

times rebelled against the questions and harsh realities you brought home to share with me. My playful threats to dress as a Sandinista for Halloween last year somehow did not seem funny to either of us. Perhaps I felt the tension most keenly when I came home from a month-long sojourn (with a Manchester College group) in India last January bringing a *khadi* (homespun, handwoven cotton) banner bearing a Mahatma Gandhi quote: "Nonviolence is the greatest force available to mankind" (sic). Could we live with that proclamation hanging beside your Sandino posters? What would Gandhi have said of our dilemma?

I suspect that he would have concurred with Helder Camara's notion that commitment to the principle of nonviolence must be coupled with sophistication about the political and economic forces being confronted. Gandhi's work with the poorest of India's poor (the *harijans* or untouchables), his denouncement of unrestrained technology, and his disdain for paternalistic Christian missionary efforts in his homeland indicated that his disciplines of *satyagraha* were firmly grounded not only in India's rich, spiritual heritage but in political realism. In other words, he knew what he was up against. And you are right: from what I can gather from his writings, when faced with a choice between cowardice and violence, Gandhi would have advocated violence. His passionate commitment to suffer death before inflicting lethal violence on another still allowed him to see that violence takes various forms and calls for various responses. His compassion and sophistication made allowances for necessary compromise to those who are either ill-equipped for nonviolence resistance or who find their adversary so tyrannical that nothing short of armed defense seems tolerable. But even though he characterized the Polish resistance to the German forces in World War II as

*almost* nonviolent—he still maintained that suffering love is ultimately more powerful than self-defense.

I doubt that any of the classical proponents of nonviolence on your list would condemn the use of armed confrontation in a desperate resistance to tyranny. I surely cannot condemn the campesinos in Nicaragua who took up arms against Somoza. Nor can I condemn my North American friend who, in defense of himself and his Nicaraguan co-travelers, carried a gun through the Nicaraguan mountains where National Guardsmen were hiding soon after the Sandinistas declared their victory. I can empathize with those who seized the U.S. hostages in Iran. I cannot condemn the homeless woman who hurls curses at her passersby as she wanders the streets of downtown Washington.

As I come to understand more deeply the anger that wells up in me when my freedom and dignity are violated, and as I come to share glimpses of the much greater oppression of my neighbors down the street or in the third world, I find I cannot speak of peace without demanding justice.

But the nagging questions remain: What if I had been in Nicaragua during the insurrection? Would I have taken up arms? Or perhaps, less hypothetically, what if *you* had decided to join the Frente? What do I say of the Nicaraguan church leaders who laud the Sandinista victory in July '79 as God's victory, or as you suggest—that the FSLN victory is a sign of the kingdom of God? What do I say of the Trappist priest Ernesto Cardenal, who hailed the FSLN's armed struggle as one not only of justice, but of love? Is it possible to love one's enemies by killing them?

You point to the lack of vengeance in the victorious Sandinista's response to the National Guard, to military commander Tomas Borge's forgiveness of his torturer, to the aboli-