

## Former Sandinista

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because they are blind to anything else." Belli noted that it is easy for Americans to speak glowingly of conditions in Nicaragua because they will not have to live with the consequences. "I wish all the ones who go to Nicaragua and say it's great would stay there and never leave," he said.

Belli conceded, however, that the Sandinistas might have good intentions. But he said, "I think Stalin might have had good intentions of establishing a new world justice. Anyone who opposes the Sandinistas is the enemy and should be crushed. That's the danger with totalitarianistic ideologies. They are so messianic. Hitler probably wanted a wonderful Germany, too, but he was a fanatic."

A onetime editorial writer for Nicaragua's opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, Belli holds a law degree from the University of Madrid and a master's degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania. He had become involved with the Sandinistas in 1966 and was acquainted with several of the men who assumed power after the Sandinistas took control of the liberal coalition that overthrew Anastasio Somoza.

For 10 years, Belli sympathized with and aided the efforts of the Sandinistas. After a "personal encounter with Jesus Christ" in 1975, he lost faith in the communist ideology of the party. "Now I see things differently. The presence of Jesus Christ has convinced me that Marxism is not the answer — that you can't just change the economic structure, you have to change people's hearts," he said.

But this is not the case, he said, and events in Nicaragua cannot properly be understood unless people realize that the Sandinistas have an "ideological script or hidden agenda" that is not in keeping with the democratic principles they often claim.

"Who are the Sandinistas?" he asked the audience. "The implicit interpretation that is so widespread is that the Sandinistas are people who have basic democratic ideals," he said, adding that many believe the Sandinistas will follow a policy of non-alignment if they are not pressured by the United States.

Belli's primary topic in the lecture was

what he termed the Sandinistas' subtle repression of the Church in Nicaragua. Eighty percent of the Nicaraguan populace is Roman Catholic, he noted, and the remaining 20 percent is divided among various Protestant denominations. He said that the Sandinistas are moving slowly toward their goal of eliminating religion because they have a shrewd understanding of their country.

"The Sandinistas knew that Nicaragua was one of the very religious countries," he said. "It was their strategy not to antagonize the Church too soon after the revolution. They could not openly disclose their Marxist-Leninist nature because they would alienate their supporters."

Belli noted that when asked if he is a communist, Sandinista President Daniel Ortega answered, "I am a Sandinista." That, Belli noted, was not a denial of Ortega's communist leanings, because communism is an inherent principle of Sandinism. "You cannot be a Sandinista without being a Marxist-Leninist."

Similarly, Belli said, Ortega claims to support religious freedom and points to four priests in the Sandinista government as proof. Belli claims, however, that the priests do not demonstrate Sandinista religious freedom, but instead indicate the creation of a new state religion.

Rather than challenging religion directly, the Sandinistas have set about to change the signs and beliefs of Christianity to correspond with communism, Belli said, citing an official Sandinista document he secretly obtained. The document, issued shortly before the first Christmas following the revolution of 1979, urged regional party officials not to discourage celebration of the religious holiday but to use the event to reorient children to a new meaning of Christmas, one that was fundamentally political.

The document advised that it would be foolish only five months after the revolution to challenge a tradition nearly 2,000 years old. Instead, the government printed thousands of posters showing the Christ child surrounded by armed militia men,

depicting the "Birth of the new man of the revolution," Belli said.

The Sandinistas' attempt to convert Christianity to a Marxist-Leninist state religion is aided, he claimed, by the efforts of a group of "minority Christians" who espouse liberation theology, an interpretation of the gospels which is currently popular in Latin America. This theology praises Marxist revolution as the way to liberate people and to create a new world justice.

The Sandinistas, Belli said, have embraced the liberation theologians, giving them access to the government-controlled media and funds for Cursillo activities and retreats.

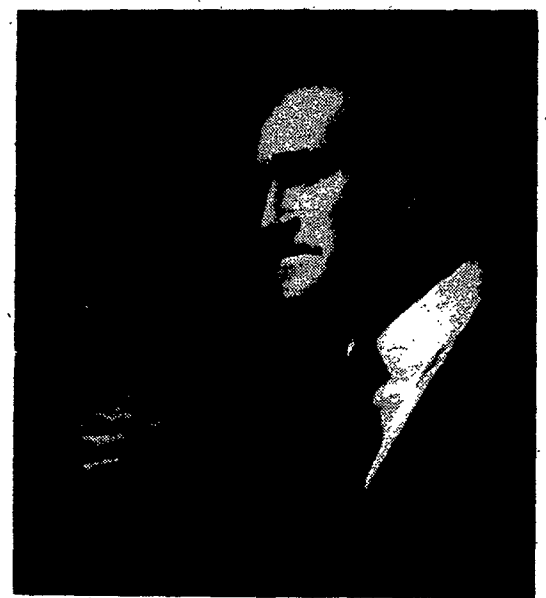
These liberation theologians teach that in order to be a true Christian, you must be a Sandinista, Belli claimed. He showed slides taken from his book to illustrate the ways in which he believes Christianity is being manipulated to promote support of the Sandinista government. In one example, a pamphlet Belli said was published by a pro-Marxist Jesuit organization, the figure of Christ crucified is superimposed on a larger drawing of an armed guerilla fighter. In another, a drawing of a cross is combined with a hammer and sickle.

Thus, the pro-Sandinista clergy teach that the path to "salvation is not fighting against sin for holiness, but fighting against the system," Belli said. The Sandinista Party has become the new messiah, he asserts. The kingdoms of God and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas are treated as synonymous.

According to Belli, Father Ernesto Cardenal, Sandinista minister of culture, furthers this idea with the statement: "You cannot encounter man and you cannot encounter God unless you embrace Marx." The belief that Christ came to liberate humanity is taken literally — a liberation from worldly chains, not the chains of sin, Belli said. He explained that the message of Sandinista Christianity is that if Christ were to be reincarnated in Nicaragua today He would be a guerilla fighter, and Ronald Reagan would be Pontius Pilate.

"Instead of denying Jesus Christ, the new strategy is to change Him, to change what He means, which is a subtle way of denying Him," Belli said.

The Sandinistas also claim that there are two churches in Nicaragua: the "church of the poor," which supports the government, and the "church of the rich," which opposes it. Ironically, Belli explains, the poor of Nicaragua hold to the so-called church of the



Humberto Belli

rich, while the intellectual and economic elite support the "church of the poor." Belli noted that both Father Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto, Sandinista minister of foreign affairs, come from Nicaragua's upper class. Liberation theology is supported, he said, by the "theological jet set."

Belli explained that the Sandinista government has gone to great lengths to discredit or silence churchmen — including Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo — who oppose their policies, and in one instance, confiscated the printing press of one parish so that it could not publish a parish bulletin.

Belli urged the audience to "work inside your churches so that people become aware of the other side of what is going on in Nicaragua." He cited in particular the merit of writing to the editors of newspapers.

Belli conceded, however, that there is little hope of constraining the Sandinistas, short of another revolution. And despite all the evidence he presented to demonstrate Sandinista repression, he said he was not sure that life would be any better for Nicaraguans if the U.S.-supported contra forces were to gain control. The result of a contra takeover, he acknowledged, might well be a right-wing totalitarian regime even more repressive than that of the Sandinistas.

## Witness

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strain the civil war places on Nicaraguans as he watched the man with whom he was staying come home from working all day, change into a military uniform and go out all night on guard duty.

To Kimberly Murman, the message came in the words of a Catholic priest. He told her that under the Somoza regime, which the U.S. validated as non-communist, the people had no food, no education, no health care, no freedom whatsoever. Now, under the Sandinistas, he pointed out, the people have all those things, but not the acceptance of the U.S. "What are we to do?" he asked her. "If this is communism, must we not bless it?"

She added that despite all her preparation for the trip, the one thing she was not prepared for was the depth of spiritual and emotional suffering of the people. "All they want to do is to raise their crops, bring up their children, live their lives and see their country take its rightful place in the world ... They can't understand why another country would want to interfere with that."

Harris also brought back an unspoken message, one he had seen in the faces of a family twice burned out of their home and living in a refugee camp. He described them as "numbed and driven in a way that words

can't describe."

Murphy's mind. In the town of Yali, he stayed with a family of seven children and

As the group's photographer, Harris also remarked that the U.S. embassy, which the group visited in Nicaragua, was the only place on his journey where he was forbidden to use a tape recorder or take pictures.

Another silent message remains in Terry their mother. Their husband and father had been killed. One night, as Murphy watched, the woman said good night to her 14-year-old son at the door. He was on his way out to patrol dressed in his army uniform.

"It was very touching to see this mother saying 'Goodbye, be careful, I love you' knowing that he might be killed or seriously injured," Murphy said.

For Kevin Meyer, the silent message was a beautiful little girl in an orphanage. Her mind had been scarred when her parents were both killed as she watched, hiding in a ditch.

Helen Krog spoke for herself and her husband Norman, when she said the trip was "the most meaningful experience we have had in all of our lives."

They stayed with a 61-year-old woman who has learned to read since the revolution. The woman told them, "Before I could read and write, I hardly knew who I was. I couldn't even recognize my name."

The delegation's oldest member,

71-year-old June Botsford, received applause from the crowd after she spoke.

"We in this country pride ourselves on the strength of our family relationships," she said. "Yet it doesn't seem to bother us that through our support and financing of the contras, we are destroying Nicaraguan families."

Botsford said when she thinks of the suffering of families, both in Nicaragua and in the U.S., she thinks of a Spanish word familiar to Sanctuary workers — "bastante" or "enough."

"I've had enough of this suffering from both countries," she said.

Sister Christine Wagner, who helped organize the Witness for Peace community forum in honor of National Peace with Justice week, announced the beginning of a "Hunger for Peace" fast, from Friday, Oct. 25 to January 1, 1986. Inspired by Father Miguel D'Escoto, the fast calls for one or more persons to sign up each day so a continuous fast is observed. For more information, call Sister Christine at (716) 546-4894.

## PRO LIFE AUDIO TAPES

### New York Right-To-Life Convention-85'

- #1 Bishop Clark — Challenge of Christianity to Abortion
- #2 Sen. J. Donovan — Gov. Cuomo's Taxes — Killing the unborn
- #3 Fr. William Smith — Death & Dying — Granny Doe
- #4 Cong. F.J. Sensenbrenner — Where Do We Go From Here
- #5 Rosemary Bottcher — Pro Life Feminism
- #6 Kathy DiFiore — Help for pregnant unwed women
- #7 Lorijo Nerats — Helping Women who have had abortions
- #8 Richard Glasow — Planned Parenthood's Pro Abortion Crusade

Each 60 minute tape: \$5.00 ea. includes postage  
 4 Tapes: \$17.00 includes postage  
 6 Tapes: \$24.00 includes postage  
 All 8 Tapes: \$30.00 includes postage

Please specify tape #(s) requested or complete set of 8. Make check or money order payable to Rochester Area Right to Life Committee, Inc. and send to:

Rochester Area Right to Life Committee, Inc.  
 3910 Dewey Avenue, Rochester, New York 14616

For Additional information, call:  
 (716) 621-4690

## FEATURED HOMES OF THE WEEK



**EAST SIDE NEW HOMES**  
 Prices starting at \$105,000 and up. Beautiful new subdivision in Penfield by Fedyk Builders many exciting designs or use your own plans.



**WEST SIDE INVESTMENT**  
 Super just listed Boston in 19th Ward. Close to Genesee Park Boulevard. On bus line, great location for University. Priced in low 70's to move fast.



Jean Herrera

**Century 21**  
**HOME SPIRIT**



Robert Malone

**EAST** 1945 East Ridge Rd. 467-3121  
**WEST** 2709 Chili Ave. 247-7700