

The Imperial Church

Church and state partners in imperial expansion, rivals in power

- Middle Ages and into Spanish colonial Latin America
- Governor's palace and cathedral on opposite sides of main plaza — not much change today

Divine Hierarchy

- Earthly hierarchy to be obeyed as God's will
- God as King in heaven, ruler
- Hierarchy abhors revolt, revolution, or any challenge from below — blasphemy
- God will judge the rulers—impunity from popular judgment
- This is a perfect theology for dictatorships, empires

Priority of Soul over Body

- Discipline the body to save the soul — reward in heaven
- Anything is justified if it is done to save souls
- European treatment of Indigenous peoples
- In 1980s, Bishop Pablo Vega justified the Contra war as a war to save the souls of Nicaraguans from communism

Universal Unchanging Principles — Basis of Theology

- Ignores historical, cultural, social realities and context
- Reality of people's lives and society is ignored or less important

Liberation Theology

Vatican 2, early 1960s — Concern about the people — poverty, injustice, oppression

- **Gustavo Gutierrez** — **A Theology of Liberation, 1971**
- **Hugo Assmann** — **Theology for a Nomad Church** — faith is dynamic, not static
- **José Comblin** — **The Church and the National Security State, 1979**, national security justifies anything and takes the place of God

Lived Reality Is the Starting Point

- **Begin not with philosophy but with lived reality of the people**
- **Social sciences inform this theology** — economics, anthropology, history
- **Similar to Paulo Freire's methodology** — **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Critique of Imperialism — Dependency as cause of much misery

- **Dependency of people on religious and political hierarchy**
- **Dependency of some countries on others in international sphere**
- **Perpetual dependency destroys human dignity**

Base Communities — Comunidades eclesiales de base CEB

- **People interpret the Gospels in light of their own lived reality and society**

God of the Streets — Different Idea of God

- **The God who works, suffers, and lives with the people, not in high heaven**
- **Sweats in the street, changes tires, launders and irons clothes, makes tortillas, sells ice cream in the park**
- **God belongs to the people, not to the religious or political hierarchy**

Salvation, Liberation is Communal, not Individual

- **How we save each other by community action together**
- **Challenges the isolating individualism of “Jesus-and-me” spirituality that excludes social ills**
- **Threat to dictatorships that thrive on isolating people**

Integral Human Person — Material Conditions Matter —soul and body

- **Preferential option for the poor**

Liberation Theology and the Nicaraguan Revolution

Liberation theology and Nicaraguan revolution developing at same time

Many Nicaraguans saw similarity or congruence between liberation theology and the Sandinista-led revolution —working for the better society

Many joined the Sandinistas (FSLN) through their religious faith

The revolution included both liberation theology people and old time secular leftists

Not a perfect union, but collaboration

Churches open, priests in the revolutionary government, but a critical, conservative hierarchy

Liberation as a political and theological reality

FSLN seen as a vehicle for advancing the sort of society envisioned in liberation theology

Traditional Catholic pious practices became instruments of both spiritual solace and political action

- **Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs**
- **Via Crucis, Way of the Cross**

The War on Liberation Theology and the Revolution

Religion had to be restored as a vehicle for empire, not liberation.

Because of congruence and close relationship between liberation theology and the Sandinista-led revolution, their enemies had to destroy both together

Contra War and crackdown on liberation theology—Reagan's propaganda campaign against both

- **Santa Fe Document** — explicitly identifies liberation theology as threat to U.S. interests in Central America

“Liberation theology is marxism”

- Promotes materialism not spiritualism
- Promotes class struggle and overthrow of divine hierarchy
- Response e.g., Gary Macon, *Unlikely Allies: The Christian-Socialist Convergence, 1990*

Reagan: Sandinistas are repressing and persecuting religion
Same trope used today against Ortega and Sandinistas

Censure, removal of revolutionary and liberation priests and religious by Vatican and local Nicaraguan bishops

- Removal by assassination: Romero, 6 Jesuits, church women, Guadalupe Carney, others
- Removal by censure: Cardenal brothers, others,
- Replaced with anti-Sandinista priests
- U.S. support for evangelical missionaries and churches that preach traditional religion and U.S. culture

By 1990, liberation theology advocates replaced or forced underground by U.S., Vatican, and Nicaraguan hierarchy; and the Sandinistas were out of power.

How the Catholic Church Lost Its Influence among the People

Long history of priest shortage, not present, or not part of the community

During Contra War, some local priests refused to serve communities known as revolutionary or Sandinista

**Local communities learned to carry on without priests
CEBs were part of this tendency**

Faith expressed increasingly in daily life, building community, not rituals, churches, chapels, or the presence of priests

May seem as if religion disappear, but it was often internalized

The involvement of priests, hierarchy, in the violence of 2018 furthered this trend enormously—From absence to irrelevance to alienation from the institutional church****

**Some went to churches or CEBs known to be pro-liberation.
Some continued with their own small community practices and did not attend church.
Some left religion entirely.**

The Jesuits

One of the largest Catholic religious orders of men. Founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish nobleman and soldier turned priest.

Unity but diversity —group of very diverse individuals bound together by a common spiritual tie, identity, traditions.

Always controversial. wrath of kings, rulers, for their defense of the Pope.

Sometimes caught in church-state power struggles.

In colonial Latin America, Jesuits were the target of Spanish and Portuguese settlers and officials for their defense of Indigenous people.

Jesuit spirituality —Contemplative in action—**their work is their prayer**

Vow of chastity —No sexual activity, no marriage

Vow of obedience

- Jesuits founded on a hierarchical military model
- Pray, present your case and discern with your superior, then accept his decision
- Obedience to Pope —meant taking Vatican 2 seriously
- Compliance with Vatican 2 —some enthusiastically, others slowly, uncertain

Vow of Poverty

- Detachment — use whatever is at hand but do not get attached to any of it
- You own nothing —you use everything for the good
- Walk among the wealthy and powerful and the poor equally, without attachment

Jesuits became identified especially with education.

- Educate the sons of the elites who control society.
- Inculcate ideas of social justice, human rights, dignity so they will carry these into their leadership in society
- Next generation more enlightened than previous one

Three problems with this strategy

- Will the students actually carry these values forward into adult life?
- Isn't this perpetuation of an elitist model of society?
- Poses big spiritual danger for Jesuits who spend their time among the elite
- How to do this without embracing the values of the elite?
- Leap of faith? But Jesuits are human and can be “corrupted.”

Is this **part** of what happened at UCA Managua over the past three decades?

What happened at UCA that got it to its role in 2018 is a complex question with many factors and changing realities.