

Prison Journal No. 11 -- August 6-9, 2006

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Dear Friends,

I wish to begin this last of my prison journals with thank yous. I want to thank all who have held me in your thoughts and prayers and those who supported me financially during these six months of incarceration. Those beginning months were not easy ones. My time in the Jackson County Jail was some of the most difficult jail time I've served in my peacemaking career. Your prayers and support lifted me through those difficult times. Thank you.

I'd like to thank my community members at the Des Moines Catholic Worker. Knowing you all were "taking care of business," doing the hospitality and keeping the doors open was a great support for me. Doing the works of mercy is the core and heart of any Catholic Worker community. That we are able to afford my being locked up for my peacemaking efforts is a testimony to the wealth and blessings God has bestowed on our Catholic Worker community. Thank you all....

Finally, I want to thank the few dear people who did most of the work, invested hours of their time, to make sure I was supported in the manner I asked to be, at times seemed to demand to be. Much-o-thanks to Barbara Hans who took my weekly lectionary scribblings and transformed them into readable text to be sent on for their final editing. I'm sure Barbara was relieved to receive my last installment. I owe you big time, Barb. I also want to thank Andrea Molinari and Allyne Smith for sharing the duty of doing the final editing on the lectionary reflections. These guys made sure I did not get too far a field from the beaten scriptural track, correcting any major misreads of mine. Much-o-thanks good and holy scribes.

Mostly though, my thanks go to Fran Fuller, my fellow DM Catholic Worker, who really did most of the work of support for me. For starters, Fran was the one who got the emails out to you all. She also singularly edited my prison journal writings. She handled all my correspondence, banking needs, and served as the person I called first for any and all personal needs. Secondly, she took over a number of my responsibilities at the Catholic Worker. She was the editor of the two issues of the *via pacis* and directed their mailings. She took over the Berrigan House and took care of Dan and Phil, my two white cats. My partner, Laney Green, and the love of my life said that Fran saved our relationship during these months. For Fran took the brunt of my rough, rude and demanding directives from jail. Laney rightly knew if Fran were not my main support person she would have caught a lot of my ill tempered mood swings. The last time I talked with Fran she said she was looking forward to getting her life back. Thank you so much, Fran. I am not sure I will ever be able to repay you for all you have done. I do hope in some measure to make an effort. (Editor's note: hmmm.....I'm sure I can think of something! ☺)

A-BOMBING OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI, JAPAN – 61 YEARS OF LYING WIITH NO
END IN SIGHT

It is fitting that I'm writing my final prison journal on the anniversaries of the USA A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, on August 6 and 9, 1945. As I write this reflection, fellow Des Moines and Omaha Catholic Workers are participating in our annual 3 ½ day vigil at the main gate of Offutt AFB, the home of the Strategic Nuclear and US Space Commands. We first started demonstrating at Offutt AFB, south of Omaha, NE, back when it was the Strategic Air Command Headquarters on August 6, 1979. We have returned every year

since to remember what Pope Paul VI called, “A butchery of untold magnitude,” the slaughter of 120,000 innocent Japanese civilians in an unacknowledged war crime.

Offutt AFB is not the only place in the country that people are remembering these dark evens. Peace activists in Oakridge, TN, Bangor, WA, Livermore, CA, Washington, DC, Valley Forge, PA, and Duluth, MN, are just a few more places. These sites were reported in the ***Nuclear Resister***. The ***Nuclear Resister*** is an important publication that reports and networks nonviolent resistance to war and nuclear weapons. It gives updates and lists of peace activists who are doing prison time for their peacemaking efforts. It is published six times a year and has been doing so since 1980. I highly recommend subscribing and supporting this important little newspaper. They can be reached by mail at PO Box 43383, Tucson, AZ, 85733, or by phone at 520-323-8697, or by email at nukeresister@igc.org.

With all that is going on in the world today, especially with the ongoing wars in the Middle East, one might reasonable ask why peacemakers in the USA would focus on something that happened over 60 years ago? Would not our protesting energies be better served on the current wars?

A Greek philosopher once said, “The first casualty of war is truth.” Like any human activity whether loving or hating, wars are an infinite network of human relationships that contribute to the larger web of life. They do not happen in a vacuum. The violence of war like the nonviolence of peacemaking is cyclical. It builds on previous violent war-making acts. The accumulation of violent war-making acts helps to create cultures of war. Currently, the cultures of wars dominate the world’s human societies. And the USA is the leading nation creating the global war-making cultures. Martin Luther King, Jr., said it best in 1968, “The USA is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.” That was in 1968. It has not changed today. And I believe the USA A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, serve as the emblematic deeds giving the moral rational to our believed national licenses to be the world’s singular military Super Power in whose mission STRATCom attempts to fulfill.

We Americans have lost our moral bearings when it comes to war-making. We would do well to study what Pope John Paul II meant when he said, “All wars are human failures.” If truth be the first casualty of war, then as a human failure, all wars are built on lies, lies that lead to crimes against humanity. Both the winners and losers tell lies in wars. The one moral advantage a losing side has over a winning side is that at the end of a war their lies and crimes against humanity are often exposed and prosecuted. This was certainly true after WW II, a human failure that killed over 30 million people and left most of Europe, Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East in shambles. At the end of WW II, the Allied forces of the USA, Britain, France and the Soviet Union put the leaders of German, Italy and Japan on trial for the war crimes they and their nations committed. But when it came to trying the war crimes of the winners, there was no one to judge or prosecute. Therefore, there was no opportunity to confess, repent and make amends for the lies and crimes that we as a nation committed during WW II. In fact, just the opposite took place. Our lies and crimes were remembered as truths and heroic deeds of a righteous nation.

The A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, was one of those unacknowledged USA war crimes. Some war crimes are textbook, open and shut cases. The deliberate targeting and bombing of civilian populations is one of these textbook war crimes. Neither Hiroshima nor Nagasaki were military targets. The USA reasoning for the A-bombings was to end the war and to save both American and Japanese lives. I do not believe either of these claims to be true but even if they were, they cannot excuse the criminal nature of the bombings. And yet to this day, we cannot get an official apology or a national consensus to the criminality of these two A-bombings.

There are a number of reasons why the USA cannot bring itself to own up to the criminal nature of the A-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If we were to admit to their being war crimes, we would also have to look at the other related massive indiscriminate bombings of civilian population centers that took place in the last two years of the war in Germany and Japan. Every major city in both countries was bombed during these years and tens of thousands of civilians were killed. One of the reasons the USA chose to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki was they were two cities of their size that had not already been bombed. To admit the truth about Hiroshima and Nagasaki would open a Pandora's Box that many in power would just as soon keep the lid on.

Yet the greater risk for the USA in facing the truth about Hiroshima and Nagasaki lies in the criminal acts that have followed them in which the national mythology surrounding them has given justification. The old moral imperative that one lie leads to another holds true here. In the post WW II world, the unacknowledged crimes of the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki set in motion the lies behind the nuclear arms race. Instead of having a period of mourning and repentance after WW II from the criminal acts by losers and winners alike – something truly Christian countries would have done, after WW II, the USA celebrated our victory, condemned our enemies and promptly started the Cold War with our former ally, the Soviet Union. And almost immediately we were in a Nuclear Arms Race in which we never were equaled and most of the time, we were far superior to our nearest rival, the Soviet Union. The lie behind the Nuclear Arms race is there is no real security with it. It helped to create a spirit of never-ending war, robbed from the poor and undermined any real chance for peace.

Just as dangerous and evil as the nuclear technology was, the spiritual "black hole" Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened up in our national consciousness. Once we as a nation were able to morally justify the mass killing of 120,000 innocent civilians as acceptable "collateral damage", there was nothing we weren't willing to do to defeat our new Cold War adversaries. Through the Cold War years, USA foreign policies took on a major disconnect between what we told ourselves we were doing and what we actually were doing to further our national interest. For over 45 years, the world's two super powers battled each other through surrogate wars and harsh economic and political policies that exploited the peoples and nations of the world. Millions of people were killed, resources plundered and cultures destroyed. We have on to look at the blood legacy of the US School of the Americas and the wholesale human rights violations it fostered in Latin America to begin to understand the magnitude of our murderous ways.

It is not that the USA has not committed other grave national sins and crimes. We have a history replete with criminal, murderous deeds done in our name Slavery, the liquidation of Native Americans, and the destruction of the environment rank high on the list of moral failures and we continue to live with their after affects today. But the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a critical piece in our national narrative, a building block event of our perception of ourselves in the post-WW II era that has given us a self-ordained "Divine mandate" to play global policeman.

Proof of this unholy alliance with nuclear weapons came with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the reason for our having our nuclear weapons disappeared and yet our nuclear arsenal remains. In fact, our military and war-making capabilities have actually increased since the end of the Cold War. The mission of STRATCom at Offutt AFB is now to have a Global Strike Force ready to project US military might anywhere on the planet in a matter of minutes. Today the USA has military personnel stationed in over 600 paces outside our country. Our military budget equals the combined

military budgets of all other countries in the world! We are the singular global super power. No empire in human history has ever acquired as much power and global dominance as we have today. The single major question Americans need to start asking themselves is whether we are an empire or a republic?

THREE WAYS IN WHICH HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI'S LIE IS BEING PLAYED OUT IN THE MIDDLE EAST TODAY

1. Say one thing. Do another.

For the last 55 years, the USA foreign policy in the Middle East has been one track run on two rails. All the while we claimed to be defenders of freedom and democracy, our actions belied an entirely different agenda. The first rail of this one track foreign policy was to make sure that Middle East oil kept flowing out of the region, cheaply. To insure this, we supported and put in place the most undemocratic government who had no regard for human rights, who neglected the needs of their poor majorities and brutally put down genuine, nonviolent dissent.

The second rail of this two rail foreign policy track was to support the State of Israel no matter what it did. Over the last 55 years, Israel has morphed from a small, vulnerable, out-numbered, out-gunned nation trying to survive amidst a host of hostile neighbors into a regional super power with a military capable of defeating all other armies in the region at the same time, with its own stockpile of nuclear weapons. Through the years with its occupation of Palestine, it has become the biggest human rights violator in the region which is no small thing! Israel is still a small country, out-numbered and fiercely hated by its neighbors, especially the poor and dispossessed. And Israel is currently fighting a war with Lebanon that they cannot win despite their overwhelming military superiority. Because their enemies were birthed in previous defeats at the hands of Israel, killing them only makes them stronger. Israel seems to be squandering any chance for making peace with its neighbors by treating the Palestinians unjustly and only joining them in making war on each other.

2. "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?" Matthew 7:3

The USA is very good at pointing out the faults of our enemies but is virtually blind to our own shortcomings. Because of this, we have a very distorted view of the world and our role in it. Contrary to what President Bush keeps telling us that Islamic terrorists hate our values of freedom and democracy, what they really hate is our hypocrisy and double standards regarding Israel. What Americans need to start understanding is that all we say about the evils of our enemies is mostly true. However, things are even worse because in many ways we have done many things more evil and immoral than our enemies!

3. Numbers do matter – The issue of proportionality

One person murdered in political violence is a human tragedy. Still numbers do tell a tale. Body counts do matter. Who kills best and most, who commits the most human rights violations, who controls the most resources, land and human beings through violence and force, whose people live better than others, all these things matter. The truth behind the numbers is something Americans are unwilling to see. Iraq is a great example of this self-serving blindness. Starting with the first Gulf War in 1991 to the present occupation, the USA has killed more Iraqis than all other warring factions within Iraq combined. That includes the 100,000 plus people killed by Saddam Hussein immediately after the 1991 war, the post USA invasion suicide bombers, the Iraqi on Iraqi sectarian violence in the so-called declared

civil war. In the first five years of the USA led sanctions alone, over 500,000 children died because of the sanctions. We killed close to 200,000 Iraqis in the first Gulf War and we have killed between 50,000 and 100,000 in the second Gulf War. The destructive power of our war-making machines has done huge amounts of destruction to the Iraqi civilian infrastructure in both the Gulf One and Gulf Two Wars. The nearly 3,000 USA military deaths from the current war and occupation does not even come close to the death and destruction we have brought upon Iraq since 1991, yet for most Americans the only lives that matter are American lives. This spiritual blindness was set in place with the A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It speaks directly to one of the key principles of the Just War tradition called "proportionality."

The 9/11 Mis-Read

The Bush administration's mis-read of the events of 9/11 is very revealing. The USA Government, the national media and vast majority of Americans read the events of 9/11 as another Pearl Harbor and rallied the country to fight another World War against terrorism. In Reality, 9/11 was the inevitable "blow back" from our A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the 61 years of lying on top of lying which has made us the hated World Empire we are today. What Malcolm X said regarding the assassination of President Kennedy fits well to describe what happened on 9/11 when he said, "The chickens have come home to roost." The bible says it even better, "You reap what you sow."

Our yearly remembrance and protest surrounding the August 6-9 anniversaries of the USA A-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is just the beginning and necessary work of calling the nation to a collective AA Fifth Step process of no more lying, of telling the truth, of confessing of all past sins, asking for forgiveness and making a good faith effort to make amends for 61 years of lying and killing.