

Nicaraguan government ought to be hailed as bringing in the Kingdom of God. (Though if I were God, I'd certainly choose those beautiful mountains and people in which to do it!) However, I doubt I would apologize if I had lived through the last four nights of Somoza's vengeance which delivered nonstop aerial bombardment on the major cities. I heard many Christians who lived through the battle describe the triumphal entry of the FSLN into the capital city as the dawning of God's Kingdom in Nicaragua, and I was neither surprised nor offended by their metaphor.

That does not mean I disregard your caution of losing perspective on the reality that the Sandinistas are an earthly government. A government is still a government, I believe you say. You are absolutely right in pinpointing the difference between the people and the government. I got carried away. But I still cannot help but feel a surge of exhilaration when I see the desires of a people—oppressed for so long—translated into state priorities. That does not mean we cease to view the Government of National Reconstruction with a critical, objective eye.

I want to share some excerpts from a November 1979 Pastoral Letter written by the Nicaraguan bishops. It moves me deeply. We should study it together as a response to your concern for Nicaraguan Christians making dangerous connections between the coming Kingdom of God and the FSLN victory.

They express in the letter the clear-sightedness you are concerned about, acknowledging that the present reconstruction stage is at once chaotic, disorderly, vulnerable to errors and abuses, while it is also a time of profound creativity and bears signs of the Kingdom of God.

We must remember that no historical revolutionary event can exhaust the infinite possibilities for justice and absolute solidarity

of the Kingdom of God. We must state that our commitment to the revolutionary process does not imply naivete, blind enthusiasm, or the creation of a new idol before which everyone must bow down unquestioningly. . .

The heart of Jesus' message is the announcement of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom founded on God's love for all humanity and in which the poor hold a special place. . . To announce the Kingdom means that we have to bring it into our lives. On that effort, the authenticity of our faith in God is staked, establishing what the Holy Scriptures call "justice and right" for the poor. It is commitment which tests our faith in Christ, who gave his life to proclaim the Kingdom. . . Jesus tells us that the Kingdom means liberation and justice (Luke 4:16-20), because it is a kingdom of life. Our need to build this kingdom is the basis for our accepting and participating in the current process, whose purpose is to ensure that all Nicaraguans truly live. . . By acting as Christians we become Christians. Without such solidarity, our announcement of the Good News is but an empty phrase.

I am remembering something a friend, a Nicaraguan Christian, said about objectivity toward state powers. He said he is ashamed to see part of the church hierarchy in Nicaragua today openly criticize the Sandinista government after having remained silent during Somoza's terrible reign; Somoza may not have taken so many lives if the church had taken the risk to oppose the dictatorship when to do so promised repression and martyrdom. It took the church hierarchy many years of direct, then tacit support for the Somozas before the suffering of the people evoked a response of faith and solidarity. Where the Catholic Bishops were concerned, it was not until June 1979—six weeks before victory, that they issued a letter acknowledging the right of the Nicaraguan people to engage in revolutionary insurrection. To do what is perceived as the "Christian duty" today and criticize the government is a relatively safe move, given the climate of pluralism. A common denunciation I hear