

lence of the Nicaraguan people's eventual outpouring of anger. It was understandable.

After months of studying and translating reports of human rights violations, of seeing the Latin American press photos, of comforting the anguished friends who lost family and friends at Somoza's hands, of discovering that the National Guard learned its torture techniques from U.S. military advisors, how could I not but re-think the assertion that all violence is the same?

It becomes clear to me why those who die of malnutrition and disease, who hunger and thirst for bread and justice speak of revolution and why those who hold the reigns of wealth and power speak of "gradual and peaceful change," or "working through the system." I realized last year that anything that was legal in Nicaragua was absolutely non-threatening and meaningless to the Somoza regime. In such a situation, the passage of power to the opposite hands could come only through organized popular resistance. The holders of power forced that resistance to resort to violent means. In many parts of Latin America today, the means of the resistance are no longer determined by the common people.

I do not know that any of the popular opposition groups in Nicaragua practiced non-violent resistance on *principle*. However, the fact that they all foresaw armed insurrection as inevitable does not negate the significant fact that for many years, their resistance was *de facto* nonviolent: the crippling national strikes carried out jointly by owners and workers, the funeral services which were often silent mass protest marches, the women who occupied the United Nations building in Managua, the hunger strikes organized by health workers or by mothers of the disappeared, the occupations of churches, the preaching of sermons against the state violations.

If Nicaraguan Archbishop Obando y Bravo had preached what Salvadorean Archbishop Romero preached he would have also been slain. In a Sunday homily last May, Oscar Romero spoke directly to the Salvadorean National Guard:

Brothers, you belong to our own people. You kill your brother peasants; and in the face of an order to kill that is given by a man, the law of God should prevail that says 'do not kill.' No soldier is obliged to obey an order counter to the law of God. No one has to comply with an immoral law. . . I beg you, I beseech you. I order you, stop the killing.

Archbishop Romero was assassinated the day after he preached against the guardians of the ruling class in Nicaragua. The women who staged a sit-in at the UN office were tear-gassed, jailed, beaten. Peasants who asked for decent wages were murdered along side their families in their sleep. Students who protested because the poor could not afford a bus fare hike were assaulted, tear-gassed, imprisoned, tortured, their genitals ripped off. . . I could go on.

I shall never forget the story recounted by a North American nun of two 14-year-old boys taken by the National Guard from their home beside hers, shot in the vacant field behind her street, laid on the ground with red and black FSLN kerchiefs tied around their necks, pistols placed in their hands. Their bloody photo with the accompanying article claiming to have captured and killed "communists," appeared in Somoza's newspaper the following day.

I cannot ask why after 40 years of oppression those people did not try a massive non-violent resistance against Somoza. Rather, I ask why they tried nonviolent tactics at all. They did try them. They began with them, and never ceased trying to use them. The people suffered with one another and—out of love for their comrades—could not but resist, even when it meant armed insurrection.