

# Democracy and the Revolutionary Process in Nicaragua

Francois Houtart

## ONLY 53¢ A DAY WILL SUPPORT A NICARAGUAN FREEDOM FIGHTER

In many areas of the world there are children who spend their days fighting for survival. They cry at night but no one answers. Their parents were abducted by Communist forces because they spoke about "freedom." Some were executed by firing squads, others were shot in the back, still more died in political prisons.

To see this may sound like a nightmare, something you would see on the Late Show. Here in Nicaragua, it is a way of life.

I know. My name is Charley and I am a Nicaraguan counter-revolutionist, a Contra, a Freedom Fighter.

I have taken up arms against the Soviet Empire and its satellite government in Nicaragua and I need your help.

Let me, your Congress and all our funding. People like Michael Serrano, Shaver Jackson, and Ted Kennedy, who claim to be "friends of the people," said



that it was unethical to fund what here in Nicaragua is the "will of the people." There is no "country" called Nicaragua. Only a nation of people living under a totalitarian regime funded by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Amn? you as Americans, committed to government of the people, by the people, and for the people? Just that what you fought for just over 200 years ago? If so, please help.

For \$26 a month you can help bring democracy to Central America. Regular meals, medical attention, and the chance to vote in a free and open election. That's all we need.

In America you have so much. We have nothing. Our very future and the future of the democratic world is at stake.

Please help me and my fellow patriots. We haven't got long.

*vaya con Dios,  
Charley*

## SEND DEMOCRACY AROUND THE WORLD

SAVE THE CONTRAS, P.O. Box 2609, Washington, DC 20013-0209

- Yes, I want to help Charley and his fellow Freedom Fighters in Nicaragua.
- Enclosed is my first monthly payment of \$26.
- Enclosed is \$302 for one year's supply of food, medicine, and clothing.
- I can't send money now, but I will write my Congressman and tell him to support U.S. aid to the Contras.

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## SAVE THE CONTRAS

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In Europe, judgments about Nicaragua are largely colored both by the collective experience of the various peoples and by the political systems they have established. Parliamentary democracy, acquired with great hardship and recovered after the intervals of fascism and nazism, appears in its concrete form, as the unique manner of political participation. Leaving aside the factual genesis and the underlying philosophy on which parliamentary democracy is based allows it to be established as an absolute parameter.

It is difficult for any human group in any culture to renounce its own canons in order to read other realities. Knowledge of history could surely contribute to a relativization of judgments, on condition however that one takes into account all the factors of the social constructions and in particular the social struggles which have marked them and continue to specify each one of them.

In several European countries, the fact that one political party defends the cause of Nicaragua is enough to make it suspicious in the eyes of others, even those who have expressed sympathy towards a people struggling for self-determination. Moreover, the image that West Europeans have about socialist regimes of the East and the type of political relations which were established between the two Europes since the end of the Second World War, have considerably contributed to the creation of stereotypes, thus making it difficult to understand the Nicaraguan reality.

We can, therefore, understand why the theme of democracy and the revolutionary process in Nicaragua requires a serious effort on our part to step out of our categories and to look at reality with new eyes. There is no question, of course, of compromising on the principles of the liberation of peoples, democracy, social and individual rights, but we must be aware that such principles only exist within very precise historical, social and cultural realities. This is true not only for Nicaragua, but also for the European nations. The only wise attitude, respectful of the differences, is to recognize this fact.

## I. Genesis and Constraints of the Political System

Two main lines of reflection are important about Nicaragua. The first one consists in understanding how from a situation of economic dependence, of underdevelopment as a way of life and of political dictatorship, a project of liberation has been born and afterwards institutionalized. The second one is the war situation which is prevailing since 1981.

### 1) *The Social Genesis of the Political Organization*

In spite of its rapidity in its ultimate phase, the revolutionary process has been the carrier of popular participation which has had hardly any precedent in Latin America. This allowed the Sandinist Front to establish from the beginning a political system with a very broad popular base and to take a distance towards the project of political restoration carried on by the minority social classes which had dominated the various phases of the history of the country since its independence.

Nicaragua had never known democracy, even a parliamentary democracy, as European countries have experienced it for more than a century. For Europe, we must not forget, it was a progressive experience and quite imperfect. Elections were based on a client type of relationship between the agrarian bourgeoisie and the peasants, when the latter were not directly manipulated by the political regime. The Sandinist Revolution has been the first experience of political participation by the whole population at large. But this did not suffice to create a full political consciousness and a considerable work was left over the problem of transforming the people as bearers of the revolutionary impetus and making them the subject of the new economic, social, cultural and political construction.

Now, such an objective is not exclusively accomplished within the forms that we know in our European societies. The originality of Nicaragua has been to combine initiatives of direct participations, and economic reforms aimed at the transformation of the social relations and classical forms of parliamentary democracy. Protagonists of ready-made models are at a loss; hence, a great number of stereotypes which are politically utilized.

There is no need to hide the fact that the Nicaraguan project is a socialist one. It is characterized by an economy put at the service of the majorities and aimed at emancipating itself from the logic of domination of the capitalist system. It is also typified by participative political forms which gives to the rural and urban majorities the real weight of their social existence, destroying thereby the predominance of the social classes which had formerly monopolized power. Finally it rests on an ideology including at the same time nation-building and the reality of class struggle, with the peculiar characteristic

of the joint existence of a Marxist reference and a Christian participation.

However two features are rather frightful for Westerners, the concept of Marxism (especially Marxism-Leninism) and the aid given by the socialist countries to the Sandinist Revolution, especially that coming from the USSR and from Cuba. For the first point, we must put the Marxist approach within its historical context in Central America. Therefore, we must try to understand and judge it by the political practice of Nicaragua and not by abstract definitions cleverly used to create scarecrows. One example will suffice: the attitude toward religion, which is quite different from that of most of the East European countries or even of Cuba. Giulio Girardi demonstrated well in his book on Marxism, Sandinism and Christianity<sup>1</sup>, the exact meaning of those orientations, at the same time different and complementary. In particular he has indicated the function accomplished by a non-dogmatic Marxism in the direction of the Nicaraguan society.

The foreign aid of the socialist countries is first of all geared towards a people trying to come out of poverty and dependence and this is the reason of their economic, sanitary and social initiatives. But inevitably such aid is also part of the confrontation with the imperialism of the USA, which tries to submit the Nicaraguan people to its injunctions. It is good to recall that the North American intervention in Nicaragua and in Central America predated the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and even the Russian Revolution of 1917. A dozen direct aggressions or occupations by the USA took place within a century in Nicaragua alone.<sup>2</sup>

### 2) *The state of war*

Our second reflection is linked with the conditions of the war. The long and difficult process of political institutionalization must be accomplished in a war situation. Between 1981 and 1986, there has been more than 35,000 deaths in Nicaragua; economic losses exceed one billion dollars; the national budget, handicapped in that 50% is allocated to defense expenditure. Military operations are financed and directed by the US Government (legally and illegally) which also imposed an economic boycott and embargo against Nicaragua.

All these explain the measures taken in Nicaragua which are so difficult for us to understand in Europe: the declaration of a state of emergency; suppression of the *habeas corpus* for violations connected with war operations; control of the media for the information linked with the security of the nation; closing down of *La Prensa*, after the position taken by the newspaper in favor of the American aid to the "contras" in June 1986; expulsion of Monsignor Pablo Vega, bishop of Juigalpa, who also approved the same decision.

We must remember the real historical context. Nicaragua is not living in normal circumstances, no more than France during the "drole de guerre" in 1939-40 or Great Britain

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during the Second World War. No one can expect in such conditions to see the institutions of a country function according to a model of a nation at peace. However, facing the increase of external aggression, the gravity of the economic situation and the ever growing need for foreign aid coming from the socialist countries, could one fear a stiffening of the regime, an authoritarian drift, a renunciation of the initial project? This is the question that many Europeans are asking themselves.

Once more it is imperative to abandon stereotypes to answer such questions. Objective factors do exist allowing one to formulate such a hypothesis and nobody can deny the reality and the possibility of such eventualities. But other elements have to be brought in at the same time, namely the fact that to be able to develop their project the Sandinists must accelerate the processes of economic, social and cultural participation. The contradictions brought by the counter-revolution, trying to equate reality with the image created by the "freedom fighters", so dear to the heart of President Reagan, are in fact resulting in just the opposite. Land reform has been accelerated, especially in the war zones; elections have been organized ahead of schedule; a Constitution has been voted; the law on Autonomy of the Atlantic coast is being drafted; the integration of the private sector in the economy is continuing; the participative structures in the economy and in the political management are being institutionalized. It is thus another logic which is developing, based on factors as objective as those alluded to before.

One could think that this is too optimistic a view of reality. As a matter of fact, difficulties are not lacking, the dissatisfaction of urban middle classes has increased, the lack of cadres is real, the political options of the summit are not always lived in the same way at the base, the strength of the external and internal opposition remains great. All this is true, but the social dynamics has neither been suffocated by a paralyzing bureaucracy, nor by the imposition of an authoritarian political power. Let us now go further in the reflection on the theoretical basis of the Nicaraguan reality.

## II. The participation of the social actors

As we have seen, the fundamental orientation in Nicaragua is neither one of a mere *coup d'etat*, nor the imposition of the pre-established model. It is characterized by new practices, new institutions, new symbols and ideological productions, related to the hegemony of the majorities. To analyze such a phenomenon we must at the same time be faithful to the reality and to approach it with a dialectical perspective. We are facing a process of social reconstruction affecting at the same time the nation, the State and the civil society, within the general framework of an agro-export economy. It means that the constraints are great and that in a short range the existing class structure will not go through drastic changes<sup>3</sup>.

### 1) Majorities, people and popular hegemony

It is important to clarify some concepts much used in the case of the Nicaraguan revolution. "Majorities" is used to define all the social groups who have been excluded from political power, from the main part of the distribution of the social product and from cultural participation at the national level. It is not identified with a particular class, because various sectors of the population are concerned: poor peasants, semi-proletarianized peasants, social actors in the so-called informal sectors of the economy, workers, indigenous populations, etc. There was no important working class in Nicaragua at the moment of the revolution and even if elements of it have played a role in the process, it could not be the axis of the revolutionary process.

Here comes the concept of *people* so much used in Latin America and which has been the occasion of great controversies in which we don't want to enter. Let us say for the moment that in the Nicaraguan context, people means the majorities who have been excluded in the various social processes and who, after the Revolution, are forming the center of the national and social reconstruction. In order to understand better this reality and to analyze it in more theoretical terms, it is necessary to recall the type of society existing during the Somoza regime. It was characterized by a dependent capitalism, mostly agrarian. From the sociological point of



*"The Sandinist Revolution has been the first experience of political participation by the whole population at large".*

view it means that the majority of the working force was not really and directly submitted to the capital. The degree of proletarianization was feeble and many pre-capitalist forms of production existed in various areas of the economy: agriculture, artisanry, commerce, services. The same was true in the field of local political organizations, the village, the small town, the neighborhood. Many of the popular representations were typical of a mythical way of thinking. All this was possible, because the capital did not need to include the whole of manpower in direct links of dependence and required as a matter of fact, the existence and the development of such pre-capitalist forms for its own reproduction.

The creation of a popular hegemony, which is the open goal of the Sandinist Front, has to be understood in the same perspective. It means from the negative point of view, the negation of the logic of the capital which subordinates the social accumulation to the satisfaction of its own needs and from a positive point of view the increase of a popular power able to orient general decisions in favor of the interests of the majorities. However, the realization of such a project meets with contradictions because it has to be accomplished in the process of a class struggle. It is obvious that a part of the bourgeoisie will react facing the "political alienation" that the loss of hegemony means for it, even if the possibility of producing, investing and consuming has been largely maintained. Though local investments rentability and even access to foreign market is possible, the capital cannot utilize the State any more as its own instrument nor can it constitute itself as a financial capital and is unable to accumulate abroad. There exists thus the possibility of an enlarged reproduction of the class, but no more access at the hegemonical direction of society.

The working class, reduced in number, has been recognized and better working conditions, more security in labor contracts and social welfare have been introduced. However some of the more immediate demands have not been met, hence various social conflicts and the interdiction of strikes during the state of emergency.

Among the peasants, the situation is quite diversified. Those who received land from Agrarian Reforms and integrated in service cooperatives or in cooperatives of production, are benefitting the services of the State and of the UNAG (peasant's professional organization). They represent about 70% of the peasantry. Parcellary proprietors have been receiving some services also, but their situation has not changed fundamentally. Agricultural workers remain in the same relation of production, especially in the cattle breeding farms, even if the labor legislation has been transformed. Migrant agricultural manpower, necessary for the coffee and cotton crops has been drastically reduced by Land Reform, which gave land to the landless or small parcellary peasants. This is the reason why volunteers from the cities or from the cooperatives are necessary to assure the crops, especially in coffee plantations.

The urban middle class has increased with the revolution through several mechanisms: increase of education, state employment, etc. It is though, in a very ambiguous situation. It is composed by different groups, some existing before (e.g. merchants) and some relatively new (i.e. the fruit of the revolution). They are generally characterized by a desire to increase their consuming capacity, the model being the upper classes with sumptuary habits and are attracted by the American way of life. However, in the present circumstances the consuming capacity is drastically reduced.

If we look at the urban poor, living from many small service activities, often of an unproductive nature, and dwelling in the less privileged neighborhoods, we notice great accomplishments by way of welfare measures: betterment of the physical environment, electricity, water, health and educational services, etc. This is now handicapped by the war economy. The Sandinist Front has a strong support among this population, but the enormous difference still existing between their living conditions and that of the bourgeoisie and the uncontrollable increase of new, wild urbanization in Managua as consequence of the war, is posing a real political problem.

All this shows that a great number of contradictions still exist. Contradictions coming from the class structure, from the process of transformation and from the present war situation. To build the popular hegemony, in the sense expressed above, within such a dialectical process is the real challenge.

## 2) *The State*

It is obvious that the main instrument to achieve revolutionary transformations is the State. But there are various conceptions of the role of the State in such a process. Let us see what is the practice of the Nicaraguan Revolution and how they are defining their own goals.

The final aim is the liberation of the people, which means not only a political change, but also a transformation of civil society. This is the objective of any socialist project. However there are several ways according to several conceptions. One of them is to think in steps: first to conquer power, second to transform the economy and third to accomplish a popular revolution. The other one, already adopted by the Sandinist Front during the revolutionary struggle, is to envisage the transformation as a whole and not to separate political power from the imperative of changing all the institutions of civil society and from the transformations of the subject itself. In other words, make the state an actor of the social construction. Of course, it remains to be seen how far such a theoretical approach is translated into reality.

The task is not easy. During the revolutionary process a certain unanimity had been achieved against the Somoza tyranny, allowing a real accumulation of forces and to a certain extent a class alliance. Building the popular hegemony resulted in a more acute class contradiction on the political level, when the prolongation of the mixed economy within the framework of an agro-exportative model had as a consequence the reproduction of a class structure opposed to the theoretical goal of the revolution. How does one resolve such contradictions without establishing a State with power exclusively dominated by a small "avant-garde"?

The Sandinist Front has acquired its legitimacy in the liberation struggle. The various tendencies inside the Front, which have led to splits at certain times, were more related to revolutionary practices than to fundamental orientations.



Therefore, it assumed the direction of the State during the first period, even if a voice was given to other parties and to other institutions in the Government and in the State Council. With the election internationally supervised, this legitimacy has been consecrated by a majority vote.

However, such a political process could have remained quite formal, if the other aspects of societal development would not have been achieved. We will develop this aspect later on, but let us reckon the literacy campaign, the health organization, the educational boom, the various popular organizations in the economic, political and cultural fields.

Surely the Sandinist Front, as a party, possesses the leadership of the political life. It plays at the same time the role of a majority party and of a politico-ideological "avant-garde" because of both its historical role and its popular project. But it is not a one-party system. Three other traditional parties (between 12% and 6% of the votes for each of them) and three small parties (two of them at the left of the Front), are represented in the Parliament. To the extent that some of the parties (at least two of them) are representing the interests of the bourgeoisie, it gives this class and also the middle classes the possibility of participating in the national project. Of course this political pluralism does not respond to the universal and ahistorical vision of it.

This brings us precisely to the nature of the opposition in the new political and social project. We can distinguish three types. The first one is located inside Nicaragua and represented by the parties that have participated in the elections. They have accepted the national project and in particular, the necessity of promoting a national consciousness vis-a-vis American imperialism in the region, linked more with a geopolitical domination than to direct economic interests. They have accepted also the necessity of social transformations, but the parties either challenge the FSLN leadership or they disagree with the institutional process or they advocate more radical measures in the economic and social fields.

Another type of internal opposition is the one which refused to accept the channels of political expression. The main traditional parties fall in this category. They could not accept a project based on popular hegemony because they represent the interests of the traditional bourgeoisie. They continued to express themselves through the paper *La Prensa*, which has been suppressed since middle of 1986, for the reasons given above. Also through some other institutional channels, such as the Church's institutions and the private educational system. Such opposition has little popular support because it does not present a real national or popular alternative to the Sandinist project. They are unable to meet the needs of the majority nor assure the sovereignty of the nation, as is clearly demonstrated in the neighboring countries, like El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and even Costa Rica.

The external opposition is constituted by the *Contras*. There is no homogeneity among them. The first group has been the Somozist National Guard, which continues to keep

the military leadership. Later, members of the bourgeoisie joined and exercised political leadership, not without certain contradictions according to their political origin or their economic positions. Certain leaders of the Miskitos disillusioned at the beginning of the Revolution by the too narrow concept of nation-building of the Sandinists, are also a part of this opposition.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the actual fighters are members of small urban or rural middle class, small peasants disillusioned by the Land Reform, agricultural workers whose patrons are in favor of the *contras*, Miskitos and other peasants recruited by force during the operations against the villages and the cooperatives. Their total number is estimated to be about 15,000. Without American support in the direction of the military operations, they would not be able to continue existing. The popular base of the *contras* is not existent and government control through the local militia and the army is solidly established. However, the *contras*, capable of massacring people in the local communities made quite a dent in the economy of the country.

It is now more than 6 years that the new political regime has been facing the difficulties and the contradictions explained above. One can ask if the internal logic of the process itself did not develop another situation than the one foreseen theoretically. In other words, how did the relations between the party and the State evolve and how has the link between the Front and the popular organizations been defined? It is of course, very difficult to answer such fundamental questions in few words. We would like only to give some indications. Surely the accusation of confusion between Party and State are not lacking. They are mostly formulated by the opposition, inside and outside. Facts are alluded to: the only television network is the "sandinist television system"; the compulsory military service is accomplished in the "sandinist army"; mass organizations are "sandinist" (the main youth movement, CDS [Committees for the Defense of the Sandinist Revolution], the main trade-union CST [Sandinist Workers's Central] etc.).

Even when the theoretical definitions are clear, it is evident that the concrete realities can possibly lead to confusions. This obliged the Sandinist Front for example to seriously reform the CDS in 1985, their internal logic having tended to monopolize local power too exclusively in the hands of party members. The preoccupation of the Front to remain a popular party has moderated the tendency which exist in any State bureaucracy to establish itself as the universal reference. However, it is not easy given the heritage of the former pre-revolutionary administration what with its grave lack of professional preparation among functionaries and the ideological weakness of some of the new bureaucrats.

### III. The Civil Society

Power was not the only purpose of the Sandinist Front. To exercise a moral leadership, it took initiatives in all the



domains of civil society. A double task had to be accomplished, to transform the past and to create new ways. On the basis of the principles explained above regarding popular hegemony, mixed economy, political pluralism, religious freedom, nation-building and people's participation, institutional transformations have taken place. In the domain of Law, for example, the previous code was not abolished but new progressive regulations were introduced and a new Constitution elaborated after a long preparation, including studies in various West European and Latin American countries.

The same can be said about the medical institutions. The recognition of health as a social right resulted to the organization of health centers all over the country, to the campaigns of popular education, to the constitution of health brigades in the field of social hygiene, etc. However, private medicine continued to exist. If we take the educational sector, the enormous efforts made by the State to build new schools did not hinder the flourishing of institutions. Planning in those sectors has its requirements and the private sector must enter in a national coordination. (It has been the case, for example, of the Centro-American University directed by the Jesuits.)

Contradictions have been revealed in the process as some transformations have not been done without severe conflicts. It has been the case for example with the Red Cross, a traditional monopoly of the bourgeoisie in Central America. The content of education programmes and values, has also been the occasion of disagreements and conflicts reflective of the existing contradictions, especially among the schools functioning directly as reproductive mechanism of the higher

classes which ran contrary to the views of some bureaucrats or the approaches of some Marxist cadres.

Many other fields of the civil society have been also transformed. Let us take for example the economic organizations of the agricultural sector. The first creation of the Front has been the ATC, a rural trade union. In 1981, the small producers have quit the organization because of their structural differences with the agricultural laborers. The UNAG (Union of Agriculturalists and Cattle breeders) was thus formed for the small producers. As said before, all this reflect the contradictions existing in the rural society and to a certain extent what could be called as the class struggle in this area. What we have noticed about the health and the education systems can also be applied here.

The various new organizations of the civil society are oriented to popular participation. The cooperatives: for example, being of small dimension, are left free to establish themselves their rules, to organize the work, to decide about the use of surplus. It is impressive to see after a few months how former agricultural laborers were able to take decisions, have acquired new professional capacities, entered in new approaches towards reality and developed a social and political consciousness. Various factors have contributed to this, namely; their participation in the local militia, the programmes of adult education, the help of the UNAG, etc. But this would not have been possible without a general approach of the situation of the peasants.

In a survey that we have made about the representations of health and illnesses among the lower classes in Nicaragua, we have noticed that sole alphabetization was not changing fundamentally the mentalities of the people and that it was necessary to include a transformation of the economic and social base of the groups. Otherwise, new practical knowledges could easily be absorbed within a mythical way of thinking. Typical of this were the answers of some peasants about the origin of illnesses. They explained that they were produced by microbes, but that those microbes were sent by the bad eye.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural factors are essential in a process of social transformation and among them, cultural expressions. One of the characteristics of the Nicaraguan revolution has been the production of popular poetry, theatre, music, paintings. It is true that all those processes are far from being linear. They only develop themselves within numerous contradictions, superficial or more fundamental, resulting in discussions or in conflicts, solved through consensus or at times through authoritarian intervention. Reality is generally the fruit of a mixture of processes. No doubt that the war situation and the economic difficulties have an impact on them, but anywhere it is possible, the response of the Front has been to increase popular participation. In situations of real danger for the revolutionary project, repressive measures have been taken (closure of *La Prensa*, expulsion of bishop Vega, censorship, emergency suspension of the right to strike, etc.). It would be naive to affirm that it does not provoke contradictions, but not in the way the opponents abroad express them.

#### IV. Religion and Church-State relations

Religion has always played an important role in Nicaragua, as one of the main components of the system of meanings, as an important element of social reproduction in the traditional society when the feast of the local saint was the main symbolic expression of the social groups and finally, as a politically influential institution. The Sandinist Revolution has changed the position of the Catholic Church in the Nicaraguan society and it is important to indicate in which sense.

First of all, we must recall the role played by Christians in the revolutionary process. Basic Communities have contributed to create the social basis of the Front, especially in some rural regions. Lay movements have been at the origin of a new social and political consciousness among members of the bourgeoisie and of the middle class, who became key personalities in the Revolution. Members of the clergy have played an eminent role in various sectors, during the revolutionary process and today, even inside the State apparatus. But it is not only in the motivation of social actors that religion has played a role. The transformation of religious thinking has permitted the development of a new concept of God, among Catholics and Protestants, a God present in history through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is no more a God far away from the concrete situation of human beings but the God of the poor we can meet in the street and as spoken in the *misa campesina*. Such a new awareness developed in the Basic Christian Communities under the leadership of peasants and which resulted also in a new social ethics quite in correspondence with the Sandinist project.

During the last 6 years, Christians have been active in the Nicaraguan society and the Church of the poor in spite of the numerous obstacles put by some religious leaders. Though those Christians refused the identification of the Church with the social and political project of the bourgeoisie, they do not want to appear as building another Church and therefore always have refused the qualification of a "popular Church". The reading of the Bible and a familiarity with the Gospel have greatly contributed to such commitments.

One can be astonished to see an important part of the clergy and of the bishops adopting an attitude of opposition against the Sandinist regime, with arguments varying from accusations of atheism to accusations of persecution. But it would be too long to go through all the possible explanations, from the reality of local incidents interpreted as policies, to the assimilation of the Sandinist policy with the one of some Communist countries of Eastern Europe or of the Cuban revolution at its beginning. Yet the main explanation is probably the fact that the Church as an institution has lost a great part of her former social space, considered by some as indispensable for her mission. As a matter of fact, the Church has no more the monopoly of giving meanings for the popular groups. She became a minority in the organization of the

educational system, because half the population of Nicaragua has been transformed into a school. She is no longer the main organizational power in the health system, now that it has been recognized as a social right and not only as a field for the exercise of charity. The development projects of the Church are now integrated in a totality, of which she is only a small part, now that the whole country has been transformed in a great development project. All this means the loss of a certain type of social space for the Church, a space necessary to exercise an influence through institutional power in civil society. But at the same time, the new possibilities for evangelization were neglected and the repressive attitudes against the Christians engaged in the revolutionary process have often resulted in a suicidal type of pastoral work.

The conflict between the State and the Catholic Church has been very acute. It seems now to have entered in a less heavy confrontation what with the dialogue proposed by President Ortega and which has been accepted by Cardinal Obando y Bravo after the arrival of the new *nuncio*.

It is difficult to conclude when a process is still going on. We have only tried to indicate what were the main lines of the evolution. For sure, it is important to take the necessary distances from our own situations in order to understand what is happening in Nicaragua. But it is also necessary to adopt a similar perspective on the fundamental issues of society? **K**

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Guillermo Girardi, *Sandinismo, Marxismo y Cristianismo*, Nueva York, Mexico, 1985.

<sup>2</sup>As a matter of fact, the attitude of the representatives of the socialist countries and of Cuba in particular, has been always restrained. About the international relations, they have recommended to the Nicaraguans to be prudent, because in the event of an American direct intervention, none could come to their help, neither the Cubans, who would be the first victims, nor the Soviets, whose lines of communication are far too long. Moreover the Soviets would not risk a Third World War for a regional conflict. The same appears to be true at the level of internal economic, social and cultural policies. Too radical measures could precipitate the country into graver difficulties, with the risk of an economic catastrophe, precisely the goal of the USA and which the socialist countries would be unable to compensate. This is the reason why the idea of two imperialism confronting each other in the region, propounded by some of the opponents, is without any logical foundation, be it economic, political or cultural (not even religious).

<sup>3</sup>José Luis Corragio, *Nicaragua, Revolución y Democracia*, Ed. Linea, Managua, 1985.

<sup>4</sup>The case of Eden Pastora, who organised a guerilla movement operating from Costa Rica, is probably more related with a question of personal desire for power than with a political project.

<sup>5</sup>F. Houtart and G. Lemercinier, *Las representaciones de la salud y de las enfermedades en los medios populares rurales y urbanos de Nicaragua*, Centre de Recherches socio-religieuses, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1986.