

# Berrigan battles the 'social numbing'

By Ron Hunt  
Of the Emerald

Daniel Berrigan calls it "social numbing."

This "murderous indifference" to the value of human life in America prompts Berrigan to ask, "What is happening to our people?"

As an example, Berrigan talks of his trial in rural Pennsylvania where he and seven others were prosecuted for tapping the nose of a nuclear warhead with a household hammer — a tiny moral rap against against immense immorality of nuclear arms.

The conviction was expected, but the trial process was shocking, he says. A "language of moral evasion" was used by General Electric employees on every level, from guards to top researchers, Berrigan says. None of them mentioned the word "bomb," "nuclear" or "warhead." Ever.

"They would close their briefcases,

close their hearts, go home and call it living."

Closed hearts: the gut level of a society that rivals Nazi Germany in its use of euphemisms.

## Checks and balances

For example, more than one million human beings are slaughtered each year under the label "fetus." Closed hearts are the basis for America's growing romance with the assumption that "unproductive and unprofitable" people should not live.

Social numbing results not only in screening off reality but in viewing dissenters as "abnormal." Berrigan tells of Pascal's parable about a group of people lost at sea. The navigator keeps saying

that the boat is heading north by northwest. But after several days at sea, someone discovers that they are actually heading south, and he cries out the truth.

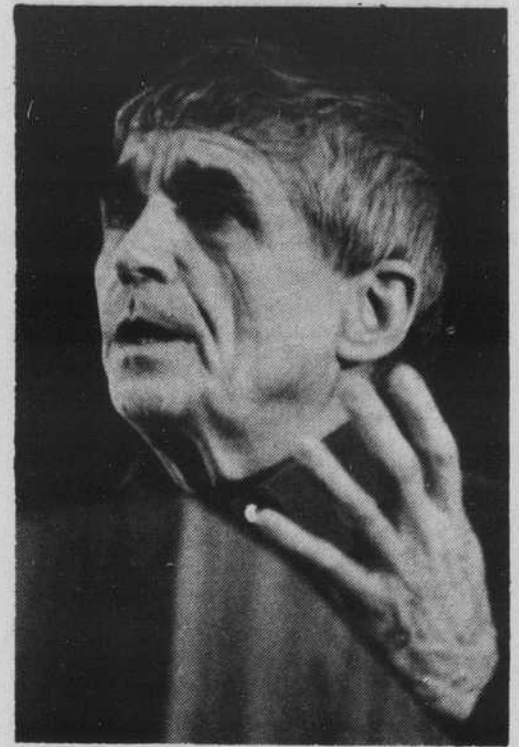
How will most of the people react? Berrigan predicts the dissenter would be thrown overboard by the people being deceived. Is it better, he asks, to be lied to in security than told the truth which disturbs?

The church, says Berrigan, needs to be heard because it has vision — pro-human, decent, non-violent. Faith is pitted against the "various forms of despair on the market these days."

But he points out that various parts of the church has capitulated to the culture — by keeping religion separate from everyday life — and is afraid of "real religion and real politics."

Faith has not only given Berrigan the moral grounding for his protests, he says, but has also kept him from despair — and from succumbing to the "social numbing" he combats.

Maybe it's time to let the numbing wear off and feel the pain.



Daniel Berrigan

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