Daniel Berrigan's Speech to Arabs Stirs a Furor Over Award

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

Plans to honor the Rev. Daniel J. Berrigan with a peace award have run into opposition following the report of a speech he gave recently to an Arab audience describing Israel as a "criminal Jewish community" and a "nightmare" that manufactures human waste.

As a result of the speech, delivered by Father Berrigan on Oct. 19 before the Arab University Students' Council in New Haven, the American Civil Liberties Union has protested plans to present the Jesuit priest the Gandhi Peace Award for antiwar activities, at the Community Church of New Haven on Jan. 9.

Agreeing with the complaints and terming the speech "so prejudiced as to invite characterizations of anti-Semitism," the Rev. Donald S. Harrington of the Community Church, as 40 East 57th Street, said he was reconsidering his decision to present the award.

Released From Prison

The award is sponsored by an organization called Promoting Enduring Peace, headed by the Rev. Philip Berrigan, who spent 23 months in Danbury, Connecticut, on charges related to the Vietnam War and was released last December.

The Rev. Daniel J. Berrigan's speech on Arab-Israeli conflict drew little public attention when it was made two months ago. The controversy began with publication of the text and a Jewish response in American Report, an organ of Clergy and Lay Concerned.

Taking pride in the fact that he was a "non-expert" in the Middle East, Father Berrigan said, "I came to the world with a prejudice and an ignorance of the subject," and that the Jewish state was an "emotional one to the Arabs for what he called "their capacity for defense" and "their contempt for their own poor.”

Turning to Israel, he characterized it, along with South Africa and the United States, as "a secular state seeking a biblical justification for crimes against humanity."

While the world knew "criminal Christian communities," Father Berrigan said, "we had never known a criminal Jewish community."

"Imperialist Faces"

Recovering from the Holocaust, "the Jews," he continued, "are the survivors of the Jewish people. Israel entered the imperial adventure. She took up the imperial weapons, and spread abroad the imperial deceptions."

In the space of 25 years, Father Berrigan said, "the slave became master, and created slaves."

"The coinage of Israel is stamped with the imperialist faces of those who favor it has courted; the creation of an élite of millionaires, generals and entrepreneurs," he stated. "And the price is being paid by Israel's Oriental Jews, the poor, the excluded, the prisoners."

The same racist ideology of the Nazis was now being used by Israel, "fostering the myth of the barbarian Arab," Father Berrigan declared.

It was a tragedy, he said, that in place of Jewish prophetic wisdom, Israel should launch an Orwellian nightmare of double talk, racism, flip-flop sociological jargon, aimed at proving its racial superiority to the people it has crushed."

The dream of Israel, he asserted, "has become a nightmare of "Israel," he continued, "has not abolished poverty and misery; rather, these manufacture human waste, the by-products of her entrepreneurs, the military-industrial complex. Israel has not freed the captives of a prison system; instead, it has expanded the prison system, perfected its espionage, exported on the world market that expensive blood-ridden commodity, the savage triumph of the technological West: violence and the tools of violence."

Her absurd generals, her military junta, are paraded on national holidays before the narcotized public. The model is not the kingdom of peace, it is an Orwellian transplant, taken bodily from Big Brother's bloody heart."

Were the Jews in Israel, Father Berrigan said, he would be living as in America — in resistance to the state. And, he said, "we would also probably be either hunted by the police or in prison."

He also charged that "many American Jewish leaders are capable of ignoring the Asian holocaust in favor of economic and military aid to Israel."

However, he praised American Jews in general for having " correlated their leaders in accepting the bale offered by Nixon."

The text of the speech in American Report drew a sharp rebuttal from Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, president of the American Jewish Congress, in a subsequent issue.

Achievements Cited

Rabbi Hertzberg charged Father Berrigan presented a "false image of Father Berrigan with ignoring the antiwar efforts of Jewish leaders and other segments of American society and cited some of Israel's social achievements to refute what the rabbi called the "unrelieved wickedness."

"Let us call all this by its name," Rabbi Hertzberg wrote: "old-fashioned theological anti-Semitism." Following the complaints by the Jewish Congress about the award, Dr. Harrington said he would not present the award. Mr. Pfeffer that unless Dr. Harrington could make a statement dissociating himself from Father Berrigan's sentiments, it might be better for someone else to present the award. In any case, Dr. Harrington said, Father Berrigan should have opened himself to a dialogue by making his speech to a Jewish audience.