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BLUEPRINT

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Jesuits Jailed for Justice,

by

Michael O'Grady S.J., Joseph Mulligan S.J., and Ben Jimenez S.J.

Editor's note:

Over the years, tens of thousands of people have traveled to Columbus, Georgia to vigil annually for the closing of the School of the Americas - Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA-WHINSEC). Each year, as part of the vigil, a small number of people engage in nonviolent civil disobedience by crossing the line onto the grounds of the Fort to shine the spotlight on the abuses committed by the graduates of the school and US policies. Since civil disobedience protests against SOA-WHINSEC began more than 10 years ago, over 230 people have been found guilty in federal court of trespass. More than 190 people served federal prison sentences. Several dozen others served substantial terms of federal probation. Most have had to pay substantial fines.

Each of the following Jesuits was convicted of the federal crime of trespass and sentenced to serve 90 days in prison. For more information about the movement to close the school and this year's vigil, see the website of School of Americas Watch www.soaw.org.

I Wasn't Always Like This

By

Ben Jimenez S.J.

In April of 1977, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was persuaded by the Jesuit Central American provincial, Cesar Jerez, to drive to the National Guard barracks to visit a Panamanian Jesuit who had been arrested on his way back from a mass in a small community. Archbishop Romero intervened and used his influence to secure the release and safe deportation of the Jesuit. To make sure he was going to be protected, Romero and Jerez drove behind the army vehicle taking the Panamanian Jesuit to the airport. As they saw the man safely onto the plane, a companion of the Panamanian said, "Thank you for helping, Monsignor." Romero replied, "I wasn't always like this." "No, monsignor, you weren't," the companion replied, "this is the fruit of the blood of Rutilio Grande."

I wasn't always like this either. I remember the first time I heard about civil disobedience through the Plowshares and the Catonsville Nine. I thought, "Whoa, hey, this seems just a little extreme! Going to jail? Sitting in a prison all day long? What good is that going to do?"

Then I met Dan Berrigan, and started reading his books. Then I met Carl Kabat and learned more about the Plowshares nuclear disarmament actions. Then I started reading Phil Berrigan's works. At the time of the Catonsville Nine, Phil came to Dan asking if he wanted to participate, explaining that the government will tolerate letters and demonstrations from now until kingdom come, and that it's time to confront the government, rather than react to it. I no longer consider civil disobedience and direct action extreme. Now I consider it essential if we desire to seriously work for peace.

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Something Serious for Peace

About two years ago, Mike O'Grady called me from Cincinnati. He told me of his interest in attending the annual SOA Watch demonstration in November, and asked me to come. I followed the SOA Watch from day one, but never attended one of their annual rallies. I saw the numbers reach 14-15,000 in the mid nineties and figured, "Hey, they have enough supporters, so I'll focus on the nuclear weapons or something else." Then Mike explained his interest in not only attending but crossing the line at Fort Benning. I almost dropped the phone. Could I be hearing right? Another Jesuit wants to confront the U.S. government in civil disobedience? Another Jesuit wants to act on our Jesuit documents, put the Gospels into practice? I replied, "Mike, the answer is yes."

Dr. King told us that an unjust law is no law at all. Imagine all the plowshares people, all the SOA witnesses, and others who, in an effort to stop future homicides, face prosecution themselves. The laws protect the weapons. The laws protect training institutions from any kind of accountability. The law protects official, sanctioned killing and destruction.

I remember reading the documents of the 32nd general congregation of worldwide Jesuits during the novitiate and thinking, "These are some pretty heavy writings." My favorite line from GC 32: "We shall not work for the promotion of justice without having to pay a price." Since then the Jesuits convened the 32nd and

34th general congregations, urging Jesuits, in GC 34, to join in the movements for peace and justice around the world. So Mike and I, and Joe Mulligan, thought we'd do just that.

I have often pondered why more Jesuits don't take the gospels and our documents to their logical conclusions, why more of us don't "pay the price." To the extent that we do this, we keep our writings and the gospels fresh, alive. To the extent that we do not, we allow dust and rust to take hold, to the point where going to jail for our beliefs appears odd, extreme. The truth of the matter is there is something gospel about paying the price.

We Jesuits write about social justice, lecture about it, research it. Isn't the next logical step to do it? To help balance the ledger, Mike, Joe, and I thought we would step up, to add another chapter to "The strange case of the teacher who practices what he teaches." Given that SOA trained troops murdered six Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter during another U.S. sponsored civil war, (in which tens of thousands of Salvadorans died and thousands more fled their country) we figured it is time to put ourselves on the line.

The Wedding Feast

The king sent his messenger to invite people to the wedding feast, "Hey, I have to check on the oxen I just bought. Please excuse me." "No, I just bought some land and need to inspect it. Please excuse me." "No, sorry I can't come, I just got married." Those rejecting the invitation of the feast present good, sound reasons; who can argue with them? They're even polite in declining.

Our lay brothers and sisters respond. They, with all the responsibilities of family life, respond. And we Jesuits, who live in community without the responsibilities of family life, who might be expected to take such risks, given our training, call, and education, ask to be excused. Well the invitation still stands: come to the wedding feast. Let's go together.

Thank You for Your Support

The Jesuit conference, following the U.S. Bishops, sent a letter to President Bush stating that limited military force might be necessary in Afghanistan to protect the common good only after all diplomatic efforts have failed. The administration's office of faith based initiatives and community initiatives responded:

“Thank you for your recent letter to President Bush concerning America's response to the tragic events of September 11. I appreciate your support and prayers at this time in our nation's history. We are blessed to live in a great nation, one where freedom, liberty, and justice will prevail. Despite defending freedom and justice. I applaud the Jesuit community for all the good work done in this country and abroad.

Wait a minute. How can we Jesuits, official representatives of the Prince of Peace, claim the necessity of force? What kind of shepherds are we, and from Whom do we claim justification? Certainly not Jesus. For if the gospels are clear about anything, it's the nonviolent way of our Lord. Of course, speaking out against the actions of our government brings derision, contempt, and mockery; not exactly everyone's cup of tea. But speaking out, resisting with our lives, constitutes the price of loyalty.

Conversations in Minimum and With Uncle Sam

Jesuit: “Ben, don't get involved with breaking the law; they'll crucify you.” I replied, “You mean like Jesus?”

A guard escorted me out of the Muscogee County Jail January 26:

“Yea, I was at that protest you all had.”

“You were? Where were you?”

“Well, you wouldn't have seen me; I had my face shield on.”

“So, are you going to the protest this coming year?”

“Not if I can help it; Sunday's my only day off.”

Brother in Muscogee: “Don't worry, Ben, nobody's gonna bother you.”

Me: “Why not?”

Brother: “Well, we saw you standing on your head and stuff.”

Me: “Haven't you ever seen that before?”

Brother: “Well, yeah, but you do it for like a minute or more. So nobody's gonna mess with you.”

I showed my ordination prayer card to a Jesuit. It had Isaiah 2:4 on it: They shall hammer their swords into plowshares and study war no more.

The Jesuit read it and said, “Well, don't bet on it.”

I replied, “Oh no, I'm betting my life on this.”

Resistance and Hope: Reflections on a Georgian Sojourn

By
Mike O'Grady, SJ

My name is Mike O'Grady and I am a Jesuit Brother. I live in Cincinnati as part of Claver Jesuit Community, a small group of men intent on practically embodying the concepts of solidarity, accompaniment, and presence, in our urban, low-income, black neighborhood of South Cumminsville.

In November 2003 I was missioned by my community, friends, and others in our larger Jesuit fellowship, to participate in the SOA Watch direct action and vigil. This action commemorates the 1989 murder of fellow Jesuits, their housekeeper and her young daughter.

It was in remembrance of these friends in the Lord and with the full support of my community that I was given the courage to face my fears and enter Ft. Benning in order to shut

Cellblock 2, Cell B
of the Muscogee
County jail thus
became my home
for the next three
months.

down the SOA-WHINSEC. I climbed over the barbed-wire, hurricane fence surrounding the fort with Gary Ashbeck of Baltimore's Jonah House, and Ben Jimenez, S.J. of Cleveland. After we were arrested we were shipped to Muscogee County jail in Columbus Ga. Gary, Ben and I decided to refuse bond and stay in jail awaiting our trial.

Cellblock 2, Cell B of the Muscogee County jail thus became my home for the next three months. During my time “inside” I was in a cell with seven other men 24 hours a day. Like the other inmates I experienced denial of visits and routine correspondence, found absolutely no privacy, no quiet, no outside time, and no personal space. Like everyone else, I was subjected to the noise, physical threats, and personal and institutional violence that are a constitutive part of that milieu.

I became close with four men who truly helped this outsider to see God present in such a setting. Their names are Jimmy, Herman, Cory, and Robert. For those short but rather intense three months these men were some of my best teachers. We were warehoused along with many other men who are considered expendable and disposable people in today's American society. We watched out for each other, prayed with each other, and formed a small community intent on getting out of there without getting hurt or harmed, or without hurting or harming others.

The three month meditation was a sacramental reminder of Christ's continuing crucifixion by the “good people” of this world. It was a deeply special opportunity to experience the graces present where suffering and abuse of human dignity are simply part of the deal. It was a time to face my fears and angers and learn more clearly what it means to trust in Jesus. And in my difficulties inside Muscogee I was able to understand a bit more clearly my fellow Jesuit brothers who spoke in our recent general congregation of how “the Crucified Jesus reminds us that in weakness and vulnerability God's love can shine forth mightily.” (D 1, n 9).

I will try to answer a few of the questions

people ask.

Why did you do it?

I deliberately broke the law, went into jail, and embraced the consequences of my actions for the simple reason that for me this is what it means to live out my faith as a Jesuit. My faith requires that I stand up when it comes to announcing the reign of the Prince of Peace, especially when I see people hurting others. The SOA-WHINSEC constitutes an ongoing state-sponsored terror enterprise teaching militaries in South and Central America how to hone and craft their skills and techniques in order to suppress domestic dissent, oppress those who disagree with them, and to murder and torture. I believe that fidelity means in order to honor our friends dead and living we must do more than get on our knees and hope for their best.

I did what I did because I believe in a God whose love is so encompassing that it allows us to venture into the most wounded and broken parts of our world and to carry the message of love. I include such places as our U.S. Congress, Ft. Benning Military Reservation, Columbus Federal Courthouse, and Muscogee County Jail. As those in our Christian mystical tradition counsel, “where there is no love, bring love, and there you will find love.”

Were you scared being in jail?

In a word, yes. But there is a wide gulf between being scared to the point of letting fear order one's actions, and recognizing that fear and anxiety are natural whenever I enter into “limit situations” that test mental, physical, and spiritual abilities.

In the past, my being scared has often afforded me an excellent excuse from which to position myself as being above entering into the messiness and woundedness of this world's deeply divisive issues. Yet by trusting “jail time as witness time” I've learned much about myself and those others who are at the giving and receiving end of our cultural myths of redemptive and retributive violence (masquerading as justice). In sum, I have

I deliberately broke the law and went into jail for the simple reason that this is what it means to live out my faith as a Jesuit.

found fear to be a steady friend who, along with anger, helps me to listen to the stirrings inside and to understand and recognize the humanity of my opponents and adversaries.

Would you do it again?

Yes. I can't see us getting through these days of darkness without the vitalizing role of communities of resistance and hope. To be part of such communities means at times to be witnessing to our beliefs with our bodies and actions. Given the forces arrayed against us, I believe that only through resistance and hope will we reclaim the vision of America. And only through resistance and hope (which for some might include jail time) will we convey the depth of our convictions and the willingness to embrace these difficulties and challenges in patient and persistent witness to the Friend who teaches us about love in action.

Do you really think you had any effect?

Maybe, maybe not. A friend wrote "Mike, I am worried about you, that you are wasting your time, risking your health, sitting in that jail when you could be doing so much more...after all," he continued, "protests are only as good as they are effective."

If I tried real hard I could put together a sizable list of outcomes that might be characterized as ways we've been effective and efficient, and all those other words which connote utility. But alas, I am not a utilitarian. I am a Christian. It just seems right to do my best to model Christ's Spirit of Love in my actions and to trust that the outcomes will be way beyond any calculus I can imagine or compute.

Are you reformed?

Completely! I can truly say that I have been utterly reformed (perhaps the better word is transformed) by my experience with the military authorities, federal prosecutors and judge, and our system of retributive imprisonment. I have become stronger in my conviction that in the face of the ever-deepening movement toward neo-fascism in

this country, communities of resistance and hope (like SOA Watch) are serving to embody Christ's incarnated presence in our broken world. I have also become reinvigorated in the belief that accompaniment means taking the risks and accepting the consequences of friendship with Christ. I put my body, my freedom, my good name, and my health in a place where I might be a visible, credible witness for the values of Christ. It is my hope that my action was a visible sign of Jesus' gospel of peace, reconciliation and understanding.

Fasting in Jail

By Joseph E. Mulligan, S.J.

During the first 45 days of my 90-day sentence for civil disobedience, I engaged in a liquids-only fast. This was done as a prayer for the closing of the SOA-WHINSEC and an end to the occupation of Iraq. This is part of my journal entry on the 30th day of the fast.

Fasting in Repentance

I am fasting in repentance for the massive crimes of our government and corporations, for which I feel a painful responsibility as an American citizen.

Although I have lived in Nicaragua for eighteen years, I have not wanted to change my citizenship. I love many people in Nicaragua, especially my friends in the Christian Base Communities, with whom I feel very much at home, as well as my fellow Jesuits, the Jesuit Volunteers, and other friends.

I also love my people in the U.S., where I have kept one foot planted over these years, returning to do some work and to enjoy visits every year.

Last fall, I took a plane ride over part of the Grand Canyon. Beholding the power and splendor of God's creation, tears of joy came to my eyes, as the young pilot announced: "Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the Grand Canyon." "America the Beautiful" was heard through our headsets, and never was it so appropriate

I engaged in a liquids - only fast for the first 45 days in jail in repentance for the massive crimes of our government.

and moving. I prayed that our "purple mountain majesties" would one day be matched by the radiant crown of brother/sisterhood for which the hymn prays.

My journey last fall also brought me to Washington, D.C., now the seat of world power (empire), for some work on the case of my friend Fr. James "Guadalupe" Carney. He disappeared in Honduras in 1983 when his Christian commitment to the liberation of the poor and to the construction of a socialist society led him to enter Honduras as a chaplain to an armed revolutionary group. Whenever I am in D.C., I pray that the architectural splendor of its buildings may be matched one day by the beautiful justice of its political achievement -- contributing its significant share in the creation of a new world.

Next I traveled to talk at Xavier University in Cincinnati. I enjoyed a delightful reunion with many of the students who have taken part in the university's Semester in Nicaragua program, with which I am honored to be associated. I celebrate the youth of America, so gifted and talented, with such potential for living meaningful, dedicated lives and for shaping a more human society. In the students and many other Americans who have been in Nicaragua, I have seen and give thanks for the expansion of their awareness and knowledge and for the further deepening of their compassion and their commitment to justice.

As I love Nicaragua, I love the U.S. -- its scenery, its culture, and above all its people and their struggles to improve this country. As citizens we have tremendous potential to change the policies of the most powerful nation on earth, so that it will be a dynamo for justice and peace rather than for exploitation and violence.

Fasting in Solidarity

In addition to the motive of repentance for the crimes of my country, I am fasting also in solidarity with the deprived majority of the world's population, especially the hungry and sick in Nicaragua.

I have never held the notion that North Americans, with access to material resources and with the important internal resource of education, can really identify completely with the poor and oppressed of the world or really share their condition.

But fasting in jail gives me a slight inkling of what it is like for those billions of the human race who have to live on far less than 2000 calories a day and whose freedom, mobility, and human potential are severely restricted by the harsh conditions of their lives.

I think of Adam, a 45-year-old man who took four bullets in the back as the victim of an armed robbery five years ago. Adam lives with his mother in the squatters' settlement where I work with the Christian Base Community.

Adam's physical world consists of one room in his two-room tin-roofed wooden house, located alongside a drainage ditch flowing with foul water. Surgery and proper physical therapy could possibly help him walk with a walker or crutches, but he remains totally paralyzed from the waist down due to lack of financial resources. Treatment would be too expensive in the now practically totally privatized Nicaraguan health-care system. It seems that his room will be his cell for life.

For friends like Adam, imprisoned by their physical condition, there is no end in sight to the restrictions on their mobility. Although I have less than sixty days to go until release, I can identify ever so slightly with them in their confinement.

While fasting I am also more keenly aware of those who have to fast indefinitely. Many people in Nicaragua are fasting on Fridays and demonstrating at the American embassy against U.S. foreign policy in solidarity with me. But for many of them, on many days fasting is not optional.

I think of two severely malnourished infants I noticed some years ago -- one in a mountain village, the other in the Adolfo Reyes

If our love is real, we must strive for maximum effectiveness in feeding the hungry, helping the sick, the prisoners, and others in need.

barrio of Managua where I accompany another Christian Base Community. Thanks to my vehicle and some money I gathered, these two children were rescued from death by emergency treatment in hospitals -- only two of perhaps a million malnourished kids in Nicaragua.

Thanks to my small Fund for the Disabled, which is supported largely by my Detroit Province of the Society of Jesus, I am able to provide some monthly assistance to people with disabilities. But such assistance, while extremely significant for me and for the few beneficiaries, is just a drop in an ocean of vital needs.

Fasting Impels Us to Struggle Effectively

So what is the point of a fast in jail or a Lenten fast or the traditional Catholic abstinence from meat on certain days? Surely such practices would be counterproductive if they led us to congratulate ourselves, thinking that by carrying them out with some slight sacrifice we were really doing something effective for the starving masses of the world.

If our love is real, we must strive for maximum effectiveness in feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, helping the sick, the prisoners, and others in need.

This is precisely where a personal experience of physical deprivation and of loss of freedom and mobility can be significant and important. These experiences can help us know and feel the suffering of the truly deprived. These experiences can impel us to struggle effectively to alleviate their misery and to transform the political and economic structures which exacerbate and perpetuate their pain.

I have witnessed this happening in students, volunteers, and others who have spent a semester or several years in Latin America and even in those who have spent shorter periods there.

I am grateful that this has also been my experience, and I hope and pray that it will be a

fruit of this experience of jail and fasting. My concluding prayer for all is that of St. Paul who prayed that "love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best" (Philippians 1:9-10).



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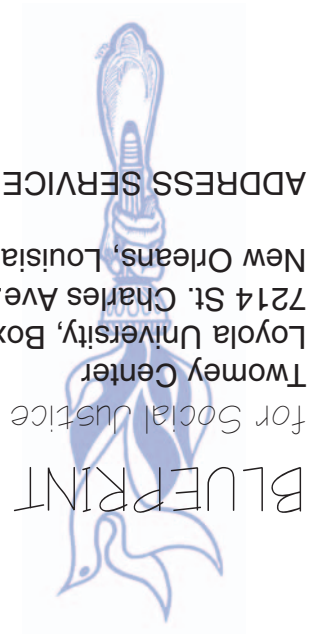
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In this Issue

Jesuit Jailed for Justice Brief reflections by

Jesuits Ben Jimenez, Joe Mulligan and Mike O'Grady on their recent time in jail.

Each Jesuit served several months in jail for nonviolently walking onto the grounds of Fort Benning, Georgia. They took their action to challenge the injustices committed by the United States and graduates of the School of the Americas (SOA), renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), a military training school located on the grounds of Fort Benning. That school has trained most of the worst human rights abusers in our hemisphere. As but one example, of the twenty-six soldiers subsequently implicated in the murders of the Jesuit priests and women in El Salvador in 1989, nineteen received training at the School of the Americas.



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