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The Dual Role Of The Roman Catholic Clergy In The Overthrow Of Somoza

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THE DUAL ROLE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY IN THE OVERTHROW OF SOMOZA

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The Dual Role of the Roman Catholic Clergy in the Overthrow of Somoza

Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church has been an integral part of the Hispanic world. The case of Nicaragua is no exception. Roman Catholic Missionaries arrived in Nicaragua simultaneously with the conquistadors. Since that time Nicaragua has dealt with civil war, revolutions, and political instability. The Catholic Church has sought to minister to the Nicaraguan people, regardless of the political stage. However, during the nineteen-sixties and seventies both Nicaragua and the Roman Catholic Church were experiencing revolutionary times. Nicaragua was dealing with the powerful Somoza regime, U. S. intervention, and a revival of the Sandino reform. The Catholic Church began to deal with changes in itself, after the Vatican II council (ending in 1965) split the Catholic clergy into two groups: the progressive clergy, made up of liberal bishops and poor clergy; and the traditional clergy, made up of the conservative members of the hierarchy and the middle class Church. In 1979 the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional--FSLN) overthrew the Somoza government. In that revolution key figures of the Roman Catholic clergy played significant roles in shaping the revolution.

The main focus of this paper will be to establish historical precedents for the clergy's involvement in the 1979 revolution and to provide some understanding of why certain key figures assumed the positions they did. J. M. Kirk, in his book Politics and the Catholic Church in Nicaragua makes the claim, "the dominant trend has been for the
The Catholic Church to defend a political stability that most clearly favored the middle classes at the social and economic expense of the popular sectors" (1992, p. 3). I find some truth to this claim especially in the pre-Vatican II Church. It is my contention that in the post Vatican Church both sectors of the Catholic Church worked to bring about social order and political stability to benefit the populace of Nicaragua. However, the contrasting philosophies of the traditional and progressive clergy would cause them to play different roles in the revolution. The key figures of the traditional clergy would work through the existing political structures to try to bring about a mediated change, while the key figures of the progressive clergy would work through grassroot organizations and eventually actively participate in the Sandinista movement to bring about social justice.

To understand why the clergy played the roles they did in 1979 it is important to examine the historical precedents of the Nicaraguan clergy and the role of the major political factions of the revolution. This paper will do just that. I will start out by illustrating the major clerical figures and their importance as historical precedents, followed by a close examination of the Somoza regime, the FSLN, the Catholic clergy in general, and the events that brought them together on December 27, 1974 (the date that the FSLN took government officials hostage to trigger the revolution). Then I will look at the events from 1975 to 1979 showing the involvement of all major players in the revolution. By this I hope to establish that not only did both the traditional and progressive clergy play a significant role in the revolution, but also that key clerical figures acted in line with a trend that was already established by their predecessors.
The Nicaraguan Church and Clergy: From Colonialization to the Sandino Uprising

The Nicaraguan clergy has always been involved in Nicaraguan politics. For the most part the Church has been an advocate of conservative regimes; however, some clerical figures have spoken out on behalf of the poor. The clergy of the late 1970's were part of the latter group. In the 1970's, the Catholic clergy would be broken into two distinct ideological factions. Both factions claimed that they carried on the human rights message of their predecessors. In this section I will introduce the key historical figures that spoke out on behalf of the poor. Some figures worked within the political system to bring about change in social conditions, while others pursued revolutionary measures. It is important to note that these men not only would establish the clerical relationship to the Nicaraguan government, but they would also begin to define the positions of the 1970's traditional and progressive clergy.

The role of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua had its inception in 1493, when Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal Bull Inter Coetera, which gave permission to the Catholic Kings of Spain to bring the new world under their domain while evangelizing these lands and people for the Catholic faith (Dussel, 1981, p. 308). The colonial clergy thereafter was tied to the state. Father Diego de Aguero, the first priest to set foot in Nicaragua, came as part of the first military expedition in 1523 (Merrill, 1994, p.48). He claimed that he had baptized over thirty-two thousand Indians in six months, subsequently making Nicaragua an official Catholic Colony (Mulligan, 1991, p.53).
Hernandez de Cordoba then founded the cities of Leon and Granada and became the governor of the territory. During his reign, he sent many Indians to Peru as slaves. To stop the cruelty to indigenous peoples, King Charles V of Spain proclaimed that the Indians would have a protectorate (Dussel, 1981, p. 48). The duties of the protectorate would fall on the shoulders of the bishop. Father Diego Alvarez Osorio would become the first Bishop of Nicaragua (Merrill, 1994, p. 8). He took his duties very seriously and spoke out for the rights of Indians. This won great disapproval for him by the landowners (Mulligan, 1991, p. 54). Osorio was the first Nicaraguan example of a clergy member challenging the ruling class over the rights of the poor. However, Osorio's legacy would soon be overshadowed by his younger contemporary Bartolome de las Casas.

De las Casas was a Dominican priest, who was invited to Leon by Osorio. He was probably the greatest champion of the colonial poor. He wrote several books, letters, and even traveled to Spain fourteen times to speak with the King about the terrible conditions suffered by the Indians, leading to the 1542 promulgation prohibiting the enslavement of Indians (Dussel, 1981, p. 51; Mulligan, 1991, p. 54). This outraged the landowners and in 1543 de las Casas was expelled from Nicaragua by Governor Rodrigo de Contreras. During that same year de las Casas was appointed Bishop of Chiapas in Mexico.

The following year Antonio de Valdivieso, another Dominican priest, was consecrated bishop of Nicaragua by, none other than, de las Casas. Contreras, who already had problems with de las Casas, found it no easier to deal with Valdivieso. Contreras still pursued his policy of exploitation of the Indians, and in 1547 Valdivieso wrote to the King: "The state of those Indians is such that slavery would be prosperity for
them, because slaves are treated like persons while they are treated like animals. Much more respect is shown to animals than to them" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 55). Six years after Valdivieso wrote this letter he was killed by Contreras's sons. It has been said, "He was killed for the cause of justice. With the blood of his martyrdom, the Church of the Poor is born in Nicaragua" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 55). It would be these colonial bishops that the twentieth century clergy would look to for inspiration in their fight for justice.

Events in early eighteenth century Spain would be key in shaping the Nicaraguan government and its relation to the Church. From 1701 to 1714 Spain was fighting the war of Spanish Succession. The Bourbon family replaced the Habsburg family as the rulers of Spain. The Habsburgs supported trade monopolies in the colonies, while the Bourbons supported free-trade policies. The wealthy elites of Leon and Granada had made their fortunes off the policies of the Habsburgs. They became known as the conservative class, because they wanted to go back to the monopolies. The other groups that supported the new trade policies came to be known as the liberals. The conservatives soon became supporters of the Catholic Church and in turn the Church benefited when the conservatives were in power. Therefore, the clergy preferred the conservative side of liberal-conservative rivalry (Merrill, 1994, pp. 9-10).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Spain had begun to lose control over its colonies. The Spanish crown insisted that only Spanish-born elites could administer colonial governments. This led to resentment of the upper class by the middle class and the peasants. As the nineteenth century got underway, a split between the upper and lower classes became highly visible. The clergy soon began to reflect the class split.
Some members of the clergy, who came from the upper class, were in favor of imperial rule and the colonial economies, while clerical members from the lower and peasant class reflected the values of the poor. This was the case with Father Tomas Ruiz, who in 1805 organized the first opposition to the crown, contrary to the popular belief that first opposition was formed in 1811 (Mulligan, 1991, pp. 57-58).

Father Ruiz was the first Nicaraguan Indian to become a priest and also the first to receive a law degree. He organized the first group of revolutionaries, who were made up of Indians, peasants and other members of the clergy (Mulligan, 1991, p. 58). The group was very unsuccessful and often not recognized as anything more than an out of hand mob. However, Ruiz did take part in the more successful uprising of 1811. Father Ruiz is an important figure because he represents the first revolutionary clergy member. Members of the progressive clergy who took part in the 1979 Revolution looked to Father Ruiz as an example for their position. J. E. Mulligan states, "He was a humble, pious, and traditional priest who had a close-up knowledge of the suffering and hopes of the poor. Love for justice led him to make a political commitment in the struggle for independence, convinced that it was a Christian and priestly commitment" (1991, p. 57).

On December 22, 1811 people of Granada replaced the royal officials with a middle class city government. Father Benito Soto was named to the government as a representative of the people (another example of the clergy taking part in the revolution). The response of the upper class clergy is best summed up in a proclamation put out by Father Jose Antonio Chomorro, vicar of Granada,
By disobeying the Spaniards who have come here, the people have disobeyed the kings of Spain and have transgressed all their laws. The people have fired officials without trial. The people think they have more power than God, the Church, and the king. From this it can be deduced that the people in rebellion have been and are traitors to God, the king, and the nation (Mulligan, 1991, pp. 58-59).

Despite the efforts of the conservatives, on September 15, 1821 Central America became independent of Spain. This victory was looked upon as a victory for upper and middle classes. The clergy from wealthy families allied themselves with the new ruling class, while the poor clergy associated themselves with the peasants. It was at this time the clergy began to develop into two camps; the wealthy and the poor clergy divided along economic lines. However, Vatican II, the Medellin conference, and the development of Liberation Theology would mark the ideological split between the clergy (Dussel 1981, pp. 324-325).

On April 30, 1838, Nicaragua became an independent nation (Nicaragua was part the Mexican Empire and the United Provinces of Central America following independence from Spain). The role of the Catholic Church in the affairs of the nation was defined in the Treaty of Independence: "The Catholic religion which we have professed in centuries past and will profess in those to come is to be kept pure and unalterable." (Mulligan, 1991, p.59). The status of the Church remained as stated in the Treaty of Independence only when the conservatives were in power. Liberal regimes sought to limit the political power of the Catholic Church by seizing Church property and allowing other religions to be practiced in Nicaragua.

When conservative regimes were in power the clergy were given special privileges and funds to build new churches. During one period of conservative rule, the Nicaraguan
government signed a treaty with the Vatican (1862). The Roman Church was once again named the official Church of the Republic. The clergy were to be economically supported by the government. Education would be in the hands of religious orders, and the bishops would have the right of censorship. In return, the government was able to nominate the bishops and assign priests (Mulligan, 1991, p. 62). This time, which is often called "the thirty years," was seen as a golden age of the Nicaraguan Church (Mulligan, 1991, p. 63).

The "thirty years" lasted until 1893 when the liberals regained power under Jose Santo Zelaya. Zelaya was backed by the middle class landowners and coffee growers. Shortly after the liberals came to power, they called a constitutional convention. The constitution repealed the 1862 treaty with the Vatican, and redistributed Church lands.

Once again, in 1909, the conservatives regained power under protection from the United States' Marines. During this period the Church began to regain its status. The religious orders began to build schools and diplomatic ties were reestablished with the Vatican. The clergy was content with the regime and some clerics went out of their way to praise the conservatives for reestablishing peace in the country (Mulligan, 1991, pp. 65-66). However, the conservatives were unable to maintain the peace without the help of the United States. In an effort to make Nicaragua militarily self-sufficient, the U. S. helped to established the Nicaraguan National Guard, in 1927. The National Guard was created in response to the Sandino movement; both would evolve into major forces of the 1979 conflict (Merrill, 1994, p. 21).
The Sandino Uprising and the Church Support of Somoza Garcia

In order to understand the 1979 conflict, it is important to examine the events that took place from 1927 to 1974. The political stage of the late 1920's would introduce the revolutionary spirit of Sandino and mark the beginning of the Somoza family regime. Most of the Roman Catholic clergy supported the conservative government of Somoza Garcia, although radical changes in the Catholic Church would alter this relationship for Somoza Garcia's sons. It is important to keep in mind that at this time the Catholic clergy is only divided by economic class and not ideology. I will continue the story in 1926.

Throughout the 1920's Nicaragua had been engulfed by a civil war stemming from the liberal-conservative rivalry. In 1926 a young patriot, Augusto Cesar Sandino, joined the liberals in the civil war against the conservatives. It would be Sandino's ideology that would influence the 1979 Sandinistas. Also, in direct response to the Sandino Uprising the Nicaraguan National Guard would be created. The National Guard provided the means by which Anastasio Somoza Garcia would consolidate power and begin the two-generation Somoza Dictatorship. The spirit of Sandino within the context of the Somoza family regime would provide the environment in which the Nicaraguan clergy would minister. Therefore I will dedicate the next few pages to establishing the setting in which the 1979 revolution took place.

Sandino was the illegitimate son of a wealthy landowner. He was raised by his half-Indian mother in rural Nicaragua. He worked as a mechanic for several companies, including U. S.- owned Huasteca Petroleum in Tampico, Mexico. During his time in
Mexico, Sandino developed strong nationalist feelings for Nicaragua, as well as Latin America (Vanden, 1982, p. 29). On his return to Nicaragua he began working in a U. S.-owned gold mine when the civil war broke out. Sandino organized a small group of Indians and peasants who then began fighting with the liberals to drive the U. S. out of Nicaragua.

Sandino was a very versatile leader and resorted to any tactic that would give him the advantage. In 1927 Sandino published his manifesto, which read in part:

I am a worker from the city, an artisan as they say in my country. But my ideal is to be found on the broad horizon of internationalism, in the right to be free and demand justice . . . . That I am a plebeian, the oligarchs (that is, the swamp rats) will say. No matter--my greatest honor is to arise from among the oppressed who are the soul and nerve of the race, from those of us who have been left behind to live at the mercy of the shameless assassins who helped to inspire the crime of high treason: the Conservatives of Nicaragua (quoted in Vanden, 1982, p. 29).

Sandino claimed he had over three thousand men fighting with him, but official estimates put this number at about three hundred (Merrill, 1994, p. 22). The United States Marines were very unsuccessful adjusting to guerrilla warfare, and the U. S. turned to air power. Soon afterwards, when Sandino wrote to President Herbert Hoover asking him to withdraw the Marines, he wrote, "I am aware of the material resources your country has. You have everything, except God" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 68). The bishops, however, disagreed with this statement and with what they thought were extremist ideas.

In 1930 five Nicaraguan Bishops including the Archbishop of Managua issued a joint pastoral letter telling Sandino and his followers to stop the uprising. They said, "Let Christ our Lord, extinguish the destructive fire, reconcile the hearts and extend the banner of peace . . . Paternally, we exhort our children to abandon the sterile armed struggle . . ."
(Mulligan, 1991, p. 69). Not only were the bishops asking for peace, they were obviously against Sandino. At one point, the Bishop of Granada blessed the Marines and the weapons they were using against Sandino. Sandino's response to the clergy was simple. In 1931 he wrote, "The clergy is allied with the Yankee bankers" (Mulligan, 1991, p.69).

When the U. S. Marines withdrew, on January 1, 1933, they left the Nicaraguan National Guard as the only military organization in the country. Anastasio Somoza Garcia was left in charge of the Guard, largely because he studied in Philadelphia, spoke fluent English, and had many friends in the United States military. However, Somoza Garcia had political ambitions of his own and on February 21, 1934, Somoza Garcia had Sandino assassinated, following a reconciliation dinner (Merrill, 1994, p. 24).

After some political maneuvering Somoza Garcia was able to have himself elected President of Nicaragua in 1936. One year later he constitutionally combined the office of the President and the director of the National Guard, thus beginning the longest family dictatorship in Latin American History (Wheaton and Dilling, 1980, p. 3).

According to Kirk, the reign of Somoza Garcia could be defined by three characteristics: 1) his slavish admiration for United States; 2) his inherently corrupt, self-promoting style of government; and 3) the level of repression he used to retain power (1992, p.34). These characteristics can be used to describe the entire Somoza Regime, from 1936 to 1979.

In Somoza Garcia's quest to control Nicaragua, he used the force of the National Guard to repress anyone who would oppose him. He then began staffing the government and the military with close friends and family. By the late nineteen-thirties "[t]he
institutional power of the National Guard controlled the national radio and telegraph networks, the postal and immigration services, health services, the internal revenue service, and the national railroads" (Merrill, 1994, p. 26). Then, in 1938, Somoza Garcia declared that the president had the power to over-rule the constitution.

Once Somoza Garcia had consolidated power in Nicaragua, he was able to use the resources of the entire country for his personal benefit. Initially, Somoza Garcia was supported by most sectors of society (or at least the ones he had not yet destroyed). The upper and middle classes, who saw themselves benefiting with the success of Somoza Garcia, thought of him as the "pacifier" of the poor and the "innovator" of the economy (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 3). Somoza Garcia was thought to be the person that would rescue Nicaragua from the years of civil unrest. Even the clergy was in full support of Somoza. At the fiftieth anniversary of the ordination of Archbishop Lezcano y Ortega (1938), Somoza Garcia contributed to the celebration by having the National Guard salute the archbishop while planes flew maneuvers overhead. At the close of the celebration the Archbishop thanked Somoza Garcia, by calling his government "the Supreme Government of the Republic, to which we constantly offer our sincere and respectful loyalty" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 74).

In the early nineteen-forties Somoza Garcia watched his popularity increase. With the out-break of World War II, Somoza Garcia declared war on the Axis powers. Throughout the war, Nicaragua remained loyal to Somoza Garcia. In 1942, Archbishop Lezcano crowned Somoza's daughter Queen of the Army in an elaborate religious ceremony (Berryman, 1984, p. 55). However, soon after the war ended businessmen
began to realize how greedy Somoza Garcia actually was, and support for the government began to diminish. Somoza Garcia began to increasingly use the National Guard to protect his political status and to protect his wealth (Kirk, 1992, p.35). As Somoza Garcia's ruthless business and governing practices increased, opposition to him began to grow. In an attempt to curb his declining popularity, Somoza Garcia decided not to run in the 1946 election. After Somoza Garcia realized he could no longer control the government from behind the scenes, he announced his presidential candidacy, for 1956. At this announcement Somoza Garcia was shot by Rigoberto Lopez Perez, and died a few days later.

The Church reacted by condemning this act and buried Somoza Garcia as a "Prince of the Church." Pope Pius XII and U. S. Cardinal Spellman sent their condolences, and Archbishop Gonzales of Managua, offered two hundred days' indulgences to Catholics who helped in praying for Somoza. The only Nicaraguan Bishop that did not attend the funeral was Calderon y Padilla, out of protest for Somoza Garcia's treatment of the poor (Berryman, 1984, p. 55).

After the death of Somoza Garcia, his sons Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle took control of the government. Luis became president, while Anastasio assumed the position of Director of the National Guard. Luis Somoza, who realized that the government needed to be reformed, began to make some changes. He reinstated the ban on reelection and in 1960 helped form the Central American Common Market. Luis Somoza took an anti-communist attitude that won him praise from the Church and the
United States. Due to bad health Luis did not run for President in 1967, which led to the
election of his brother, Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Luis died two months later.

During the reign of Luis Somoza, some very crucial events took place, starting in
1961, with the establishment of the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN). The
FSLN did not play much of a role until the mid-seventies, as described by Wheaton and
Dilling:

The weakening of the liberal-conservative conflict which became obvious during the
second half of the 1960's created a political vacuum that was not immediately filled
by the FSLN. While the FSLN was accumulating experience, the Sandinistas
remained politically and strategically isolated. But the reformist tendencies also
lacked a social base from which to fill this vacuum. The middle class, where such
reforms traditionally arise, did not recognize the crisis because it was caught up in
the process of social and economic self improvement (1980, p. 6).

The next major event came in 1963 when Pope John XXIII called the Vatican II
Council. This council would prove to have profound effects on the Roman Catholic
Church, especially the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM). The theology that
came out of Vatican II would be the precursor to the Latin American bishops' Medellin
and Puebla conferences in 1968 and 1979, respectively. As the Church began to redefine
itself the ideological split in the clergy would take place. Because this split is essential to
understand the relationship of the progressive clergy to the FSLN, I will discuss the
Roman Catholic clergy first.
The Split of the Catholic Clergy

In 1963 Pope John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council. The council threw Catholic Theology for a loop, and many profound documents were issued. These documents are important in their own right, but they were especially important when applied to Latin America. As previously stated, a rift between the upper class clergy and the lower class clergy had existed, in Central America, since the War of Independence. The Vatican II documents would be accepted by both camps; however, the upper and lower class clergy would interpret the documents very differently. The upper class clergy read the documents to mean that the Church, especially the clergy, should remain neutral in political conflicts, while the lower class clergy interpreted the documents as a basis for necessary involvement to correct social ills. The different interpretations of these documents would only be magnified by CELAM, in later conferences. The conservative bishops and priests (usually from the upper class) that followed the "neutral interpretation" would make up the traditional clergy, and the liberal bishops and priests (usually from the lower class and followers of Liberation Theology) would become the progressive clergy.

Vatican II closed in 1965 and the documents were published soon after. In these documents the Church expressed concern for social justice and equality of people. Section two (subtitled Socio-economic life as a whole) of the document Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World reads:
It is in full accord with human nature that juridical-political structures should with ever better success and without discrimination, afford all their citizens the chance to participate freely and actively in establishing the constitutional bases of a political community, governing the state, determining the scope and purpose of various institutions, and choosing leaders (Abbott, 1966, p. 285).

This notion of free participation in government is important for Nicaragua. As it will be illustrated later in this paper, the traditional clergy interpreted the passage to mean the establishment of a constitutional government. While the progressive clergy took it to mean that people have the right to establish any form of government that provides for the rights and welfare of its citizens.

Later in the same section of the document points out that the Church should not rely on favors from the ruling class:

The Church herself employs the things of time to the degree that her own proper mission demands. Still, she does not lodge her hope in privileges conferred by civil authority. Indeed, she stands ready to renounce the exercise of certain legitimately acquired rights if it becomes clear that their use raises doubt about the sincerity of her witness or that new conditions of life demand some other arrangement (Abbott, 1966, p. 288).

This passage is especially crucial considering that for many years the clergy sided with the conservative governments of Nicaragua to gain special status for the Church. This statement was interpreted in a variety of ways. As will be discussed later, the Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, took this passage literally by refusing personal gifts. However, questions regarding money for churches and schools, as well as members of the clergy holding offices in the government were not resolved.

The next chapter of this document points out the nature of peace:
Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead it is rightly and appropriately called "an enterprise of justice" (Is. 32:7) (Abbott, 1966, p. 290).

Once again we have a passage that was interpreted two ways. Is peace merely a society with guaranteed political freedoms? Or is it the creation of a society that strives to erase economic inequality? These questions would provide yet another major point on which the traditional and progressive clergy would disagree. The bishops returned to Latin America with these ideas, that had now become the "official" teachings of the Catholic Church. The bishops were unsure of many of these documents and they disagreed among themselves. The uneasiness left by Vatican II resulted in the calling of the second CELAM conference (Peruvian Commission, 1970, pp. xii-xiv).

In 1968 the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) met in Medellin, Colombia to apply the teachings of Vatican II to the Latin American world. The Medellin Document for Peace goes beyond the statements of Vatican II. Vatican II defined peace, but the Medellin document says, "Peace is not there for us; we must construct it" (Peruvian Commission, 1970, p. 204). This statement would pull the traditional and progressive clergy even further apart than before. The traditional clergy would allude to mediated solutions, while the progressive clergy would pay close attention to the following passage, which allows for revolutionary activity:
It is true that revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country, whether it is vested in persons or unjust structures. But it is also true that violence or armed revolts generally engender new injustices, introduce new inequities, and bring new disaster. The evil situation that exists, and it surely is evil, may not be dealt with in such a way that an even worse situation results (Peruvian Commission, 1970, pp. 207-208).

As the Revolution of 1979 heated up the traditional and progressive clergy would find themselves in a bitter debate regarding whether or not the FSLN would bring a better or worse society to Nicaragua.

Vatican II and Medellin would set the stage for how the traditional and progressive clergy would react to the growing opposition to Somoza. The ideas that were expressed at these two episcopal meetings had not been a major focus of the Nicaraguan Church experience to this point. The clergy had been somewhat divided before, but for the first time two distinct ideologies would surface.

The Ideals of the Traditional and Progressive Clergy

Two years after the Medellin Conference, Miguel Obando y Bravo was appointed Archbishop of Nicaragua. Obando y Bravo would come to define the position of the traditional clergy during the revolution (1974-1984). When Obando y Bravo became archbishop, Somoza threw him a grand reception. The evening was festive and it appeared that once again the archbishop would legitimize the government by proclaiming that the Church approved of the ruling class. Instead, holding up the ideals of Vatican II and Medellin, Obando y Bravo gave a speech asking the soldiers to think about a gospel
passage. He said, "... without betraying conscience and while giving Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's, it is possible to be a perfect Christian while being a perfect citizen" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 114). In this speech Obando pointed out that the soldiers could obey their military orders in a Christian manner rather than the dehumanizing fashion they had been. From the start Obando believed that he could reform the Somoza dictatorship in a peaceful fashion.

Throughout the 1970's Obando spoke out on social issues within the spirit of Vatican II, Medellin, and tradition of De las Casas. Through words and action Obando showed that he would stand against the injustice of the government. In 1971 he refused to accept a Mercedes-Benz given to him by Somoza. This act put an end to elaborate gift-giving by the government to the Church (Lernoux, 1980, p. 89).

Although Obando stood in the tradition of the great colonial bishops, he refused to give in to the temptations of revolution. Mulligan describes the Nicaraguan Bishops of the time in relationship to the archbishop: "A small group was overtly pro-Somoza. . . On the other end of the spectrum stood Archbishop Obando y Bravo, an outspoken anti-Somoza figure. However. . . Obando always kept his distance from the radical opposition led by the FSLN" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 115).

Obando y Bravo personally believed in non-violence as an ordinary practice, and that revolution should only be a last resort. During the 1974 hostage taking (to be discussed later) Obando told Somoza, "God willing that it be resolved without bloodshed! I know five million dollars is a very large amount, but the life of a human being has no
price" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 121). Obando saw the Church as a mediator. He favored the
dialogue approach of the Democratic Liberation Union (UDEL) to be discussed later.

On the other hand, the progressive clergy took a different approach. They
believed that Vatican II and Medellin called them to actively facilitate change in the
tradition of Father Ruiz. In 1971, Gustavo Gutierrez published A Theology of Liberation.
According to Enrique Dussel, "The theology of liberation [emphasized in the original] was
not the result of spontaneous generation. It has a recent history, a history that goes back
to Bartolome de Las Casas in the sixteenth century" (1981, p. 324). The progressive
clergy believes liberation theology to be the true interpretation of the Christian faith. It is
this theology that would establish the base for the progressive clergy's participation in the
revolution.

Liberation theology is a systematic method of active participation in linking the
work of the Church with social transformation. Liberation theology, unlike traditional
theology, does not take philosophical concepts and apply them to a belief in God; rather,
liberation theology is a process. It is a process in which a person reflects on the Gospels
and applies the teachings of Christ to daily living for the betterment of society (Boff and
Boff, 1987, ch. 3).

The main focus of liberation theology is solidarity with the poor. By living and
suffering with the poor, the progressive clergy is able to understand the problems facing
the afflicted. Gutierrez states, "We are vitally aware of the social revolution now in
progress. We identify with it" (1988, p. 65). He goes on to say that the Church must find
permanent solutions to the social ills facing Latin America, "... it is necessary to change
the very bases of the system, for a true solution to these problems can come about only within the context of a far-reaching transformation of existent structures" (Gutierrez, 1988, p. 65). The progressive clergy believes that by actively living out their faith, people can bring about a classless society (Boff and Boff, 1987, pp. 93-95).

According to liberation theologians Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Marxism is a tool used in liberation theology to obtain the final goal of social justice. They state, "liberation theology freely borrows from Marxism certain 'methodological pointers' that have proved fruitful in understanding the world of the oppressed,. . . "(1987, p. 28). The idea that Marxism does not contradict liberation theology is a key element in understanding why the progressive clergy found no contradiction in following the FSLN (Kirk, 1992, p. 75).

A Maryknoll missionary, Father Thomas Marti, commented on the clerical division stemming from liberation theology:

Once you start tinkering with the social order you are bound to get reaction and often times even Church people, bishops and so forth, will be sympathetic with the people that have power. More sympathetic with them than the people without power, and that is where you get the conflict and controversy and so forth (interview, 1995).

Throughout the late sixties and early seventies the progressive clergy began to gather people into "Base Communities." Base communities are literally small prayer groups of ten to twenty people, who meet on a regular basis to study scripture. Edward Cleary states, "They reflect on what the scriptures mean in their daily lives. That reflection frequently leads them to courses of political action to improve the living conditions in their barrio" (1985, pp. 104-105).
One such base community was Solentiname, founded by Father Ernesto Cardenal in 1966. Solentiname is located on an archipelago in Lake Nicaragua. It was in this community that the Nicaraguan folk Mass of Carlos Mejia Godoy was first performed. Spirituality such as in the folk Mass served as a catalyst for peasants' awareness of the political situation and confirmed the idea that God was on the side of the poor. The peasants would sing to God as they entered the church:

You go with the hand of my people; You struggle in the country and the city; You line up in the field; to get your daily wage; You eat your snow cone in the park, with Eusebio, Pancho, and Juan Jose; You even plead for more syrup, when they don't put enough on (translated from Godoy).

Ernesto Cardenal made this statement about the folk Mass:

I imagine that the traditional Mass, for the Greek and Roman world, ought to have been as modern and revolutionary as the Mass of Mejia Godoy is for us today. And this Mass is as orthodox as the traditional one. Only this Mass is from our time and our land. . . . Also, this Mass is not neutral. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of Union, cannot be neutral in a class struggle. This Mass, the same as the traditional one, is a Mass against the oppressors, those who prevent that the fruits of nature and of the workers be shared in fraternal communion (translated from Godoy).

It was through these base communities and spirituality that the progressive clergy had an impact on the politicization of the poor and that the FSLN would gain much of its support in the revolution (Vanderlaan, 1986, p. 109). Ernesto Cardenal said "our Solentiname community, inspired by the spirit of Merton’s, was a ‘politicized’ community right from the start, involved with the Nicaraguan people, and with its liberation. Eventually this brought me into contact with the Sandinista Front" (quoted in Cabestrero, 1982, p. 26).
The Development of the FSLN and its Relationship to the Progressive Clergy

The Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) was founded on July 26, 1961 by Carlos Fonseca Amador, Tomas Borge, and Silvio Mayorga. The FSLN developed in three distinct phases; the "resurrect" period, the "accumulation" phase, and the "insurrectional" phase (Vanden, 1982, pp. 33-39; Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, pp. 9-11).

The "resurrect" period lasted from 1961 to 1967. During this phase the FSLN wanted to "resurrect," the Sandino movement modified with the writings of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. At this time the FSLN was little more than an ideological group of bandits living in the harsh mountainous border region of Honduras and Nicaragua. The FSLN had hopes of overthrowing the Somoza government and repeating Castro's feat in Nicaragua. Fonseca urged the FSLN to study the writings and tactics of Sandino to prepare for the first guerrilla fight in 1963. Under the direction of Santos Lopez, a survivor of Sandino's army, the FSLN started their guerrilla attacks. According to Harry Vanden the FSLN learned a valuable lesson, "They felt that launching rural guerrilla warfare was all that was necessary to convince the popular masses to take up arms and join the struggle. In Nicaragua, as elsewhere in the region, this was a fundamental and very costly error" (1982, p. 35). The FSLN met tragic defeat after defeat, on one side they were being battered by the National Guard and on the other side they were fighting the Honduran Army. The last defeat of this phase came at Pancasan, a small border town in Honduras. The FSLN had become surrounded and many of the FSLN guerrillas were
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killed. From that point on the FSLN felt it could better serve its cause by being in the urban areas educating the masses (Vanden, 1982, pp. 36-37). The second phase had begun.

During the "accumulation" phase, from 1967 to 1974, the FSLN began recruiting young students in the cities and sent them to northern Nicaragua where they hoped to raise awareness of the people and to better train their forces. At this time the FSLN began to establish what they called "intermediate organizations," which were closely related to the base communities. It was during this phase that the progressive clergy developed its relationship with the FSLN. Borge wrote about the FSLN organizations, "We had student organizations, worker organizations, neighborhood committees, Christian movements, artistic groups, and so on. . . . We led these intermediate organizations ourselves, through compañeros who followed the orientation of the Front" (Quoted in Vanden, 1982, p. 37). It was during this period that the FSLN was developing their ideology and the practicability of the revolution. Also, during this period the National Guard began to launch large-scale counterinsurgency operations. To combat the counterinsurgency operations the FSLN planed their December 27, 1974 attack on government officials (to be discussed later)-(Vanden, 1982, p. 36-39).

The third stage of the FSLN, the "Insurrectional" phase, begins following the 1974 attack. During this time, the FSLN gained the recognition and support of most of the groups that opposed Somoza. At this time the progressive clergy helped to shape FSLN ideology and became almost indistinguishable from the FSLN. Roger Lancaster stated: "Sandinista praxis [practice] is a form of Christian praxis, not in the sense of being a
subset of theology, but in the sense that it embodies a religious notion of the sacred and the profane. . . ." (1988, p. 139).

Liberation theology contains two key concepts that allowed the progressive clergy to unite with the FSLN. The concepts of solidarity with the poor and Marxism's compatibility with Christianity, coupled with the FSLN's move toward ideological pluralism allowed for the marriage between the progressive Church and the FSLN to be consummated (Merrill, 1994, p. 33; Vanden, 1982, p. 40). Kirk wrote, "For the Sandinistas, this was essentially a policy of common sense, given the overwhelming Catholic nature of the Nicaraguan people; for the progressive clergy, such an alliance with the Sandinista Front was in many ways merely the logical extension of the magisterium of Medellin" (1992, p. 75). As the revolution raged the FSLN gained the support of the middle class to move beyond a grassroots movement (Vanden, 1982, p. 40). It is now important to examine the events leading to the revolution.

The Reign of Anastasio Somoza Deybale to December 27, 1974: A Regime in Crisis

The government of Anastasio Somoza Deybale (hereafter Somoza) was similar to that of his father's. He held the combined powers of the President and Director of the National Guard. He used the National Guard to repress any opposition to his government. As Kirk wrote, "The seven-thousand-member National Guard, buoyed by extensive military aid from Washington between 1967 and 1975, was always there to lend its support to Somoza, who remained as their director--virtually a power unto himself,
untouchable and omnipotent" (1992, p. 61). However, unlike his father, Somoza faced serious criticism of his authority, by an outspoken traditional clergy and a revolutionary progressive one.

From 1967 to 1972 the economy of Nicaragua stagnated, due to the crisis in the Central American Common Market following the war between Honduras and El Salvador (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 7). This, added to the corruption and use of force by Somoza, led to increased opposition to him by populist and business groups. In December of 1972, a major earthquake destroyed Managua, killing an estimated ten thousand people and dislocating over one hundred thousand others (Berryman, 1984, p. 65). Following the earthquake Nicaragua was in a state of chaos. Due to the help of Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and U. S. troops order was restored. With the advice of U. S. ambassador Turner Shelton, Somoza appointed himself as the head of the National Emergency Committee (Berryman, 1984, p. 65).3

Due to Somoza's misuse of foreign aid, human rights abuses, and greed, the Democratic Union for Liberation (UDEL) formed to oppose Somoza in the 1974 elections. UDEL was made up of conservatives, liberal democrats, Christian and social democrats, and the Nicaraguan Socialist party, led by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the editor of La Prensa, and Ramiro Sacasa, the former Minister of Education. The purpose behind UDEL was to promote dialogue with the government and to foster pluralism. The traditional clergy fully supported and participated in these efforts. However, Somoza responded with more violence, censorship, and repression. To no one's surprise, since
On December 27, 1974, the work of the Sandinistas (FSLN) made world news when they attacked the house of Dr. Castillo Quant, a former government official. The FSLN took several hostages, a number of whom were government officials and Somoza's relatives. In an agreement mediated by Archbishop Obando y Bravo the guerrillas were flown with Obando y Bravo, one Spanish ambassador, one Mexican ambassador, and five million dollars to Cuba. Obando y Bravo and the ambassadors then returned to Nicaragua. The FSLN also got to publish their manifesto in *La Prensa*. The Somoza government was badly embarrassed and the FSLN became the forefront of the opposition movement over the UDEL (Berryman, 1984, pp. 69-70; Merrill, 1994, p. 35; Mulligan, 1991, pp. 120-121; Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 10).

The Revolution from 1975 to 1977 and the Participation of the Clergy

Following the December 27th hostage taking an embarrassed Somoza placed Nicaragua under martial law. From 1975 to 1977, the National Guard went out on patrols seeking the FSLN. During these years the National Guard slaughtered thousands of peasants. Ironically, this campaign served as a unifying factor among anti-Somoza groups (Berryman 1984, p. 70; Merrill, 1994, p. 32). Mark Falcoff states the effect of Somoza's policy of National Guard patrols:
Opposition to the regime was more widespread than ever before and growing, and it was largely unrelated to the then tiny FSLN. Rather, it embraced virtually every respectable interest outside the Somoza machine, including businessmen like Adolfo Calero and clerics like the archbishop of Managua, Monsignor Miguel Obando y Bravo (1987, p. 316).

The progressive clergy was probably affected most by the patrols. The organizational structure of base communities made them easy targets for the National Guard, who would indiscriminately pick up peasants mistaking them for guerrilla collaborators (Berryman 1984, p. 70). This enraged the progressive clergy and further forced them into revolutionary action. This was the case of Solentiname. After some members of the community participated in a 1977 attack on National Guard Barracks, the Guard retaliated by destroying Solentiname. Thereafter Ernesto Cardenal actively participated in the FSLN (Cabestrero, 1983, p. 14).

At the same time the popular Church was collaborating with the FSLN, the traditional clergy maintained its role as mediator. The goal of the traditional clergy was simply to keep dialogue moving between the Somoza government and the opposing factions. Non-violence was to be the vehicle by which all change was to come about (Mulligan, 1991, p. 122). In a 1976 pastoral letter Archbishop Obando y Bravo wrote, "We will never be prophets of violence or of the class struggle; rather, we will support fraternal dialogue, based upon conversion and love. We should insist on the conversion of a man's heart...There will be no new continent without new men" (Kirk, 1992, p. 90).

In 1976, the progressive clergy was very active with efforts to end the human rights abuses of the National Guard. The religious order of the Capuchins compiled a list of all the peasants who were unjustly killed or tortured (Berryman, 1984, p.71). Shortly
thereafter Nicaraguan activists began to pressure the United States Congress to use American influence to stop the abuses (Falcoff & Royal, 1987, p. 316). In June Father Fernando Cardenal, founder of the Nicaraguan Commission for Human rights, testified before a U. S. Congressional committee regarding these issues. Less than a year later he became an official member of the FSLN (Cabestrero, 1983, p. 46).

In 1977 the progressive clergy continued to speak out for human rights. Father Miguel D'Escoto traveled to Washington to testify before the Congressional committee, and Ernesto Cardenal traveled to Rome denouncing Somoza and the human rights abuses. (Cabestrero, 1983, pp. 14 & 92). Also, the traditional clergy became active in speaking for human rights. The bishops issued the 1977 pastoral letter, Novedades, which condemned the Somoza dictatorship (Mulligan, 1991, p. 122). As an end result of the Congressional committee hearings and international opposition, the United States government withdrew its support from Somoza until improvements in human rights were made (Merrill, 1994, p. 33).

In July of 1977 Somoza suffered a mild heart attack and was hospitalized in Miami, until mid-September. In Somoza's absence, members of his own liberal party began to conspire with the UDEL (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, pp. 11-12). Without the support of the U. S., Somoza could not maintain his power; therefore he officially lifted martial law in late September (Merrill, 1994, p. 33). However, in October of 1977 Obando y Bravo, two other bishops and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, head of the UDEL and editor of La Prensa (Nicaragua's only independently owned newspaper), were among the members of a newly formed pro-dialogue commission (Mulligan, 1991, p. 124). The
purpose of this commission was to reform the Somoza regime from within to form a constitutional democracy (Mulligan, 1991, p. 124; Wheaton & Dilling 1980, p. 12).

A few days after the formation of the pro-dialogue commission, a group of businessmen and academics met in San Jose, Costa Rica; among them were Fernando Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto. This group called themselves Los Doce (the twelve). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss strategy for deposing Somoza, as well as to establish representation in a possible Sandinista government (Merrill, 1994, pp. 31-32; Mulligan, 1991, p. 124; Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 12).

By the end of October 1977, it was clear that all sectors of Nicaraguan society, with the exception of the National Guard, were against Somoza. However, the opposition was divided into two distinct factions; the UDEL, supported by the traditional clergy, and the FSLN, supported by the progressive clergy (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 12). Throughout the remainder of 1977 the UDEL continued to push for dialogue. In November the pro-dialogue commission met with Somoza. The commission offered to run elections scheduled for February 1978. U. S ambassador Maurico Solaun suggested that Somoza take advantage of the commission's proposals and be an active part in the reformation of Nicaragua. However, Somoza refused (Berryman, 1984, p.76).

In the meantime the FSLN began to step up its guerilla resistance, and was now being more actively supported with military aid from Cuba (Falcoff & Royal, 1987, pp. 316-317). Falcoff writes about Somoza's perspective of the FSLN's support from Cuba:
Ironically, this was precisely the prospect favored by Somoza himself. By refusing to negotiate effectively with the mainstream of the opposition, over time he pushed them into an alliance with the Sandinistas. This was done very deliberately, so as to confront the United States with only two choices—Somoza's continuance in office, or a Marxist-dominated government in Nicaragua. To the very end, of course, Somoza was convinced that if the alternatives were thus starkly posed, the United States would be forced to come down on his side (1987, p. 317).

In 1978, events produced exactly what Somoza wanted. By the end of the year most opposition would be in full support of the Sandinistas. However, the United States would not come down on his side. Falcoff went on to say, "Somoza's own belief in his carefully cultivated image as Washington's ally may have proven the most critical element in his fall" (1987, p. 317).

The Revolution in 1978 and the Clerical Response

On January 6, 1978 the bishops' conference issued a statement strongly condemning the Somoza dictatorship. Among the list of grievances were;

- The arbitrary, indefinite detentions. . . the inhumane methods of investigation; the lack of respect for life; the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few; the lack of sentences for many crimes; interference in religious matters, which at times results in the open or underhanded persecution of priests or Catholic lay leaders (Kirk, 1992, p. 93).

This statement was the strongest criticism by the traditional clergy to this point. The traditional clergy went on to say, "We simply cannot be quiet" (Kirk, 1992, p. 93), meaning that the traditional clergy would work to bring about a change to the leadership
of Nicaragua. Kirk wrote, "The Church leadership—to a large extent following the lead of
the 'Church of the poor'—had rapidly radicalized its faith" (1992, p. 93).

Four days later, on January 10, UDEL leader Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was
assassinated. Just days before his death Chamorro met with Miguel D'Escoto,
representing Los Doce, to discuss a closer relationship between the opposition factions
(Berryman, 1984, p. 78). The exact reason for Chamorro's death is unknown; it has been
speculated that Somoza ordered him to be killed as a way of deposing his rival (Wheaton
& Dilling, 1980, p. 16). However, it is more likely that Chamorro was ordered to be
killed by Somoza's son because of an expose on Plasmaferesis, his blood export company,
in the La Prensa (Berryman, 1984, p. 78).

Chamorro's death became the rallying event of the revolution. Some fifty thousand
people participated in a seven hour pre-funeral service. A few small riots broke out that
evening following the wake and some of Somoza's businesses were burned. The following
day, the National Guard hesitated to approach any of the large crowds and with the
exception of a small confrontation at the cemetery the funeral was very peaceful.
Chamorro's death marked the first major outpouring of anti-Somoza sentiment (Berryman,

The same day (January 11) of Chamorro's funeral, "Archbishop Obando y Bravo,
declared the Dialogue indefinitely suspended" (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 17). The
negotiations with Somoza had stopped, but they would resume a few months later.
However, the UDEL had ceased to be a major actor. On January 11, the bishops'
conference issued another pastoral letter, this time condemning the assassination of
Chamorro and calling for the guilty parties to be brought to justice (Mulligan, 1991, p. 125).

In response to Chamorro's death the business class called for Somoza to step down. On January 23, they organized a general strike to protest the dictatorship (Merrill, 1994, p. 34). This strike closed down all sectors of business. Eighty-five percent of all commerce was closed (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 18). With the economy in trouble Somoza reinstated the National Committee of Emergency, which was created in 1972 following the earthquake (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 19).

Somoza called every one back to work and when the protests continued the National Guard reacted with a violent reign of terror. It has been reported that within the province of Chontales that 350 families were killed during a two month period. "The Guard's level of violence escalated with beatings, arrests, and shootings of dozens of protestors" (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 19). The bishop of Chontales, Pablo Vega said,"the National Guard had used helicopters to massacre the people and bomb the houses" (Lernoux, 1980, p. 95).

Even with the increased violence the traditional clergy still called for peaceful means of change. "On January 27, Obando expressed his 'complete support for the General Strike as a peaceful means to demand justice'"(Mulligan, 1991, p. 126).

However, on February 2 and 3 the FSLN, staffed by many base community members, attacked the cities of Granada and Rivas, leaving behind red and black flags that read, "This city was occupied by the FSLN" (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 20). Also, on February 3, the National Strike committee felt it was apparent that the strike would not be
effective in ousting Somoza and declared an end to the strike (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 19).

On February 20, the National Guard raided the community of Monimbo, near Managua. While people were celebrating Mass the National Guard attacked the crowd of 1000 peasant women and children with tear gas and indiscriminate gun fire. For seven days a small peasant militia held out against the National Guard until 800 National Guardsmen stormed the city. The majority of the city was burned and most people were left homeless. La Prensa played an active role in making this an international event (Lernoux, 1980, p. 95; Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, pp. 20-22). As a result the United States withdrew all military aid from Somoza, citing Human Rights violations. This had a two-prong effect: it caused a continual decline in the economy and a rise of the opposition (Merrill, 1994, pp.34-35).

By May of 1978, the opposition was once again willing to negotiate with Somoza. This time, "the traditional Conservative Party joined UDEL, Los Doce, MDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Movement) in creating the Broad Opposition Front (Frente Amplio de Oposicion--FAO)" (Merrill, 1991, p. 35). In response to the creation of the FAO the FSLN created the United Peoples Movement (MPU). The MPU was made up of women, students, workers, trade unions, leftist political parties, and revolutionary organizations. Los Doce would become the communication link between the groups (Merrill, 1994, p. 35; Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 32).

As the human rights abuses continued to increase, the traditional clergy continued to speak on the notion of non-violence. On August 2, the Nicaraguan Bishops Conference
continued to insist that a new political order be put into place. This time however, the bishops implied that it was useless to try to stop the people who have already turned to violent means because they had lost faith in the power of negotiating. The reference is assumed to have been made to reflect the traditional clergy's disapproval for the FSLN and the progressive clergy that publicly supported them (Berryman, 1984, p. 83; Mulligan, 1991, p. 128). However the progressive clergy, who had already established the position of active participation in the FSLN, grew increasingly frustrated with the traditional clergy's position of non-violence. Some years after the revolution in an interview with Teofilo Cabestrero, Ernesto Cardenal reflected on a meeting he had with FSLN leaders Tomas Borge and Carlos Fonseca:

We [Cardenal, Borge, and Fonseca] saw that in Nicaragua an armed struggle was becoming more and more necessary. We recalled that Gandhi had said in certain circumstances his doctrine of nonviolence couldn't be put into practice—in Hitler's Germany it could not have been put into practice, and it was the same in Somoza's Nicaragua. (quoted in Cabestrero, 1983, p. 27).

On August 22, the FSLN became the only viable opposition faction, by attacking the National Palace (The Nicaraguan Congress). They took over 2,000 government officials hostage for over two days. Once again, Obando y Bravo would negotiate an agreement between Somoza and the FSLN (as he did on December, 27, 1974). In this agreement the FSLN was able to get political prisoners released, and 500,000 U S dollars.

This event would have many implications that would affect the fall of Somoza and the establishment of a revolutionary government. At the time this attack took place, it had been apparent for some time that Somoza would fall from power--the question merely was: When? After this attack, the National Guard began to be plagued by internal
divisions. The FSLN had completely solidified itself, the FAO could only make weak
attempts at negotiations, and the people now looked to the FSLN as being the only power
that could defeat Somoza. The events of the following twelve months would only magnify
the results of this successful attack (Merrill, 1991, p. 35; Wheaton & Dilling, p. 35-36).

During the month of September, while the FSLN was battling in the major cities of
Managua, Leon, Masaya, Chinadega, and Esteli (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 38), both
the traditional and progressive clergy were actively pursuing political issues. Obando y
Bravo and some other bishops insisted in pursuing a negotiated settlement to the civil war.
On September 15, in a highly criticized act of diplomacy, Obando was photographed
having a toast with Somoza on the national holiday. At the same time as this party, the
city of Esteli was under attack and the priests' council of Managua along with the
Conference of Religious (CONFER); two progressive clergy organizations were busy
preparing a letter to U. S. President Carter, asking him not to send any aid to the
Nicaraguan Government. This letter and concurrent uprisings of the FSLN convinced
Carter to send William Bowdler, a senior diplomat, to mediate a solution to the war

During the last efforts of the mediation process, the National Guard grew more
ruthless with indiscriminate killings and human rights abuses. In October, *Los Doce*
withdrew from the FAO along with several other of the liberal groups. The break up of
the FAO further weakened an already vain attempt to negotiate an outcome to the war.
On October 5 Ernesto Cardenal, while in Lisbon, openly criticized the Pope for not
denouncing the senseless killings by Somoza (Mulligan, 1991, p. 129). The human rights
abuses would further weaken Somoza, when in November the Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-American Commission on Human Rights published a report on the abuses of the National Guard (Merrill, 1994, p. 36).

According to Penny Lernoux, the eighty-one page OAS report, "described the indiscriminate bombing, strafing, and shelling of Nicaraguan cities and towns by the National Guard" (1980, p. 98). Lernoux went on to say;

During the so-called 'mop-up,' operation there was pointed disregard for human life, with the shooting of many people, in some cases children, in their homes or in front of them, in the presence of their parents, brothers, and sisters. The commission also condemned the Somoza government for obstructing Red Cross work; of killing, arbitrary detention, and other abuses against peasants; and of generalized repression against all young men between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. One commission member, after a visit to the devastated city of Esteli, called the National Guard an occupying army. (1980, p. 98)

These abuses once again sparked Ernesto Cardenal to criticize the Pope for not taking action. In December, E. Cardenal and Carlos Tunnermann, a member of Los Doce, sent a telegram to the Vatican. It read in part, "Nicaraguan Catholics are surprised by the Vatican's silence in the face of the tragic situation of the people of Nicaragua ... who have been atrociously massacred by the government of Gen. Somoza" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 129).

**CELAM III: The Puebla Conference**

The ideological split of the traditional and progressive clergy came to a head in January, 1979. Other countries throughout Latin America were experiencing a similar phenomenon among their clergy. The Latin American traditional clergy called the third
CELAM conference in hopes of undoing some of the social doctrine written into the Medellin document, thereby defusing the progressive clergy and the liberation theology movement. According to Penny Lernoux, the traditional clergy was uncertain about the previous episcopal councils: "[T]hose [bishops] who did not participate in the conference [Medellin] reacted with shock and fright. But even among the participants were bishops who would later claim they did not realize the significance of what they had signed, just as other prelates earlier had disclaimed Vatican II on the same grounds" (Eagleson & Scharper, 1979, p. 12). It was with these uncertainties that CELAM met for sixteen days in 1979.

The Nicaraguan delegates to Puebla were Bishop Julian Barni, of Matagalpa; Bishop Manuel Salazar, of Leon; and Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo (CELAM, 1978, pp. 49, 113, & 233). According to John Hart, a theologian with press credentials at Puebla, the delegates were selected in proportion to the Catholic population of their respective countries (interview, 1996). Furthermore Hart adds, "Of the 186 voting bishop delegates, most were considered moderate-conservative" (July-August, 1979, p. 32). The Nicaraguan delegation was definitely among this group.

In the opening address of the council, Pope John Paul II set the tone by saying:

How far humanity has travelled in those ten years [since Medellin]! How far the Church has travelled in those ten years in the company and service of humanity! This third conference [of CELAM] cannot disregard that fact. So it will have to take Medellin's conclusions as its point of departure, with all the positive elements contained therein, but without disregarding the incorrect interpretations that have sometimes resulted and that call for calm discernment, opportunite criticism, and clear-cut stances (Eagleson & Scharper, 1979, p. 57).
Even though the traditional clergy was instructed to take Medellin as a starting point, they went to great lengths to keep the progressive element out of the conference.

From the start the conservative traditional clergy had hoped to control the direction of the conference by not allowing representation of the progressive clergy. The conference took place in Don Juan de Palafox y Mendoza seminary, which is surrounded by a ten foot high stone wall (Eagleson & Scharper, 1979, p. 29). The purpose of this site was for extra security. Anyone wishing to enter the conference would have to pass through several check points showing identification. This ensured that non-invited clergy would not be heard by the delegates. (Hart interview, 1996).

As the conference got underway, the bishops began to form into two camps. The conservative delegates, who wanted to revise Medellin in one group, and the liberal bishops who supported the ideas of the progressive clergy in the other. Due to the selection process Brazil had one fourth of the delegates present. According to Hart, the Brazilian clergy was inclined to be more liberal than other Latin American clergy. Because of their number, the Brazilian delegation was able to move the conference in a progressive direction (interview, 1996). It was through the liberal bishops that the progressive clergy was able to be heard.

Across town, the progressive clergy had been invited to speak at open meetings in response to the privacy of Puebla. These meetings were sponsored by CENCOS (National Center of Social Communication) and ran simultaneously with the Puebla sessions. Feature speakers included; Ernesto Cardenal, Miguel D'Escoto, Gustavo Gutierrez, Enrique Dussel, and Leonardo Boff. At the end of the day, the liberal
delegates of Puebla would meet with the CENCOS speakers. In these meetings the progressive clergy would give ideas to the bishops and the bishops would return to the conference, presenting these ideas as their own (Hart, July-August 1979, p.33; Hart interview, 1996).

When the Puebla conference was concluded on February 15, the Puebla document was released. Ironically, the plans of the traditional clergy to revise Medellin had backfired. According to reporter Moises Sandoval, "[w]hile there had been fears that Puebla would turn the Church away from prophetic options of Medellin, CELAM III reinforced them and in some cases restated them in stronger language" (Eagleson & Scharper, 1979, p. 40). The document included Gustavo Gutierrez’s idea of the "preferential option for the poor," and approved of base communities (Eagleson & Scharper, 1979, p. 341; Hart, July-August 1979, p. 33). In essence the Puebla conference served to defuse the position of the traditional clergy. This would become apparent in the last few months of the revolution.

1979: The Final Stage of the Revolution

The FSLN further increased its political strength through the early months of 1979. In January the OAS had failed in negotiations with Somoza, marking the formal end of the negotiating process (Merrill, 1994, p. 36). On February 1, the FSLN established the National Patriotic Front (FPN). The purpose of the FPN was to legitimize the Sandinistas with broad-based political support. The FPN included members from
such groups as *Los Doce*, the Popular Social Christian Party, the FAO, and the private sector. By March the FPN would also be in formal unity with the Sandinista Guerrillas (Merrill, 1994, p. 36).

With the creation and unification of the FPN intense fighting broke out all over Nicaragua. Even during the increase in fighting Obando y Bravo still insisted on non-violent means to end the war. In an April interview with *La Prensa*, Obando stated, "Violence seeks the death of the other, the gospel always seeks life; and violence is always unjust because it is against liberty" (Mulligan, 1991, p. 130). However, in the spirit of Puebla the other Nicaraguan bishops altered their stand on the revolution. According to Mulligan, on June 2, 1979, the bishops' conference stated that the people's uprising was legitimate:

> We are all hurt and affected by the extremes of revolutionary insurrections, but their moral and legal legitimacy cannot be denied in the case of obvious and prolonged tyranny which seriously violates the fundamental rights of the person and harms the common good of the country (1991, p. 130).

Mulligan went on to comment, "Many priests and religious [progressive clergy], and vast number of lay persons, had been miles ahead of the bishops in supporting the revolution, making a clear connection between faith and revolution. . . "(1991, p. 131).

Just sixteen days (June 18) after the bishops' pronouncement, a five member junta was organized in Costa Rica to become the provisional Nicaraguan government. "The members of the new junta were Daniel Jose Ortega Saavedra of the FSLN, Moises Hassan Morales of the FPN, Sergio Ramirez Mercado of *Los Doce*, Alfonso Robelo Calejas of the MDN, and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the widow of *La Prensa*'s editor" (Merrill, 1994,
By the end of the month, FSLN forces occupied all of Nicaragua with the exception of Managua.

With the FSLN forces at his doorstep, Somoza agreed to resign the presidency. On July 16, 1979, Somoza's long awaited resignation became a reality. During the early morning hours of the 17th, Somoza along with some National Guardsmen and family members, fled to Miami (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 70). That day, Francisco Maliano Urcuyo became the interim president until the five member Junta could assume power. On July 19, FSLN forces entered Managua, and on July 20, the Junta assumed the powers of the provisional government. The Somoza era had finally came to an end.

Conclusion: The Future of the Nicaraguan Clergy

After Somoza was deposed three members of the progressive clergy were rewarded for their efforts in the revolutionary movement, receiving high government offices. Ernesto Cardenal and Fernando Cardenal of the FSLN were named as the Minister of Culture and the Minister of Education, respectively; and Miguel D'Escoto of *Los Doce* became the Minister of Foreign affairs (Cabestrero, 1982, p. 46; Gorman, 1981, p.140). The concept of the clergy participating in government was not new; neither was the concept of priests participating in revolutionary activities. However both concepts served as a wedge between the traditional and progressive clergy.

During the overthrow of Somoza the traditional and progressive clergy played two distinct roles. Both factions were in the tradition of the colonial clergy that spoke out for
human rights, although they disagreed on the process to correct the situation. As has been illustrated, the traditional clergy saw themselves in a mediating role that could bring about change through peaceful dialogue. On the other hand the progressive clergy believed that only through active participation in the revolutionary struggle could justice be won for the poor. Even though the Nicaraguan clergy had traditionally been divided along economic lines, it was not until Vatican II, CELAM II (Medellin), and the development of liberation theology that the clergy followed two different ideological paths. These ideologies stemmed out of not only traditional theology but also the experiences of clergy themselves.

In reflecting on the importance of the councils, one draws the conclusion that Gutierrez's interpretation of Vatican II and Medellin lead him to write *A Theology of Liberation*. Although, one does have to wonder whether or not this theology would have been compiled regardless of the documents of Vatican II and Medellin. In my opinion, giving the social conditions of the peasants sooner or later Gutierrez's theology would have appeared. However, I believe that Vatican II and Medellin prepared the theological world to accept such a radical theology. At the time these councils took place the Church was struggling to find her place in society. As we saw in Nicaragua, a Church that preaches a message of love was supporting a dictator that repressed human freedoms. The Church needed to redefine herself and she did so in the language of the heroic clergy of the past. During this process of redefinition the Nicaraguan clergy was forced to deal with a new generation of oppression. They responded by expressing a truth Christianity: love for the oppressed neighbor.
The traditional clergy remained consistent with mediated measures to end the revolution. Obando y Bravo led the traditional clergy in the mediation process and was out-spoken on his dislike of Somoza. From the time the archbishop took office he worked continually to bring about the society as described by Vatican II. Obando y Bravo has been criticized for not supporting the FSLN and his actions of July 17, 1979, three days before the junta took power, lead to some of that criticism. That day he was in Caracas, Venezuela to form an alternative government to the Sandinistas (Mulligan, 1991, pp. 131-132). One does have to question Obando y Bravo's motives in this instance, but I believe that the archbishop sincerely thought that a constitutional government would be best for Nicaragua. Obando y Bravo identified with the middle class and he felt the government was best in their hands.

The other bishops have been criticized as well for not recognizing the people's movement (FSLN) sooner. However, like Obando y Bravo, I believe that the bishops acted in accordance with the ideology of a mediated solution. Shortly after Puebla, the bishops' conference recognized the value of the FSLN and gave them their support. The bishops' conference did this even though the archbishop was against the Sandinistas. This illustrates the bishops' genuine concern for the welfare of the Nicaraguan people.

On the other hand the progressive clergy was naturally more inclined to work with the FSLN. Not only had the progressive clergy accepted Marxist theory, they made it compatible with Christianity. This ideological synthesis made the FSLN and the progressive clergy close allies. Together the progressive clergy and the FSLN were able to reach the peasants and empower them to overcome their oppressors. The progressive
clergy's base communities were the necessary link between the people and the revolution. This link was most documented in Solentiname, but the effect was similar with all base communities. Ernesto Cardenal was, without a doubt, a dynamic leader in this effort.

One cannot overlook the achievements of the religious orders and those who were responding to the human rights abuses. The Capuchin human rights report was crucial in the loss of Somoza's U.S. support. On the same note Fernando Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto deserve recognition for this accomplishment. Although Fernando Cardenal's greatest accomplishments would come in the post revolutionary era, he worked with the FSLN to bring an end to Somoza's Dictatorship. Miguel D'Escoto was another dynamic figure. He worked within Los Doce to stop the human rights abuses. Also, he served to bring the UDEL and the FSLN closer together. Without Los Doce it is doubtful that the FSLN would have gained the broad based middle class support need to bring down Somoza.

The clergy, both traditional and progressive, provided the necessary leadership in the overthrow. Each faction acted in a distinct manner, a manner that was spelled out for them by their predecessors and by the theological insights provided by Vatican II, Medellin, and liberation theology. In the Sandinista government the clergy would continue to battle along their ideological lines. It is doubtful that the clergy will ever be synonymous, for as long as there is class division some members of the clergy will be sympathetic to the poor while others are sympathetic to the wealthy. However, I believe that through further councils the Church again will be ideologically united. Both sectors of the clergy are coming to the understanding that the Church's mission is to the poor,
whether that mission should be carried out by mediation or revolution, or whether the end
goal is a classless society or a better society. I believe that the clergy will continue to
work for justice.
1. In the early nineteen-forties Somoza Garcia watched his popularity increase. With the out-break of World War II, Somoza Garcia declared war on the Axis powers and allowed the United States to have military bases in Nicaragua. Somoza Garcia took advantage of the war. He confiscated property from German and Italian immigrants, which he sold to himself at a discounted price. Cotton, timber, and gold exports hit an all time high. Both Nicaragua and Somoza Garcia benefited from the war experience. After the war was over the Nicaraguan economy was booming; however Somoza Garcia had taken control of many large corporations including La Salud dairy, Nicaragua's only pasteurized milk factory, and the national airlines. It is estimated that during the war Somoza Garcia amassed a sixty million dollar fortune (Berryman, 1984, p. 54).

2. As an alternative, Somoza Garcia backed Leonardo Arguello, whom Somoza thought he could control from behind the scenes. Arguello was far from a puppet president, and when he refused to listen to Somoza Garcia, a coup took over the government in 1947. U. S. President Harry S. Truman refused to recognize the coup and cut off diplomatic relations in 1948. This led Somoza Garcia to call a constitutional convention in 1948. The new constitution was laden with anticommunism overtones, which won Somoza Garcia the approval of the United States and the Church (Kirk, 1992, p.35; Merrill, 1994, p. 27).

3. At the time of the earthquake Somoza was probably the wealthiest man in Nicaragua. A list of his assets included: forty-six coffee farms, seven sugar plantations, fifty-one cattle farms, four hundred tobacco farms, one gold mine, three radio stations, two airlines, one bank, one newspaper, a fishing industry, a meat packing firm, a milk processing company, a cigar factory, a shoe factory, a transport line, a shipping port, tourist centers, an insurance company, and the following industries; oil, glass, textiles, matches, salt, ice, chemicals, jewelry, refined coffee, asbestos, cement, concrete, housing and aluminum products. It is also estimated that he had fifty percent of all arable land, forty percent of all industry, and liquid capital from four hundred to six hundred million U. S. dollars (Wheaton & Dilling, 1980, p. 17).

   Somoza and the National Guard generals prospered from the foreign aid being poured into the country. The Generals would buy land that was destroyed and then sell it to the government at an inflated price. In one such incident one of Somoza's aides bought ninety-three acres for seventy-one thousand dollars and two months later sold fifty-six of them to the government for 1.7 million dollars. All together, it is estimated that 76.7 million dollars of U. S. aid was used improperly (Berryman, 1984, p. 65).
Bibliography


