

September/October 1986

Insulated by Ideology: The Protestant Left Stands Alone on Nicaragua

Mourning the decline of his magazine's constituency, the secular Left, a writer for The Nation recently lamented that "the religious Left is the only Left we've got." With respect to advocating the cause of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, even the religious Left's ranks have begun to thin. Former Roman Catholic supporters or sympathizers of the Sandinistas, along with many others in the secular world, have become disillusioned with the Nicaraguan Marxist-Leninist regime.

The key factor in the decline of the pro-Sandinista forces has clearly been the mounting evidence of a fundamental attack on pluralism and religious freedom in Nicaragua. One group, however, has stubbornly refused to change its opinion. Insulated by ideology and increasingly isolated in both the religious and secular worlds, the Protestant Left continues to parrot the Sandinista party line.

Consider these recent events in Nicaragua. On January 1, Radio Catolica, the already censored Catholic radio station, was closed down. On June 26, La Prensa, the heavily censored independent newspaper, was shut down. On June 28, Msgr. Bismarck Carballo, a major spokesman for the Managua Archdiocese, was not allowed to return from abroad. On July 4, Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega, one of the top

leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua, was forcibly exiled.

Are we to interpret these actions by the Sandinistas as an understandable result of their struggle for survival against internal and external enemies? Or are these actions better explained by the prior ideological commitments of the Sandinistas themselves? To be sure, Sandinista actions must be considered in light of a civil war and the militant opposition of the United States. Nevertheless, an objective observer finds much which cannot be explained simply by a reference to the contras and their powerful ally to the north.

As the New York Times, in an editorial entitled "The Sandinista Road to Stalinism" put it, "Only the credulous can fail to see the long roots of the police state now emerging....They are well down the totalitarian road traveled by Fidel Castro" (July 10). Had such strong statements come from a conservative source, they certainly would have been dismissed as "red-baiting."

Catholic bishops' conferences in France, Italy, Spain, the United States, and Latin America (CELAM) have all issued strong statements protesting

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Taking Sides in the Philippines

With a prayer on its lips, the Christian world watched the non-violent revolution of Corazon Aquino which last February ousted the Marcos regime in the Philippines. It is no secret that Aquino's "people power" tactic found crucial support in the Roman Catholic Church, particularly under the leadership of Jaime Cardinal Sin. But while most Filipino Christians seem to support Aquino, who faces difficult challenges from the Right and Left, what of the U.S. churches? Early evidence is unsettling.

An NCC occasional paper, "The Philippines at a Crossroad" by B. David Williams, was released following the Aquino victory in early March. The tone of the paper is, at best, pessimistic. In his forward, Edwin Luidens, NCC Director for East Asia and the Pacific writes: "Filipino Christians have been particularly urgent in challenging us Americans for our

complicity in the problems they have faced, particularly under Martial Law. It took them 14 years of suffering to rid themselves of that dictatorial repression. Now Marcos is gone. Have the forces that encouraged him to assume power and supported him in his increasingly repressive and thoroughly corrupt administration? No, they have not! Most of them will continue to reassert their power on behalf of foreign interests -- especially Japanese and American -- and possibly thwart again the hope for a democratic development of, by and for Filipinos."

While several pages are devoted to describing gruesome human rights abuses under Marcos, David Williams' brief treatment of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New Peoples Army (NPA) is remarkable for its sympathy. Williams concedes that "violence must be challenged, wher-

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Daniel Ortega waves as he is escorted by Rev. A. Finley Schaefer (with sunglasses and beard) and security agents outside of the Park Slope Methodist Church in Brooklyn (UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos).

religious persecution in Nicaragua (RNS, July 1). One wonders if these leaders now consider that most of the international Catholic world, as well as the New York Times and Washington Post, are lying as well.

At a March press conference conducted by members of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church who had just returned from Nicaragua, Shirley Dare contended that Nicaragua was "a participatory society" which reminded her of a "New England town meeting." Richard Parker observed that "political dissent is common in Nicaragua, the arguments go on openly all the time. We never saw any sign of repression or interference in the life of local churches." He did concede that the Sandinistas do "silly and stupid things...from time to time," but said this has to do with anxiety over American opposition (engage/social action, May 1986).

In stark contrast to the idyllic picture of religious and political liberty in Nicaragua reported by the United Methodists in March is that of Roman Catholic Bishop Sean O'Malley. In mid-July, O'Malley was part of a small group which went to Nicaragua as representatives of the United States Catholic Conference. They were to communicate American solidarity with the Nicaraguan bishops. Upon their return, O'Malley issued a public statement regarding the condition of the Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua, which he asserted is "deteriorating very rapidly." The government will not allow publicity for any church-sponsored events. Mother Teresa, who had just visited Cuba, was refused permission to enter Nicaragua. O'Malley reported that "the active lay leaders are under tremendous pressure to abandon their commitment to the Church. They are often approached by the Security Forces and threatened with dire consequences for themselves and their families if they continue to work for the Church." Are these just the "silly and stupid" things that the Sandinistas do from time to time? Is this really reminiscent of a "New England town meeting"?

Particularly shameful was the warm welcome accorded Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega in late July by two influential New York churches. Prominent U.S. Catholic officials had refused to meet with the Sandinista leader because of recent actions against the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, but Riverside Church in Manhattan and Park Slope United Methodist Church in Brooklyn were delighted to host Ortega.

It should not be surprising that Ortega received a standing ovation in both churches before even speaking, or that the one questioner who dared challenge Sandinista policy was booed by the rest of the

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Sandinista actions against the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. Pope John Paul II called the expulsion of Bishop Vega an "almost incredible act" that "evokes the dark ages of actions taken against the church." Bishop James Malone, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, warned that the recent actions against Carballo and Vega reflect a "new and dangerously repressive policy." Even Reverend William Boteler, Superior General of the Maryknoll Order criticized Sandinista actions. He said it was "difficult to see" how the actions against Carballo and Vega "can serve the Nicaraguan people's need for peace and reconciliation" (Religious News Service, July 8, 1986). The Maryknoll order, it should be noted, has been a strong proponent of liberation theology and even contributed one of its own, Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto, to the Sandinista cause.

But the Protestant ecumenical world has continued either to defend the Sandinistas or remain uncharacteristically silent. One notable exception is Edmond L. Browning, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. Though careful to indicate his lack of support for U.S. financial aid to the contras, Bishop Browning sent a letter on July 14 to the Nicaraguan ambassador in Washington, DC, protesting the Sandinista actions against Carballo and Vega.

Unfortunately, the National Council of Churches (NCC) and major denominations within it are unable to concede that Sandinista actions against the Catholic church are even "religious liberty" issues. Last March, for example, Witness for Peace, a coalition of Christians opposed to contra aid, organized a group of 250 religious leaders who charged that President Reagan was "lying" when he talked about

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audience. Evidently, this segment of the American religious spectrum does not need to hear Ortega's justification of his country's actions. Nothing is going to be allowed to interfere with ideological commitments made long ago to the Sandinista government.

The problem with ideology is that it is immune to the witness of reality and as such should have no place within our churches. To be sure, Riverside and Park Slope are, we trust, extreme manifestations of this phenomenon, but to a distressing degree the same ideology grips significant other parts of the religious world as well.

Who informs the Sandinista religious lobby in this country? Whom does it trust? The religious Left has chosen to champion the cause of the so-called "popular church" — the part of the church which is immersed in liberation theology and is cooperating with the Sandinista government. According to the "popular church", there is no religious persecution in Nicaragua.

Perhaps the foremost representative of this view within Nicaragua is the Antonio Valdivieso Ecumenical Center. On August 4, Uriel Molina, its director, released a ten-page statement on behalf of the Center giving its views on the expulsion of Bishop Vega and the question of religious freedom in Nicaragua. Molina's statement is indistinguishable in its essentials from the Sandinista position.

It should be remembered that in November 1985 Molina celebrated a mass in Managua with a banner of the M-19 Colombian terrorist organization draped over the altar. This was three days after the M-19 had murdered dozens of hostages in the Colombian National Palace of Justice (Religion and Democracy, Jan/Feb 1986).

According to Molina, "Bishop Vega was engaged in a political campaign to overthrow the elected government of Nicaragua." The document confidently asserts that "the expulsion was not an action against the Church of Jesus." On the contrary, Bishop Vega was "expatriated for representing and defending the major capital interests of U.S. imperialism, of counterrevolutionary somocismo and of all the retrograde forces that collaborate to block the process of liberation in the Third World." Criticism of the Sandinistas by the foreign press is dealt with in a classic Marxist-Leninist manner. According to Molina and the Valdivieso Center, information received in the West is "filtered ahead of time through the major centers of capitalist power which control information to favor their interests... We see how many people of good will are disoriented, due to the tremendous power that imperialism exercises in the world of mass information." Thus, the substantive critiques of the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the international Catholic world are dismissed as imperialist propaganda. We would expect Marxist-Leninists to hold such views, but why would the World Council of Churches grant Molina's Center \$65,000 in 1985?

Why do major U.S. denominations provide substantial support as well?

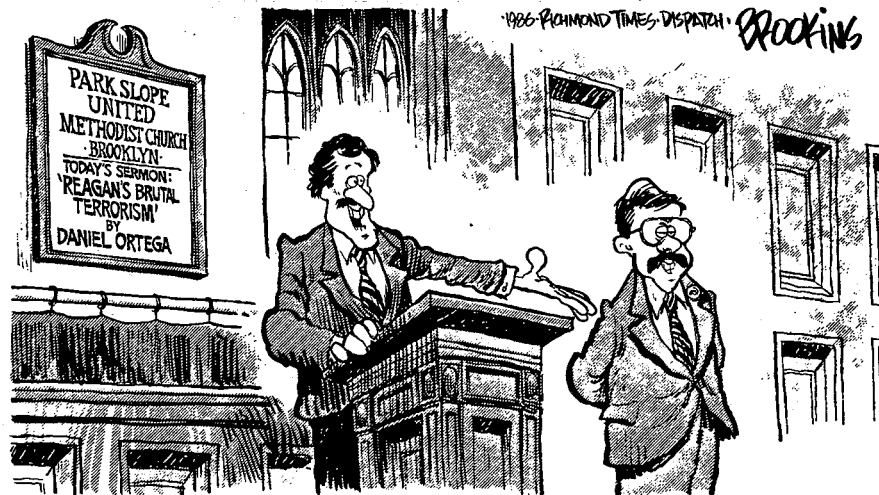
The alleged "crimes" of Bishop Vega merit some discussion. Indeed, he is suspicious of the "popular church." He fears that it will be used by international communism. Is it a crime to hold this view? Is the only legitimate Christian view the one which holds that the poor can only be served through the revolutionary, socialist agenda of the "popular church" in league with the Sandinista government?

Vega has been charged with directly aiding the contra cause. But we need to examine the statements in question. In a July 3 press conference Vega commented that American aid to the contras "is not a desirable means for (promoting) dialogue, but one cannot deny the people the right to defend themselves...when they are tormented and crushed and treated as if they had no citizenship." A tough-minded position, to be sure. But precisely the position which liberation theology proponents have always advanced, and often criticized the Church for not supporting enough.

Vega asserts that the "Church is not on the side of the counter-revolution. The problem is: Who acts against human rights? Who deprives the people of their personal security and takes away their right to express themselves?" Vega notes that human rights' violations by the contras "certainly have happened," though he goes on to observe that not everything said about them is accurate.

Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo, Archbishop of Managua, and Bishop Vega have consistently called for dialogue between the Sandinistas and the contras. Why does the Protestant Left consider it honorable for the Church to call for negotiations in El Salvador, where President Duarte faces a left-wing guerrilla movement, yet considers it treason to call for talks in Nicaragua? Mayor Ed Koch of New York City raised this same issue of consistency at an early August press conference for Bismarck Carballo, the expelled Nicaraguan priest. "When the church stands

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"WE WANT TO THANK BROTHER ORTEGA FOR THAT INSPIRING MESSAGENEXT WEEK, WE HOPE TO HAVE BROTHER GORBACHEV SPEAK ON HIS MISSIONARY PROGRAM IN AFGHANISTAN! ..."

up to right-wing terror, people applaud," fumed Koch, "but when it is left-wing terror, the same people try to stop anyone from opposing it" (RNS, August 5, 1986).

Sandinista actions against the Catholic hierarchy cannot simply be dismissed as wartime necessity. In 1984, Henry Ruiz, a prominent Sandinista leader, put it this way: "...the pluralism we are talking about entails Sandinista hegemony" (New York Tribune, May 30, 1984). On June 27, Daniel Ortega declared: "We are not going to accept a civic opposition, because that does not exist anymore" (Washington Post, June 30, 1986). These are statements of a political ideology which is fundamentally opposed to genuine democracy. Those who persist in the tattered hope that the Sandinista experiment, with its alleged merging of Christian and Marxist truths, will end oppression and poverty, must honestly reconsider Sandinista rhetoric and action.

Religious freedom will always be threatened by political regimes which are willing only to support churches as handmaidens of the state. This has been a trademark of totalitarian or semi-totalitarian states, on both the Left and the Right. At best, religion is limited to worship or active support of the government. All else is viewed as "political." By this clever semantic sleight of hand, religious oppression ceases to exist, since the scope of legitimate religion is narrowed to eliminate any critique of the state. This undermines one of the central tenets of liberation theology, namely, that the church be willing to speak out against oppression of the poor. Sadly, in Nicaragua, as in other Marxist-Leninist regimes, the church is emphatically not allowed to be an advocate for the defenseless. It would appear that the church can only attack the oppression of the Right, but never of the Left.

In a recent interview for an Italian newspaper,

Gustavo Gutierrez, considered a founder of liberation theology, was very critical of the so-called "popular church" in Nicaragua. When asked if he considered the Nicaraguan "popular church" to be a good expression of liberation theology, Gutierrez responded with an unambiguous "No" (reported in the Australian magazine NewsWeekly, March 5, 1986). Christians may well disagree about whether aid to the contras is justified, but why should there be a reluctance or refusal to speak out against attacks on religious liberty and political pluralism? Why do we continue to fund internal and external conduits of Sandinista propaganda? To the extent that reality-defying ideology is dominant among certain segments of our church leadership and bureaucracy, the problem can be expected to continue.

The problem of Nicaragua is going to remain painful for American Christians for some time to come. There are no easy answers. But, however painful and unpleasant it may be for us, we must never forget how infinitely more painful and difficult it is for the Nicaraguan people.

We must vigorously protest the steady loss of religious and political liberties in Nicaragua. Religious leaders and organizations whose ideological commitments consistently impair their moral vision must be firmly confronted. Special tribute must be paid to those Christian leaders who have had the courage to allow new information to alter previous points of view. There can be no further excuses for supporting in word or deed those who deprive others of their legitimate freedoms.

The Protestant Left undoubtedly sees itself as "a voice crying in the wilderness," but with each passing day, they look more and more like the detractors of Noah. It would be as if, when the rains began to fall and the waters rose, they continued to insist that there would be no flood. But as far as we know, even those who mocked Noah did not persist in their stubborn error when it began to rain. --Kent R. Hill

From the Director's Desk

The IRD is pleased to announce two new board members: the Most Reverend Rene H. Gracida, Bishop of Corpus Christi, and Paul Dietrich, Publisher and Editor of the Saturday Review.

Born in New Orleans, Bishop Gracida received a B.S. from the University of Houston and a M. Div. from St. Vincent College. His fascinating career includes 32 missions as a B-17 Flight Engineer during World War II, teaching architecture, and serving as a Catholic priest and bishop. He was ordained a priest in 1959, served in Florida parishes during the 1960s, and was ordained to the Episcopacy in 1971.

Since 1981, Bishop Gracida has been on the Board of Directors for Catholic Relief Services. This past December he began a 3-year term with the Committee on Social Development and World Peace of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Paul Dietrich is a native of St. Louis, Missouri, and a graduate of Webster College. He worked for

four years as a writer/producer for public television and CBS and has served two terms in the Missouri House of Representatives. In 1985, Portugal awarded Mr. Dietrich the Commander of the Portuguese Legion Benemeritencia award in appreciation of his international charitable activities. He was the first American to receive this honor since 1955. Mr. Dietrich serves on the Board of Trustees of the Catholic University of America, as well as on numerous other boards. He has edited works on foreign and domestic policy.

In addition to his present work with Saturday Review, Mr. Dietrich is the President of the National Center for Legislative Research and the John Davis Lodge Center for International Studies. He is also the publisher of Legislative Policy, a bi-monthly journal for state legislators.

We note with deep sorrow that Marion Hepburn Grant, a committed laywoman in the United Church of Christ and a member of the IRD Board of Advisors, passed away on August 1. --Kent R. Hill

Dissent Among the Presbyterians: Who Defines the "Presbyterian Position?"

The rules of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) draw a clear distinction: the denomination's General Assembly speaks to, not for, church members. Many members, however, fear that in practice that distinction has vanished. As PCUSA staffers deliver pronouncements on all manner of political issues, they often claim to speak on the basis of General Assembly resolutions, which they interpret as "the Presbyterian position" on the issues. Those who disagree are made to feel less Presbyterian than the left-leaning activists who control the General Assembly and its agencies.

Recently some discomfited Presbyterians have started to talk back to their General Assembly. A Presbyterian congressman from Nebraska raised some of their concerns in a speech to the General Assembly this June in Minneapolis. Rep. Hal Daub warned that PCUSA political stands were contributing to a steady decline in the denomination's membership (down another 43,000 in 1985). He asked for more balanced foreign policy guidance, observing that "the General Assembly is quick to point out the human rights violations of the contra forces in Nicaragua, but does not apply the same criteria to the Sandinista government, nor their ally, the Soviet Union."

Rep. Daub had been invited to address the General Assembly on behalf of 20 Presbyterian congressmen who had written to Stated Clerk James Andrews last August. Their letter expressed the legislators' distress at General Assembly statements on Central America, nuclear deterrence, and human rights. A second letter from the congressmen, to this year's General Assembly, explained: "Because we look to the Church for spiritual direction and moral sustenance, we were disturbed to find ourselves increasingly at odds on issues where we believed our command of the facts regarding the matters being addressed was at least as detailed as that of the Church, but where our conscience had led us to different conclusions." The congressmen were especially dismayed to see PCUSA staffers lobbying as if they "spoke for all Presbyterians on these matters."

Verbal appeals are not the only distress signals within the Presbyterian Church. It has also run into financial straits. In July the church headquarters, citing an income shortfall of \$3.5 million (6.5 percent), announced a freeze on national agency salaries through 1987. This latest austerity measure follows a year of cutbacks in 1985, when revenues of General Assembly agencies fell below 1984 levels.

Some clues to the origin of these financial troubles are found in a fundraising feasibility study done for the PCUSA by a private consultant. The firm of Marts and Lundy concluded that most Presbyterians "wish to support traditional programs which they consider to be clearly the responsibility of the Church," but are not inclined to contribute to "causes which are thought to be in the realm of politics or social issues." Presbyterians, according to the study,

are reluctant to make undesignated gifts to the national church, because they suspect that "the professional administrators of the Church think very differently from the mainstream membership."

How will the denomination respond to these warnings? Inviting Rep. Daub to address this year's General Assembly was a positive step; however, the resolutions it passed indicate that many ears are still deaf to his message. The General Assembly endorsed a laundry list of church Left positions: denunciation of U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras, but no criticism of the Sandinista government; support for the Sanctuary movement; a call for total economic sanctions against South Africa; opposition to the Strategic Defense Initiative.

A key measure of a church's openness is its treatment of groups that do not conform to its predominant institutional ideology. By that measure, the 1986 General Assembly had a mixed record. In an accommodating mood, it granted "Chapter IX" (official caucus) status to Presbyterians for Democracy and Religious Freedom (PDRF), an independent organization of Presbyterians who share many of the IRD's concerns. This decision reverses the denial of Chapter IX status last year, when PDRF was accused of being a sinister "IRD front."

This year the General Assembly visited its wrath upon the Presbyterian Lay Committee, declaring it "not in compliance" with Chapter IX regulations. It condemned the lay renewal group for "journalistic excesses which are injurious to the church and to sisters and brothers in the church." This finding was prompted by a study of the Lay Committee newspaper funded by the Advisory Council of Church and Society (ACCS), an agency frequently criticized in that newspaper. The study enumerated 12 "journalistic excesses," such as a reference to Sanctuary leader John Fife as "chief plumber of the illegal alien pipeline" and a description of an ACCS-sponsored article on peacemaking as "current leftist dogma." The Lay Committee replied by admitting that its language may have been "abrasive, but it is not inaccurate, nor is it guilty of character defamation."

Clearly officials in the ACCS and other Presbyterian bodies are not disposed to tolerate the Lay Committee's hard-hitting style. Whether they will be able to silence the growing chorus of dissent remains to be seen. The recently-published ACCS paper on "Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance?" will produce an excellent test case. The paper suggests that the PCUSA might become a "resistance church," promoting tactics such as refusal to pay taxes, in an attempt to obstruct U.S. "militarism." Will radicals succeed in writing this sectarian stand into church doctrine? Or will the moderate majority of Presbyterians win a reaffirmation of political pluralism, allowing room for a full range of responsible Christian views within the church and within the American democratic process?

—Alan Wisdom

Briefs

The American Lutheran Church (ALC) has called on the Ethiopian government to halt the closing of churches, to reopen churches that have been closed, and to produce information on the Rev. Gudina Tumsa, general secretary of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, a denomination related to the ALC. Mr. Tumsa was arrested in 1979 and has not been heard from since. Meeting in Minneapolis in August, the ALC convention also urged sweeping economic sanctions against South Africa, supported independence for Namibia, opposed U.S. support for the Nicaraguan guerrillas, and called for an end to human rights violations by Iran.

The big news for Lutherans this summer, however, was the approval of the plan to merge three Lutheran bodies into a new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, which will be the nation's fourth largest Protestant denomination. We asked Lutheran pastor and IRD board member Richard John Neuhaus what the merger portends for those who share the IRD's concerns about the U.S. churches. He told us, "It would seem there is a drift toward a lessening of Lutheran distinctiveness in relation to the mainline Protestant church." He cited, for example, a decreased emphasis in the new church structure on theology and spiritual formation and a greater emphasis on social issues. Pastor Neuhaus suggests that one will "cheer or lament" this "sociological and bureaucratic drift," depending upon what one thinks of the liberal, mainline U.S. churches.

A district organizer for the Rhode Island Communist Party was the 1986 recipient of the New England United Methodist Award for Excellence in Social Justice Action. According to the People's Daily World, official newspaper of the Communist Party U.S.A., Margaret Cann received the honor for her lifelong commitment to labor, peace and justice issues, as well as her recent work in developing dialogue between Marxism and Christianity. Upon accepting the award, Cann praised the Methodist bishops' pastoral letter on disarmament; she encouraged all church members to study the document with "love and commitment."

"I'm feeling rather naked right now; few church leaders are standing with me," declared Bishop John Walker, the influential black Episcopal prelate of Washington, DC. Bishop Walker's "nakedness" was caused by his suggestion that U.S. corporations should remain in South Africa and prepare the way for black leadership. In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on July 24, he warned, "In our desire to do something, we have failed to connect actions with outcome. Our agony over the plight of the black people of South Africa has often trapped us in taking actions that may be more pronounced in their symbolism than in their capacity to bring about substantive changes."

Although Walker has called for limited economic sanctions, he is clearly swimming directly against the

church tide and its call for total, comprehensive sanctions. He explained to the senators, "We must seek to...bring the chances of a transition in South Africa to a more realistic level, and also make the cost of such transition more bearable by the existing economic structure so as not to destroy it but to harness its productive energies for the benefit of all."

But as Americans struggle to find a responsible course in South Africa, the authorities there are working to stamp out dissent. The New York Times (Aug. 4) reports that the Rev. Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, the Secretary General of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, has been "tortured during questioning" by South African authorities.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference has released the text of a telegram from Pope John Paul II in which he expressed his concern at "the detention and mistreatment of Reverend Mkhathshwa" and his "fervent hope that the violence and abuse of power will cease and that the respect for personal dignity and legal guarantees will be ensured by all."

An affidavit, filed by Father Mkhathshwa's lawyer, states that he was interrogated and physically abused by an interrogation team from the South African army. In an accompanying affidavit, Sister Cecilia Smit, a Dominican sister and Mkhathshwa's secretary, noted the deterioration of his physical condition. According to Sister Cecilia, "both his feet and hands were swollen" and he "could not remain on his feet without the assistance of a stick." Father Mkhathshwa has appealed to the Pretoria Supreme Court for a restraining order to prevent further abuse by the police force.

According to Archbishop Dennis Hurley, President of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, at least three Roman Catholic priests from various provinces and three nuns from the Transvaal are also being detained under the state of emergency decree.

If you are looking for a concise but comprehensive book on the Sandinista revolution, we recommend Douglas W. Payne's The Democratic Mask: The Consolidation of the Sandinista Revolution (Freedom House, 48 East 21st St., New York, NY 10010, \$5.00). The book offers a chronological account of the first six years of the revolution in Nicaragua. It is a documented history of the Sandinistas' strategy to achieve their Marxist-Leninist goals, a strategy which has emerged from beneath what Payne calls a "carefully manufactured democratic cover."

Many U.S. churches continue their fervent advocacy of the Sanctuary movement. The eight convicted defendants in the recent Tucson Sanctuary trial were denied a kind of martyrdom when the judge suspended their sentences in July; nevertheless, religious activists pledged renewed vigor to their cause. The United Methodist Church, for example, is

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ever it is found." He goes so far as to acknowledge "reported breeches (sic) of discipline, with tragic results, by members of the NPA." Nevertheless, he assures us, "Reliable reports say, however, that the NPA has been singleminded in its goal of winning the respect and loyalty of the people."

Such a benign view of the NPA has been solidly refuted by Time correspondent Ross H. Munro in his exhaustive study of the brutal policies of the CPP and NPA (Commentary, Dec 1986). His conclusion: "Most chilling of all is the rapidly mounting evidence of the NPA's reign of terror, rivaling the Khmer Rouge in savagery, if not yet in scale."

Why has NPA brutality been so largely ignored, Munro asks. An important reason is the silence of organizations which claim to be committed to human rights, the most prominent of which is Task Force Detainees (TFD). "In an almost incredible feat of public relations," he explains, "the openly pro-communist TFD has become recognized as the leading defender of human rights in the Philippines." Munro claims that hundreds of thousands of dollars from church sources abroad have flowed into communist-controlled organizations and projects in the Philippines.

Such allegations of massive church funding are entirely plausible. One of the speakers at the April meeting of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, for example, was Sister Margot Lloren, a Catholic nun who coordinates Task Force Detainees programs. Later, the Methodist mission board nominated Task Force Detainees for the 1986 Nobel Peace Prize.

The NCC occasional paper further assures us that the New Peoples Army receives no arms from the Soviet Union. But in fact the Philippine communists repudiated Peking in 1981, and opened ties to Moscow — according to John Whitehall, writing in the March 5, 1986, NewsWeekly. Whitehall met last February with a senior CPP official who claimed that negotiations were being conducted with the Soviets about accepting Moscow's offer of arms. Already, he said, a pilot group of six Philippine communists has been sent to Vietnam for training.

Of course, it is not just U.S. church leaders on the Left who misunderstand the Philippines. Jerry



Manila archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, left, presents a statue to Jose Concepcion, head of the Philippine election watchdog group NAMFREL (RNS photo).

Falwell apparently fails to realize that being anti-communist does not necessarily guarantee that one is pro-democracy. He astounded thoughtful observers last fall when he called the Philippines under Marcos a "free" country deserving the United States' "unswerving" support. The IRD responded promptly with a statement saying, "What the Marcos government deserves is unremitting U.S. pressure toward substantial democratic reform. Mr. Falwell needs to realize that such reform would provide the best defense against radical insurgencies."

The radical Left in the Philippines, after having suffered a setback after the election of Corazon Aquino, is now clearly regrouping and pressing its efforts to polarize that society. There is no question that President Aquino and the Filipino people still face massive economic and social problems — many the legacy of the Marcos' years. The question now is: will our U.S. churches be a force for genuine good in the Philippines? If our churches' concern is for democracy, the recent election in the Philippines and the duly elected leader will be respected. If our churches are more concerned with a Marxist economic model and weakened U.S.-Philippines ties, the flirtation with groups linked to the NPA and CPP will undoubtedly continue.

—Diane Knippers

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offering "mobile teams," which have been trained to conduct Sanctuary workshops for local congregations.

Unfortunately, this religious activism has not been accompanied by balanced discussion of this issue. To help correct this problem the IRD last year sponsored a symposium on the Sanctuary movement. Sanctuary: Challenge to the Churches, edited by Maria Thomas, is the newly published transcript of the symposium.

What is the primary motivation behind the Sanctuary movement? Does the movement, as some claim, provide asylum for legitimate refugees, or is

it, as others aver, selectively harboring illegal aliens? Is Sanctuary a public relations tool of a certain political ideology? These are a few of the issues raised at the symposium, which included both the proponents of the Sanctuary movement and its critics.

Conference participants explored the conflicting use of statistics, the allegations of improper procedures, and the political goals and theological motivations on all sides of the Sanctuary debate. In 89 pages, Sanctuary offers a concise overview of the theological, moral, and political issues in dispute. It provides an opportunity for the reader to consider all sides of the debate (available from the IRD at \$5.00 each).

Religious Liberty Alert

In his statement on Human Rights Day last December the President declared: "One of the more tragic cases today is that of the Baha'is....The government of Iran is engaged in rampant religious persecutions, especially against the Baha'is. Since 1979, 198 Baha'is have been put to death, 767 are imprisoned, some 10,000 made homeless, and over 25,000 forced to flee their country. Only the continued world outcry can help bring an end to their suffering."

The Baha'is also are one of the most brutally repressed people on earth. The Baha'i religion was founded in Iran in the 1840's. It is a breakaway movement from Islam which "celebrates" the unity of great religions, racial and sexual equality, and universal education. It has 300,000 members and is the largest non-Muslim minority in Iran. Baha'is are particularly repugnant to the Islamic government of Ayatollah Khomeini because, according to the Ayatollah's interpretation, Muhammed was the "seal of the prophets," i.e., the final prophet, and therefore no valid religion can arise after Islam.

Although their doctrine forbids them to engage in politics, the Baha'is are accused by the Iranian government of being a political party, not a religious movement. They are considered tools of the U.S., Israel, Satan and the Shah. Since the revolution in 1979, Baha'i property has been confiscated, busi-

nesses disbanded or confiscated, shrines demolished and all public sector employment denied. Tens of thousands have been dismissed from government jobs. Many have been forced to repay all salaries earned in government service, or pensions paid out since retirement.

In 1983 the Iranian Prosecutor General issued an order that bans all Baha'i religious activity and provides the legal foundation on which all members of the faith can be charged with crimes simply on account of their religious convictions. Teaching of the faith, even by parents to children in the home, is not permitted. Participation in social welfare organizations is forbidden and the businesses of many Bahai's outlawed. All Baha'is have been expelled from universities, as well as many from high schools and grade schools. This denial of education seriously threatens the future survival of the community.

Although the repression of the Baha'is continues, the Iranian government has shown some sensitivity to public criticism of its treatment of the Baha'is: the number of executions declined somewhat in 1985.

What you can do to keep up the pressure on the Iranian Government: write to your senator and representative, to the President, and to the new U.N. special rapporteur on religious intolerance, Mr. Angelo Vidal d'Almeida Ribeiro, c/o Embassy of Portugal, 2125 Kalorama Road, Washington, DC, 20008.
-- Maria Thomas

A Call to Prayer for Nicaragua

Nicaraguan churches, grieved by the civil war that racks their country and strained in their relations with the Sandinista government, are seeking this fall to renew their own spiritual resources. In November, Catholics in Nicaragua will celebrate a Eucharistic Congress, intended to revive their sense of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Catholic bishops linked the congress to their earlier pleas for national reconciliation: "The reconciliation of Nicaraguans...needs to be derived from the only source that can bring it about, which is the Heart of Christ." The Eucharistic Congress will culminate in a mass on November 23, at which Nicaraguan Catholics, joined by Catholic bishops from other countries, will show their solidarity with the Nicaraguan bishops. Meanwhile, Protestants in Nicaragua will hold a Day of Prayer on Sunday, October 26. The National Council of Evangelical Pastors (CNPEN) has asked congregations to intercede for Nicaragua: that its people hear the Gospel, that its churches be strengthened, and that the land know peace. These dates, October 26 and November 23, might also provide occasions for U.S. Protestants and Catholics to unite in prayer with their fellow believers in Nicaragua.

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