

ABSTRACT
GOD AS COMRADE:
LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION

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Contemporary Catholic Christians have been hearing a lot about ministry in recent years. The Christian community, it is argued, is not made up of spectators who listen to professional clergy to learn what is necessary for salvation. Christians do not go to church passively to receive sacramental grace. They are, in fact, ministers themselves, servants of God's kingdom who are empowered by their clergy, the sacraments and the Christian community to discover and live out an active Christian life.

Once again Christians are hearing the military metaphors of the New Testament. Conscientious Christians are to be Christian soldiers who fight on the front lines. In the first world, the ministry of daily life puts you on the front line in the workplace, in schools, legislatures, wherever the love of Christ is unknown or unfelt. In Central America, and much of the third world, Christian soldiers are literally soldiers; they serve on the front line with Marxist revolutionaries, fighting the larger enemies of oppression, greed, and injustice.

Ten years ago when the Nicaraguan Revolution was underway, the Nicaraguan Church hierarchy gave the rebels their blessings. Christian soldiers such as Father Ernesto Cardenal and Father Alvaro Arguello, supported the revolution in Nicaragua and hold positions in the Nicaraguan government today. The religious policy of the FSLN (Sandinista Front for National Liberation) is unique in the history of Marxist movements. The Sandinistas are unlike traditional Marxists in that they believe religion can be an asset to the new order, especially if enlightened, empowered revolutionary Christians replace the passive, obedient-to-authority Christians that used to make up the Catholic fold.

In Nicaragua, Christians and Marxists are comrades. They work together toward common ends. The relationship is strange, unique, powerful, and fascinating. What we see is the confluence of the two most powerful movements in Western history, Marxism and Christianity.