

Nicaraguan Jesuit foresees thaw in relations between Church, state

By Greg Erlandson

Washington (NC) — Recent actions by the Nicaraguan bishops and the Holy See suggest the Church is beginning to accept the legitimacy of the Sandinista government, according to Jesuit Father Juan Hernandez Pico, who works in the Nicaraguan capital of Managua.

The bishops' commentary on a draft of Nicaragua's proposed constitution, a recent pastoral letter that criticized all foreign

military aid in the region, and Pope John Paul II's June 19 meeting with the vice president of Nicaragua are signs of a change in the Church's attitude, he said.

However, the government's return of a confiscated church building while stripping it of its contents, including a church printing press, is only "half a gesture," Father Pico said during a June 23 interview in Washington with National Catholic News Service.

Father Pico is director of the Jesuit-run Center for Investigation and Social Research in Managua.

The Nicaraguan bishops' commentary on the proposed constitution, released June 9, criticized sections on the family, freedom of conscience and education, but "the most important thing is that the bishops wrote a comment," Father Pico said.

The bishops had avoided giving any input to the constitutional commission while it was writing the first draft, even though the bishops had been invited to do so, he added.

Father Pico said the response to the constitution must be seen in the context of an April pastoral letter on the Eucharist which included the bishops' first explicit disapproval of all outside military aid.

"It seems to me that a majority is emerging in the bishops' conference (that feels) that the government of Nicaragua is legitimate, has the support of the majority of the population and must be dealt with," he said.

The bishops' commentary on the first draft of Nicaragua's proposed constitution specifically cited a statement that people have a right to build a family "through marriage or cohabitation." Although it is sanctioned by Church teaching, cohabitation is "very common in Latin America," Father Pico said.

The bishops also criticized the constitution's call for scientific education because they see that phrase as a code word for Marxist education, he said.

In open forums held to discuss the first draft, that particular phrase was also criticized by Christians who support the government, Father Pico said. They suggested the

phrase be changed to "education based on the sciences."

The priest said the pope's reception of Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramirez was also noteworthy in that it wasn't expected. It was the pope's first meeting with a Nicaraguan official since his visit to Nicaragua in 1983.

The June 19 return of the offices of the church social agency Coprosa, occupied for eight months by the government, was a gesture to the Vatican, Father Pico said. Formerly used by the papal nuncio, Coprosa's building still belongs to the Vatican.

However, the government confiscated an estimated \$500,000 worth of items in the building, according to an archdiocesan spokesman. Father Pico called the government's action "half a gesture, certainly." According to news reports, a Nicaraguan spokesman said the confiscated materials could be regained in court.

In discussing the strength of rebel forces seeking the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government, Father Pico cited a statement by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega that the contras are being defeated. However, "the situation is not that good as yet," the priest said. "I don't think we are about to see a lifting of the emergency state as of yet."

Although the state of emergency instituted last Oct. 15 sets limits on freedom of speech and other rights, Father Pico said the restrictions have not stifled the opposition. Many comments in the open forums have been critical of the government, he noted, particularly for its military draft and for the confiscation of church property.

Official urges talks in Nicaragua, El Salvador

By Jeff Endrst

United Nations (NC) — Latin American bishops continue to support a dialogue between opposing forces in Nicaragua and El Salvador, according to the head of the Latin American bishops' council.

Bishop Dario Castrillon Hoyos of Pereira, Colombia, said the bishops also oppose foreign intervention in Central America.

Bishop Castrillon, secretary general of the Latin American bishops' council, relayed the bishops' message to President Reagan on June 18 and again June 19 to Javier Perez de Cuellar, secretary general of the United Nations.

Bishop Castrillon declined to provide details of his meetings with Reagan or Perez de Cuellar, but told reporters June 19 that the Latin American bishops are "very worried about the social and political situation in the subcontinent." He expressed particular concern about "critical developments" in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

"There is now fear of imminent war" in Central America, he said.

In Nicaragua and El Salvador, the people suffer from "political division, hatred, ideological confrontation and violence." The Catholic Church in both countries takes a "position of neutrality," Bishop Castrillon said. Although "very different psychological

situations" exist in the two countries, in both cases the Church sees its role as facilitating dialogue between governments and their oppositions.

The bishops support dialogue between government and opposition forces "as a way of reconciliation and lasting peace," he said.

The government of Nicaragua has refused to negotiate with U.S.-backed rebel forces seeking its overthrow.

In El Salvador, President Jose Napoleon Duarte held two meetings with rebel forces. Both were mediated by San Salvador Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas. Talks broke down when rebels kidnapped Duarte's daughter.

Bishop Castrillon also praised the Contadora peace process "as very important for peace in Central America." The Contadora process involves the efforts of several Central and South American countries to find a diplomatic solution to conflicts in Central America.

Bishop Castrillon criticized all "foreign elements" in the region. Foreign contingents already in place should leave, and no new ones should be injected into the conflicts, he said. The bishop said this was "the only way to avoid a repetition of failure of similar foreign interventions in the past."

Group calls contra aid 'blood money'

"Blood money" was the currency NICA (Non-Intervention in Central America) members used last week to describe the effect it believes \$100 million in U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras will produce.

About 50 NICA members and supporters marched Thursday, June 26, from Washington Square Park to the Liberty Pole at noon, carrying signs and a coffin marked "Nicaragua." Along the way, they handed onlookers fake dollar bills splashed with red paint.

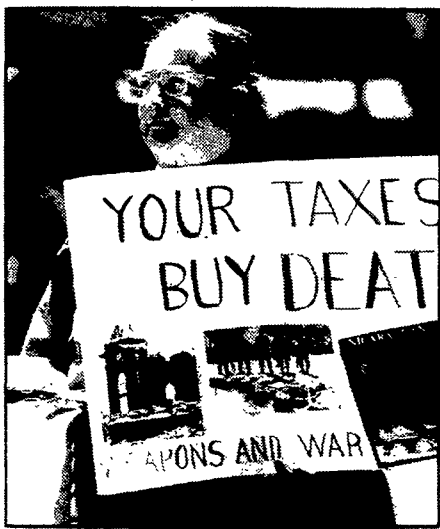
They were protesting the U.S. House of Representatives' vote Wednesday evening, June 25, to approve \$30 million in non-lethal and \$70 million in military aid to the contras. On Wednesday, the House also rejected the Barnes amendment, which proposed further investigation of charges of corruption among the contras and misuse of past U.S. aid.

Few demonstrators were surprised by the vote, but most were disappointed and disheartened. "It's a cowardly act," said Ron Linville, a NICA spokesman.

"We're out here because of what not doing this would mean — that we're approving it. While we're spending money to blow up homes in Nicaragua, there are homeless people here."

"Our Congresspeople have to be held responsible for their votes," he added.

Another demonstrator, 11-year-old Aaron Schmittman was "pretty mad" when he heard about the vote. "I think they should let the people of America



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal
Susan Jordan distributes "blood money" to passers-by during a rally held June 26 in downtown Rochester by Non-Intervention in Central America (NICA).

vote. Most people don't want contra aid ... but representatives don't listen to people anymore.

"We learned about Nicaragua in Spanish class. The contras are trying to make their own government, but a lot of people are getting killed in the process," he explained. "One hundred million dollars can make a lot of weapons that can kill a lot of people ... It's for the Nicaraguans to decide, not for us to decide."

Colombian guerillas want meeting with pope

By Sister Mary Ann Walsh

Vatican City (NC) — A major Colombian guerrilla group, M-19, sent a letter to Pope John Paul II in late June which reportedly asked for a meeting with the pontiff during his July 1-7 trip to Colombia.

The letter was delivered to the Vatican just days before the pope was to begin the visit, according to Italian press reports.

Vatican press spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said it was unlikely that the pope would change his schedule to meet with the guerrillas.

Italian press reports said the letter, delivered by M-19's foreign representative Eder Bustamante, promised the pope that there would be no increase in the organization's guerrilla activity during the visit. The letter also asked the pope for a meeting in Colombia and asked him to mediate between the guerrillas and the government, according to the reports.

Navarro-Valls said, "We should remember that the pope is open to meet with anybody, unless those people have a gun in their hand."

In an interview with the Italian news agency ANSA, Bustamante said the letter underlined the guerrillas' "wish for peace and the decision...to unilaterally suspend all

armed activity during the visit."

"We have asked for a meeting to present him with our proposals for a political solution of the conflict that overwhelms our country," Bustamante said.

"We have asked him to bless the Colombian people, the soldiers and the guerrillas who have fallen in the conflict and also us in the M-19, because we also are children of God."

M-19 is one of several guerrilla groups operating in the South American nation. Last November, a unit occupied the Palace of Justice in Bogota, the nation's capital, for 28 hours. Its siege ended when government troops stormed the palace. The ensuing battle left about 100 people dead, including 12 of the nation's 24 supreme court justices.

A Colombian priest living in Rome said M-19 originally began by proposing social reforms similar to those sought by papal encyclicals. He said, however, "as they have evolved, they have become dominated by Marxism." The group has lost its original leaders, he added.

Last year, the pope commended the Colombian bishops for "valiantly denouncing the violent activities" and expressed concern for "the macabre increase in all forms of urban and rural terrorism."

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