NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://ncronline.org)

Turning yourself in isn't a requirement for nonviolent activism

Mary Ann McGivern | Jun. 18, 2013 NCR Today

One current criticism of Edward Snowden is that he isn't a real practitioner of nonviolence. If he were, he would have stayed in the United States and gone to prison, like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. So said Sunday pundit Bob Schieffer [1], host of "Face the Nation."

There is confusion that standing around to be arrested is essential to civil disobedience. It isn't. Punishment is not integral to doing the right thing.

Getting arrested is often part of the strategy. Sitting in jail gains press and stings our consciousness. The six-month misdemeanor sentences of those protesting the School of the Americas (pardon me, Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) won't destroy careers or damage family relationships, and they are served in minimum security. The number of total years served for trespass at Fort Benning, Ga., to protest the School of the Americas is shocking.

Collectively, 245 resisters have served more than 100 years in prison, according to SOA Watch's website [2]. We should be shocked. The school continues to train soldiers in repressive governments, and SOA Watch's prisoners of conscience consider it worth six months in prison to say no to the military and to shock us all.

But what Bradley Manning suffered, naked, in solitary confinement for years, all before even being tried, does nothing to further nonviolent principles. I imagine these young men, Snowden and Manning, holding knowledge about Department of Defense and NSA behavior they believe was wrong. In conscience, they were obliged to act. But what to do? Who to tell? Obviously not the authorities. That's like asking the fox to take a watch protecting the chickens. If I had such knowledge and watched the fate of Bradley Manning -- if I had the courage to tell the press -- I'd run, too.

It is easy after the fact to scold people for not living up to some imagined Gandhian standard. It is harder to take action ourselves.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/28/2016 - 16:54*): https://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/turning-yourself-isnt-requirement-nonviolent-activism

Links:
[1] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3460_162-57589511/bob-schieffer-edward-snowden-is-no-hero/
[2] http://www.soaw.org/about-us/pocs