

from Nicaraguans is that one must earn the right to criticize the revolutionary process by having displayed—amidst the repression—commitment to the cause of the poor. Hence, there is some eyebrow lifting at those sectors of the population who had very little to say on behalf of the poor but now have much to say on behalf of themselves.

The Bishop's Pastoral letter reflects the type of dialogue taking place all over Nicaragua. I will not attempt to predict where Nicaraguan Christians will come out. It will largely depend on their ability to remain true to what they have learned about commitment to the poor.

I do not want to make the Nicaraguan people out to be unbelievable in their compassion and love. It would be a gross exaggeration to say that every bullet which flew from a Sandinista-held gun was propelled with love for the National Guard. The reality of the death and destruction from armed struggle cannot be denied. I reluctantly agree with Ellul at that point: all violence is of one kind. It cannot be separated into good and bad, pure and evil. The human reactions of anyone, including the Sandinistas, could only be expected. The vengeance manifests itself. It must. So there are instances where victory opened the way for some to express years of pent-up anger and hatred for Somoza supporters. That was especially true where the volatile issue of land ownership is concerned. For 20 years the peasants had been absolutely denied the power that comes with owning land, and a significantly large percentage of the urban population identifies itself as displaced peasantry. Inevitably, victory brought an excuse to take revenge for the wrongs done to the campesinos.

But the manner in which local Sandinista authorities handled these cases is what I find so hopeful. Their complete dedication to not only

understanding and responding to the historical context in which the people operate, but in enabling the people to work out their own solutions, however long and arduous, impresses me. Along with that, they openly admit that they are new to this business of governing and will make mistakes.

I may be too distant to see clearly, but bear with me for one more example. In the southern town of Rivas, townspeople in a local restaurant told me that immediately after victory the people gathered in the town square to elect a provisional municipal government. They elected the same "patrons" of the town whom they had elected for years—the Latin American custom of class relations. After a few weeks in which the elected patrons proved they had learned nothing through the insurrectional process, the townspeople protested. Sandinista representatives then called the people together to talk about elections under Somoza and why certain people had always been elected. They discussed how during the struggle for self-determination, leadership rose out of personal involvement in the lives of the poor. The Sandinistas then noted that it had nothing to do with wealth, or formal education, but rather was a matter of commitment to serve the people and to be with the people. Subsequently, when new elections were held, those elected to office were ones who had already proved their commitment and leadership capability during the insurrection.

All this is to say that the new Nicaragua is a scene of rapid change. The single overwhelming impression that the people gave me last September, and continue to exude, is one of a people constructing their own history. But I sway from our theme...

I am not so naive as to be surprised if Nicaragua became a militant society where the power of weaponry is idolized. The first anniversary celebration included a display of wea-