

# Nicaragua reeling from troubles

By Mike Tangeman  
Catholic News Service

CUAUTITLAN, Mexico (CNS) — Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo said President Violeta Chamorro, less than a year in office, faces an economy in "very bad" shape and a "red-hot" political scene that could lead to civil war.

So delicate is the situation that Cardinal Obando Bravo cautioned that a new rebellion could be in the making if the Chamorro government does not deal with the problems "with much maturity and thought."

Speaking at a Nov. 15 press conference during the semi-annual assembly of the Mexican bishops' conference — which he addressed on the topic of Central American refugees and emigration — the cardinal said that Nicaragua's "economic situation is very bad." He said currency devaluations and rampant inflation are "hitting poor people harder and harder."

Cardinal Obando Bravo, who has served as archbishop of Managua for the past 20

years and is Central America's only cardinal, also said the country's current political situation is "red-hot." A breakdown in dialogue between Chamorro's government and former anti-Sandinista contra rebels has led to the takeovers of three churches and the blocking of major roads in recent weeks.

"The Nicaraguan bishops' conference has said that these matters should be treated with much maturity and thought because if we are not careful I believe we could unleash a civil war," Cardinal Obando Bravo said. "And once violence starts it is very difficult to stop."

On Nov. 4, about a dozen ex-contras peaceably occupied Managua's main Catholic church and began a hunger strike to protest what they called Chamorro's failure to grant the ex-rebels farmlands and other benefits agreed to in exchange for their laying down their weapons.

Cardinal Obando Bravo said that in addition to the takeover of Las Sierritas church — where he usually delivers his Sunday

homily — the former rebels have now peaceably occupied the El Calvario church in Managua and the church of San Geronimo in the provincial capital of Masaya. They have also blocked main roads in protest, he said.

"At first, these people said that they wanted the government to comply with its promise to give (them) farmlands and to disarm civilians and the army," the cardinal said. "But since it has become more complex and they are making more demands."

He said that among those occupying the Las Sierritas church are peasant farmers, many of whom are now very weak from the hunger fast.

Cardinal Obando Bravo said that negotiations between "Dona Violeta," the nickname Nicaraguans have given Chamorro, and those who were occupying a road leading to Managua had broken down as he left the capital Nov. 12.

"The night before I left, the president came to my office to visit me and let me know that the situation was very delicate," he said.

"She herself promised to give lands to all those who laid down their arms but I don't think that all the land that these people need has been granted," he said.

The cardinal said that part of the problem was that the Chamorro government offered the ex-contras farmland that "was already occupied by the ... Sandinistas." The consequent land disputes have become bloody, he said.

Beyond the immediate political clashes, Cardinal Obando Bravo also said that the country's economy is in bad shape. It has been undermined by a series of currency devaluations and hikes in the price of food and other necessities, he said.

"Those who have more resources have ways of defending themselves, but the truly poor are suffering," he said.

The entire problem is "not just due to the war between the Sandinista government and the so-called contras," he said. In dealing with the country's problems, the cardinal said, Chamorro has shown "good will but she has been confronted with a series of problems that are very difficult to



AP/Wide World Photos  
**Masked youths signal from a belltower after taking over the Church of San Jeronimo in Masaya, Nicaragua, Nov. 13. The group was showing solidarity with former contra rebels who have demanded land from the Chamorro government.**



AP/Wide World Photos  
**TEARS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST — An unidentified person touches the icon of St. Irene in the St. Irene Chrysovalantou Cathedral in New York, Nov. 15. St. Irene, patron saint of peace, reportedly began shedding tears last month after a special prayer service for peace in the Middle East.**

resolve."

He also said that it was understandable that the Bush administration had given Chamorro only part of the foreign aid it had promised, given that stability is usually considered a prerequisite for both private investment and government aid.

"And in Nicaragua there is still not a climate completely conducive to tranquility," he said.

Further hardship for Nicaraguans, he said, could result in a democratic return to power for the still powerful Sandinista party when Chamorro's term in office ends.

"If Dona Violeta is unable to resolve the problems ... above all the economic problem," Cardinal Obando Bravo said, "then that party could probably take power again in six years time."

## Exhumed skeleton identified as remains of Toussaint

By Tracy Early  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK (CNS) — New York Cardinal John J. O'Connor announced Nov. 17 that a skeleton exhumed from the cemetery of Old St. Patrick's Church has been positively identified as that of Pierre Toussaint, who could be the first black U.S. saint.

All bones of the skeleton, exhumed Nov. 12, were found, he said. "Not a single one was missing."

Born a slave in Haiti in 1766, Toussaint became a resident of New York when he was brought to the city by his owner in 1787.

Toussaint was allowed to keep some of the money he made as a hairdresser, bought his freedom and secretly supported the family of his master, who died on a return visit to Haiti.

By the time of Toussaint's death in 1853, he was known for his works of charity and his devotion to the Eucharist.

Cardinal O'Connor formally launched Toussaint's cause for canonization last December, and ceremonially initiated the search for his remains Nov. 1, All Saints Day. Exhumation is required by the Vatican Congregation for Sainthood Causes for verification of the remains of a candidate for sainthood.

Digging at the spot historically identified as Toussaint's grave, excavators found three skeletons found to be those of two white males and a white female.

The search then began at a plot marked as that of Toussaint's niece, and a skeleton exhumed was identified as that of an older black male. But positive identification was delayed to allow more detailed examination.

Cardinal O'Connor announced the finding in his keynote address at a one-day archdiocesan conference organized as "a response to racial and ethnic issues."

He described the "meticulous" process of the archeologists, anthropologists and others involved in uncovering the bones and examining them to see whether they matched what was known of Toussaint. "They were digging with toothbrushes toward the end," he said.

As a result, he said, they were able to make a "definitive identification" at 2:30 p.m. the previous afternoon. "This is indeed the skeleton of Pierre Toussaint," he said.

The search for Toussaint's remains, Cardinal O'Connor said, has fascinated many people, and increased awareness of who Toussaint was and of the meaning of canonization.

If Toussaint is canonized, he said, it will be "a wonderful thing" for New York. He said the city was currently suffering from a psychological — not merely economic — depression, and the canonization would "restore some pride to the city."

The cardinal also said canonization would be good for the church and for the black community.

"But it will be a tragedy if we fail to recognize the reason for our interest in Pierre Toussaint," which, he said, came about not merely because Toussaint was black or because he had a dramatic experience as a Haitian slave who secured his freedom, but because of his holiness.

"In Pierre Toussaint, we have an example of a man who didn't care what anybody's status was, what anybody's color was," Cardinal O'Connor said.

Emphasizing again what has been one of the cardinal's most frequent themes, he said the fundamental evil confronting New Yorkers, deeper than such problems as racism and drug abuse, was "contempt for the human person."

Because Toussaint symbolizes concern for the human person, the cardinal said, he would bring the skeleton to St. Patrick's Cathedral, and place it in the crypt where deceased archbishops are buried.

He said later that he expected that to be done within a few days, but added that the skeleton would be brought to the cathedral and interred without fanfare to avoid any public display of devotion not approved by the church prior to canonization.

There are no plans to move Toussaint's wife if her skeleton is identified, he said. The court order allowing exhumation of Toussaint pertained only to him, Cardinal O'Connor said.

## Murders

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tion, classes were canceled for two hours Nov. 15 for an all-campus convocation featuring a talk by Jesuit Father Paul Locatelli, president of Santa Clara University, on "Christian Education and the Option for the Poor."

Jennifer Casolo, the young American arrested in San Salvador 10 days after the Jesuits' deaths and eventually deported, marked the anniversary with talks Nov. 16 in Minneapolis and Cincinnati.

Casolo, who had been charged by the Salvadoran government with aiding guerrillas but was released for lack of evidence, said in an interview for the December issue of *St. Anthony Messenger* magazine that

the murdered Jesuits had known their days were numbered. "I had seen clearly in each one of those men that they didn't expect to live until the end of the war," she said.

She remembered the Jesuits as men "who worked incredible hours" and who were always willing to speak to U.S. delegations for which she served as interpreter and tour guide while she was in El Salvador.

Casolo said the priests would sometimes ask her if their peacemaking efforts were bearing fruit. She quoted them as saying: "Will the American people ever understand that we want to live, that we want to believe in a God of life? Will they ever stop sending us signs of a God of death?"