

Roman repression of his people that was likely as harsh, in many ways, as Somoza's grip on Nicaragua.) I would hope my choice, however impassioned, would allow for the most definite possibility that I could be wrong.

Perhaps it is a luxury that I even have such a choice.

That realization of privilege is the crux of the moral ambiguity I find myself confronting. My deepest agony on the whole topic of violence and nonviolence comes as I read your reiteration of what I've heard countless times about Nicaragua: the people were forced to resort to military resistance because the U.S.-supported Somoza regime gave them no choice. In a very real sense, there is blood on my hands, my bloody pacifist hands. I am guilty of murder. Forgive me if I seem to overdramatize, but consider this: our federal tax dollars have been used time and again to fund thousands of atrocities such as the one your nun-friend described. I have never carried a gun (I even have trouble killing mice), but my money has supported and my silence has allowed some of the most brutal violence in the history of the world. The nation of which I am part has perpetuated the slow, torturous death of malnutrition and disease that our society's policies have allowed, if not caused.

The more I allow myself to face that truth about my participation in a violent world, the more my faith and my intellect call me to humility and compassion rather than to doctrinaire ethics. I cannot hope for a clear conscience. I can only hope that my ethical choices are motivated by love rather than fear. I can only pray that my increasing passion for justice can be expressed in ways that do not betray the spirit of the Prince of Peace I profess to follow.

The crucial issue for us, then, is *not* what we would have done if we had been in Nicaragua during the insurrection. We were

not there, nor are we likely ever to be in such a combat situation, unless we choose to deliberately place ourselves there. The crucial question is, rather, what does our commitment to nonviolence mean as citizens of one of the most powerful and oppressive nations in recorded history? What does it mean to hold up Jesus' model of resisting evil by dying rather than killing, amidst a world so permeated with violence—whether it be verbal threats on the streets, psychological violence done to minorities, institutionalized violence inflicted on the unemployed, or bombings plotted to counter Central American insurrectionists?

I confess that I don't know. The older I get and the more I learn, the more tentative my answers become. The more my faith moves me towards an acquaintance with the mystery of life and gives me an increasing awe at Jesus' irrational way of confronting evil, the more passionate I become about these questions. It is becoming increasingly clear that the best way to confront the questions is not to invoke platitudes, but to place myself in the thick of the confrontations. And to pray for mercy. I know that a pacifism untested is an affront to those who suffer. I must take sides, on behalf of the victims of the oppressive powers. I must either be willing to take on suffering or keep my mouth shut.

Humbly,
MJB

Dear MJ,

You're right.

Love, Yvonne

No...thankfully, you won't let me end with that. The issues you raise need yet another response.

Thank you for bringing the violence issue home to our own soil. That is difficult for me to do. After living a year with my heart in