

Father Berrigan rejects debate over just war

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PENFIELD — Debating whether the Persian Gulf War is or is not just may suit pagans well, but Christians should have no truck with such discussion, according to Father Daniel Berrigan, SJ.

That was one of the major themes the priest attempted to drive home during a press conference and subsequent lectures Sunday night, Feb. 10, at St. Joseph's Church.

"I can't get excited about whether war is unjust or just," said the well-known peace activist, who delivered the keynote speech at a prayer service initiating St. Joseph's two-day series of social-justice workshops. "In light of Christ's teaching, war is unjust," he added.

Father Berrigan stressed that he is no "radical" but simply looking back to the days of the early church when one could not be baptized a Christian while serving in the military. If a soldier wanted to be baptized, he would have to renounce military service upon adopting the faith.

With respect to the Persian Gulf War, Father Berrigan said, "I'm opposing it because I'm a Christian, and Christ has forbidden us to take part in the killing of each other."

He also noted that he had supported economic sanctions against Iraq and the use of more negotiation prior to the outbreak of war.

The white-haired Jesuit is probably best known for his imprisonment during the early 1970s for destroying draft records in

Catonsville, Md. in 1968. Along with his brother, Philip, a former Jesuit priest, Father Berrigan became a controversial figure in the church and across the nation for acts of civil disobedience against the Vietnam War in the 1960s and '70s.

But Father Berrigan asserted Sunday night that the media in New York City — where he currently works with AIDS patients in a Catholic hospice — has virtually ignored the anti-war protests that he and other activists have recently led.

"The media ignored Phil," the priest said of a recent protest in which his brother and a group of protesters poured blood into a White House fountain.

Father Berrigan was himself recently arrested for a sit-in at a traffic intersection in Harlem. The protest included a march in which the priest and others carried a coffin symbolizing the deaths of minorities serving in the war.

Father Berrigan said newspapers in New York are not interested in such protests. Neither, he claimed, is the national news media interested in the chorus of dissent from what has been termed a "popular" war.

In response to opinion polls reporting that three-quarters of the U.S. public support the war, Father Berrigan said, "The polls, as far as anyone can know, are taken generally among white, middle-class people."

The opinions of such minority groups as Hispanics and blacks — who are serving in the military in numbers proportionally greater than their share of the population —



File photo
Father Daniel Berrigan climbed the Seneca Army Depot fence in 1989.

have not been adequately reported, the priest continued.

"In New York City, there is an outrage against the war among blacks and Hispanics because their sons and daughters are being shipped over there to be cannon fodder," he said, adding, "We're being victimized by media capitulation to the war."

Capitulation to inhumane government authority is not the role of the believer, Father Berrigan told several hundred people at the prayer service prior to social-justice workshops.

The priest based his talk on the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. He concentrated particularly on the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three Jewish provincial administrators in Babylon who refused to bow down and worship a statue of King Nebuchadnezzar.

For their disobedience, the king ordered the three men thrown into a fiery furnace. But the Lord protected the men, who emerged from the fire unscathed, accompanied by a fourth figure whom King Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed "looks like a Son of God."

Christians are obligated to disobey
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Fisher forum links conflict with Palestinian question

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Even if the U.S.-led coalition defeats the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, the United States faces a potentially long and bloody guerrilla war, according to Ilham Abu Ghazaleh, a Palestinian woman teaching at Nazareth College of Rochester.

"I think all this will do is create a situation that is worse than Vietnam," predicted Abu Ghazaleh, who is in the United States on a Fulbright scholarship. "The Iraqi government will go into the mountains and it will be a guerrilla war. I can't envision a possibility of it ending soon."

And, Abu Ghazaleh added, those guerrilla forces "will not be just Iraqis."

Abu Ghazaleh was at St. John Fisher College Tuesday, Feb. 12, to offer her insights on the Persian Gulf war from a Palestinian perspective. She was part of a forum panel organized by Tamara Sonn, director of Fisher's international studies program and herself a Middle Eastern scholar.

Sonn explained that she organizes a

forum for the college each year, and because of the war and ongoing tensions in the Middle East, chose this year to focus on links between the war and the Palestinian issue.

"Despite all the negations given by the administration about linking the gulf and the Palestinian question, there are facts on the ground that lead to unavoidable comparisons," Sonn said. She added that the response of Palestinians and Arabs throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa makes links between the war and Palestinian issues "a reality we can't ignore."

In addition to a presentation by Sonn on the roots of instability in the Middle East and the talk by Abu Ghazaleh, the forum included an address on the importance of Palestine by Shaw Dallal, professor of international law at Syracuse University and a former legal counsel for the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

The forum also included a discussion
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Church mulls harboring resisters

ROCHESTER — Corpus Christi Parish is considering a proposal to declare itself a sanctuary for resisters to the war in the Persian Gulf.

On Thursday, Feb. 7, approximately 45 people met at the church to discuss a proposal that the parish provide shelter for enlisted personnel and reservists who are absent without leave from duty, according to the parish's pastor, Father James B. Callan.

The priest noted that except for one abstention, all those present voted in favor of taking a parish-wide vote on the issue.

Father Callan said two more information sessions will be conducted during the coming two weeks, and then parishioners will be asked to vote on the proposal.

By offering sanctuary, the parish would provide support for those in the military who believe the war is unjust, Father Callan explained.

He said he had discussed the matter with an administrator in the Diocese of Rochester and had received support. Although the *Catholic Courier* was able to confirm that a discussion took place between Father Callan and the diocesan administrator, the newspaper was told that the conversation did not involve support of the parish's action nor the

possibility that the parish would provide sanctuary for AWOL military personnel.

Father Callan said that under the terms of the proposal the parish would offer sanctuary only if other church communities in the Rochester area joined the effort.

Such was the case in 1984 when Corpus Christi joined a coalition of churches providing sanctuary for Salvadoran refugees. That coalition provided shelter from 1984 to 1986 to the family of Alejandro Gomez. The family later left the United States for Canada.

Thus far, Father Callan said he had talked with officials at Downtown United Presbyterian Church, one member of the Salvadoran sanctuary coalition that is now considering sanctuary for war resisters. The priest speculated that several other churches — including some Catholic parishes — might become involved as well.

At the national level, a number of church communities have declared themselves sanctuaries. Among them are Riverside Church in New York City and United Baptist Church in Seattle, which currently is housing three war resisters.

— Lee Strong

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