch, a mile, the world's green extent,—
a liberated zone
of paradise![12]

12. Berrigan, *And the Risen Bread*, pp. 217-20.