

# Cardinal Assails Reagan Policy

Chicago (NC) -- Commemorating the third anniversary of the murders of four American missionaries in El Salvador, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin attacked the Reagan administration's policies in Central America.

Maryknoll Sisters Maura Clark and Ita Ford, Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel and lay missionary Jean Donovan were slain Dec. 2, 1980 in San Salvador.

Five former members of the Salvadoran National Guard have been held in connection with the murders but their trials have been delayed several times.

In articulating the position of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on Central American policy, the cardinal said, "We have been convinced that a military solution is not the answer to the problem of Central America; such a solution will not end the violence; it will not restore order and peace."

He added that the bishops have argued the highest priority in the region should be given to the roots of the conflict "which are essentially local in nature. These include longstanding patterns of injustice, gross human rights violations and the wanton taking of human life by death squads.

"The resolution of these problems is to be found in drastic internal changes, not an ever escalating military situation," he said.

It is for these reasons, the cardinal said, that he "profoundly regrets" President Reagan's recent veto of legislation which would require continuing assessment of human rights as a requirement for U.S. aid to El Salvador.

"Such an action can only send the wrong message about the purpose and meaning of our policy," he said. "Indeed the significance of the human rights question as the cause of the overall crisis seems to be less understood by our government today than ever before....

"To ignore the long struggle of a people for justice, dignity and freedom is to completely misunderstand the nature of the conflict," Cardinal Bernardin said.

The cardinal noted that when Pope John Paul II visited Central America earlier in 1983 he called for peace, dialogue and reconciliation, making it clear that this would be accomplished only if the human rights of the people are defended and if the steps needed to ensure social and economic justice are taken.

Cardinal Bernardin acknowledged that the women's deaths and the slaying of Archbishop Oscar Romero as he celebrated Mass in San Salvador served to focus the attention of the U.S. church on Central America.

"As a church," he said, "we must continue to raise our voices on behalf of the people of Central America. This is a proper role for us as a community of believers and it is a necessary role if we are to be instrumental in stopping the killing and promoting reconciliation and peace."



In La Libertad, El Salvador, Father Douglas Roesel of Cleveland blesses a handicapped person at a memorial service for four American missionaries murdered in El Salvador three years ago. The women had worked with poor refugees and the handicapped. (NC Photo)

In letters to Cardinal Munoz Duque and Colombian President Belisario Betancur the farm workers condemned "the cruel killings committed by fanatics of the Communist Party supplied with arms from Cuba, Nicaragua or Moscow."

More than 840 people have been killed in 1983 in the fighting in central Colombia. In 1982 the government offered guerrillas an amnesty, but the majority of the insurgents rejected it.

Also in November, Bishop Jose Serna of Florencia, a member of the government's Peace Commission, met with another group of farm workers said to support the guerrillas. The meeting was arranged by Father Gonzalo Lopez, a priest who has been acting as a mediator between warring factions.

Bishop Serna asked the farm workers to support the Peace Commission's efforts to pacify and develop the region.

In other parts of the country, priests also have been playing a mediating role between the government and guerrilla groups.

But in some parts of the nation, church-state relationships have soured over accusations that military officers are involved in killing innocent people in their anti-guerrilla campaigns.

Among the accusers are two priests, Fathers Gabriel Yepes and Jorge Mira. Military spokesman have denied the accusations.

## Women Allowed On Church Courts

BOGOTA, Colombia (NC) -- Women with expertise in canon law can be appointed members of Catholic Church courts in Colombia under new rules adopted by the Colombian Bishops' Conference.

The bishops said permission for women to be on church courts was an effort to give women greater participation in church affairs.

The bishops also raised the minimum age for Catholics to marry to 18. The previous ages had been 16 for males and 14 for females. The new minimum age brings church law into conformity with civil legislation regarding marriage age.

"The aim is that people should embark on matrimony with greater maturity," said Father Guillermo Melguizo, conference secretary.

The decisions were made at a conference meeting in mid-November to update national norms based on the new Code of Canon Law, which went into effect Nov. 27.

The bishops also expressed concern that too many priests are not wearing clerical garb and recommended that priests wear dark clothing and a Roman collar.

## COLOMBIA Guerrilla War Ensnared Church

BOGOTA, Colombia (NC) -- The kidnapping of Jaime Betancur, law dean of the Catholic University of Bogota and brother of the Colombian president, shows one of the many ways in which Catholic church figures have become willing or unwilling participants in Colombia's guerrilla war.

Pope John Paul II was among the people pleading for the release of Betancur, who was kidnapped Nov. 22 by guerrillas as a way of pressuring the government to free political prisoners and raise wages.

Kidnapping has become a common practice among guerrillas. In October police said 82 people were being held captive by kidnapers and described 53 of the people as victims of politically motivated groups. In the first nine months of 1983, 20 kidnapers were shot dead by security forces.

Prior to the Betancur kidnapping, church people were already deeply involved in the guerrilla conflicts which have been going on for 20 years in this South American country, where 95 percent of the 27 million people profess Catholicism.

While some farm workers in November were asking one church leader to help protect them from guerrillas, another leader was meeting with farm workers considered sympathetic to guerrillas. While one bishop is on the government-appointed Peace Commission trying to negotiate a settlement to the fighting, several other church people have been accused by military officers of having ties with the guerrillas.

Currently, there are six guerrilla groups in Colombia with a total membership of about 10,000. The group that kidnapped the 53-year-old Betancur is the National Liberation Army, which regards Cuban President Fidel Castro as its ideological leader.

In November farm workers from central Colombia occupied a church and sent a letter to Cardinal Anibal Munoz Duque of Bogota to dramatize their call for firmer action against a communist guerrilla group in their area.

The farm workers say members of the pro-Soviet Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia killed at least seven people in November in central Colombia, where fighting between guerrillas and soldiers has been heavy.

In the wake of the killings, relatives and friends of the victims occupied the Catholic church in the town of Puerto Boyaca and sent a delegation to Bogota to meet with government and church leaders.

## NICARAGUA Controversial Priest Won't Leave Post

United Nations (NC) -- A controversial Nicaraguan priest, who was once publicly admonished by Pope John Paul II for holding a government post, said Nov. 30 that he plans to remain in the government.

The priest, Father Ernesto Cardenal, said he would rather write poetry than be the minister of culture in the Sandinista government.

But the government had asked him to stay on the job and, since "everyone obeys his conscience," he will remain, said Father Cardenal, who has published several collections of poems.

The 58-year-old priest spoke at a press conference at U.N. headquarters after arriving in the United States for a speaking tour.

When Pope John Paul visited Nicaragua last March, he vigorously shook his finger at Father Cardenal when he saw him in the airport reception line.

At the U.N. press conference Father Cardenal said the pope told him to straighten out his affairs with the church and he understood this to mean that he and several other priests in the Nicaraguan government should be either priests or government officials, but not both.

"But this is only an interpretation. The pope did not specify what he meant. And the Vatican has never followed up on the incident," he added.

Several priests hold posts in the Marxist-influenced Nicaraguan government under an agreement with the Nicaraguan bishops by which they cannot publicly exercise their priestly ministry while in public office.

Father Cardenal said the Vatican had agreed to this and "no order to the contrary" had been brought to his attention.

Regarding overall support for the Sandinistas, he said "a great number of priests are in the revolution."

When asked about the strong criticisms of the government made by Archbishop Miguel Obando Bravo of Managua, Nicaragua, he said that "the archbishop is not the church."

"The pope, the cardinals, the archbishop, the priests and the faithful are the church. We all are the church," he added.