

just enough of an air of puckish irreverence, along with his inexorable spiritual gifts, to make him an ideal hero for a generation of Catholics anxious to show secular intellectuals that their church embodied more than “a mass of Irish pastors truckling to Italian cardinals.”

Through his portraits, Fisher argues that for a certain handful, “the institutional church was of secondary importance as early as the 1930s.” His character studies provide significant historical insights to the times, but overall, are too uneven to maintain his point. The book, well-researched and documented as it is, serves to remind us where we have come from, yet because the book fails to grasp the overarching evangelical influence of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton — an influence that surpasses their times, the book strikes me as incomplete, though certainly interesting.

The signs of a countercultural or acultural movement in U. S. Catholicism today — including the work of the Berrigans, Pax Christi USA, the ever-present Catholic Worker houses of hospitality, and even the statements of the Bishops’ Peace and Economic pastorals — find their roots in Day and Merton. Instead of causing the disintegration of the church and its culture, as Fisher argues, Day and Merton could be seen as the contractors who laid the groundwork for a growing social consciousness in the church — a true counterculture in American Catholicism that gave birth to a greater fidelity, albeit too few in number. Day and Merton started something. Quality, not quantity, was the impact of their lives among the faithful, and their voices are very present today.

BERRIGAN: ARTIST & ACTIVIST

Review of

Ross Labrie

THE WRITINGS OF DANIEL BERRIGAN

Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1989

x, 273 pages / \$30.00 hardcover

Reviewed by **Thomas M. King, S. J.**

Daniel Berrigan the Jesuit and Thomas Merton the Trappist were important to each other. They were both priest-poets who found themselves in troubled times speaking in a troubled Church. They were both mavericks who did not seem to fit into the religious congregations they had joined as young men. Soon they each gained a wide following among the religionless, but again they were mavericks who continued to speak of the transcendent God. Merton was six

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years older than Berrigan, and in significant ways was his teacher — though Berrigan had already learned much from the trade unionism of his father, the social vision of his brother, the accounts of French worker priests, and the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin. But Merton's 1961 article in *The Catholic Worker*, "The Roots of War," was the catalyst that moved Berrigan to his activism. He liked Merton's call for an action rooted in contemplation.

Berrigan's activism brought on difficulties with the hierarchy of the Church which came to a head in November 1965 when he preached at the funeral of a peace activist who had set himself on fire in front of the U. N. Berrigan spoke of the act as a religiously inspired sacrifice. Merton disavowed the act and sent a telegram asking that he no longer be a sponsor for the Catholic Peace Fellowship. Much clarification was required and Berrigan was sent to Latin America. From this time onward Berrigan, the poet, would refuse to live among the "armchair artists" while others were being "broken on the wheel of life." His prose would begin to show the imprecision of involvement rather than the clarity of logic.

When the Jesuit Provincial refused to authorize Berrigan's trip to Hanoi, Berrigan wrote to Merton suggesting that he might provoke expulsion from the Jesuits. Merton advised otherwise, telling him not to get involved in "big symbolic confrontations" for the problem of authority had to be handled "with delicacy and understanding." He told him that the Church needed "a real renewal, not just an explosion." Berrigan was careful not to provoke dismissal. He appealed the decision and was allowed to go. His uncharted behavior took him beyond the ordinary limits of religious life, and Merton was one of the few whose words continued to carry authority with him. The present study by Labrie would see the period from 1965 to 1970 as Berrigan's best as activist and writer: then "the strivings of both artist and activist were held in a vigorous balance, and this gave the writing a high imaginative energy without any attendant loss in the wit and craftsmanship that had characterized the earlier work."

Berrigan was convicted for burning draft files and jumped bail. Then, as an "archly perceptive narrator," he wrote a vivid account of his travels in a *tour de force* homage to the poet-priest who had inspired Merton, St. John of the Cross: *The Dark Night of Resistance*. Here Labrie would see Berrigan as both at odds with the traditions of his Church and in sublime possession of those traditions. After he was arrested Berrigan would compare himself to the recently deceased Merton: he was a "monk without portfolio." In 1973 he wrote to the Prime Minister of North Vietnam opposing the torture of U. S. prisoners of war and called Israel a militaristic state betraying the prophets by ignoring the plight of homeless Palestinians. These cost him a loss of media attention and book reviews, but he continued to speak his mind. In Nicaragua he visited Merton's disciple, the priest-poet-Minister of Culture, Ernesto Cardenal, and he observed that the priest had been swallowed by the politician. He favored feminist causes and denounced abortion, so some speaking engagements were cancelled.

In short, like Thomas Merton, Daniel Berrigan seems bent on remaining a maverick to the end. They were each poet-priests who remained faithful to the religious orders in which they had taken vows.



THOMAS M. KING

Though Merton did not quite seem to fit in the Trappists and Berrigan does not quite seem to fit in the Jesuits, they both seemed to know they fit better in their orders than anywhere else. Ross Labrie appreciates the Quixotic mixture of poet and activist that is Berrigan. He likes Berrigan's unpredictable acts and takes him seriously as a writer. His literary reflections on Berrigan are perceptive and well considered. Labrie has a ready familiarity with the thirty books Berrigan has written and charts their development. It would not be appropriate that a book on Berrigan be dull, and the present book has met the challenge.

QUIXOTIC MERTON

Review of

Thomas M. King

ENCHANTMENTS:

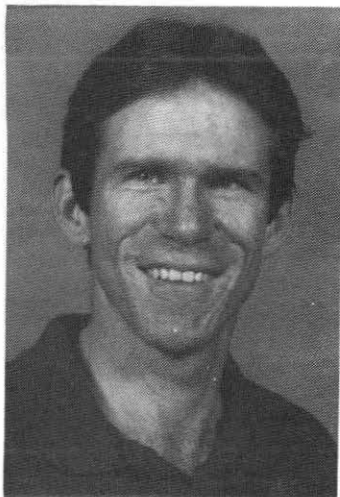
RELIGION AND THE POWER OF THE WORD

Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed & Ward, 1989

xiv, 232 pages / \$14.95 paperback

Reviewed by **Bill Koch**

I suspect that Thomas King's *Enchantments: Religion and the Power of the Word* is informed largely by his experiences conducting the "retreats and other pastoral programs" that are alluded to in the biographical note on the back cover of this work. Although a scholarly book, *Enchantments* is imbued with a pastoral, caring tone. The repetition of key phrases during the development of certain ideas also reminds one of a retreat talk. This tone and method contribute to the purpose of King's study, which seeks to find a creative balance between the tensions of various dualities in the religious experience of humanity: ethics and spirituality, experience and authority, the passing world and the enduring Word. King holds a special sympathy for



BILL KOCH

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