Fernando Cardenal, S.J.

Faith and Joy: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. Pp. 254. Pb, \$29.

When Fr. Fernando Cardenal, S.J., died on February 20th, 2016, various newspaper headlines described him as the Marxist priest who defied Pope John Paul II, while others painted him as the Sandinista leader who had been expelled from the Jesuit order. Those familiar with Nicaragua's recent history could rightly protest that such captions woefully reduced the rich complexity of Cardenal's eighty-two years of life and his steadfast commitment to the Christian faith and the education of the poor.

In this personal memoir, Cardenal reflects upon the major decisions, struggles, and remarkable events that constitute the dramatic journey of his life. The fifteen short chapters included in this abridged translation of the 2009 Spanish edition are structured around Cardenal's participation in the Sandinista insurrection and the subsequent revolutionary government. Before rehearsing these events, Cardenal takes the reader back to his early years of formation as a young Jesuit and his transformational tertianship experience in Medellín, Colombia. Born into a wealthy and influential Nicaraguan family, Cardenal first awakened to the harsh reality of the Latin American poor through his encounter and friendships with the dwellers of Medellín's Paul VI *barrio*. He describes how these relationships, developed in "a sea of pain," led him to promise God that he would "work for justice." Cardenal writes that these encounters are the key to understanding the rest of his life.

Back in Nicaragua under the brutal dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, Cardenal continued to evolve. In Managua, he begins to work at the Jesuit university, where his support of student protests helped them secure a greater participation in the administration of the university. A couple of months later, Cardenal joined his students on a hunger strike and in their takeover of the national cathedral to protest Somoza's repressive measures and the unjust imprisonment of five student leaders by the National Guard. These early actions of solidarity, which ended peacefully and successfully, depict the courage and prudence that characterize Cardenal's decisions in the coming years. Those familiar with the recent history of the Society of Jesus in Central America will be pleased to read Cardenal's positive account of the 1969 province's retreat where the Jesuits, in an act of communal discernment, determined to redirect their work toward the region's oppressed majorities and incorporate the preferential option for the poor into their institutional ministries.

Although not treated in a systematic or exhaustive manner, the plight of Cardenal's personal discernment comes to the fore when he recounts his incorporation into the leftist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the early 1970s. Cardenal recalls that it was not through the writings of Marx or Lenin but rather his reflections on the parable of the Good Samaritan, the church's just war tradition, and Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio* that guided him to conclude that, in light of Somoza's long-standing tyranny, "there was no other path than revolutionary violence" (45).

There is no doubt that Cardenal lived in one of the most dramatic times in the history of Nicaragua, and his involvement in the FSLN opens a window into the social and political movements that shaped the revolution there. Cardenal offers a behind-the-scenes account of his 1976 testimony before a US Congress whose majority still supported Somoza's regime. His denunciation of Somoza's theft, torture, and murder convinced the Carter administration to stop aiding the Nicaraguan dictatorship. Cardenal also narrates his experiences as member of the influential group identified as the "twelve." During the war, most of these well-known and respected Nicaraguans lived in exile and promoted the people's insurrection through political and diplomatic means.

Perhaps nowhere in the book is the passion of Cardenal more evident than in the chapters where he reflects upon the National Literacy Crusade. A few months after the triumph of the revolution, the new FSLN government declared 1980 as "The Year of the Literacy Campaign" and charged Cardenal with coordinating a titanic effort that would involve around one hundred thousand students, teachers, technicians, and professionals. Following Cardenal's leadership and Paulo Freire's pedagogy, this popular army of volunteer literacy workers successfully reduced the overall illiteracy rate from 50.3% to 12.9%—an achievement that the following year earned the recognition of UNESCO.

After the literacy campaign, Cardenal took charge of the Sandinista Youth Movement and, in 1984, was appointed minister of education. These were challenging times for both the new minister and the young republic. Because of his involvement in the Sandinista government, Cardenal was suspended from priestly functions and eventually dismissed from the Society of Jesus. In a detailed account of these events Cardenal carefully explains how the dictates of his conscience prevented him from resigning his government post, even as he reaffirmed his Jesuit identity and expressed his profound gratitude for the Society of Jesus. During this same time, the Reagan administration began to finance Nicaraguan contra-revolutionary forces in order to topple the young Sandinista regime. Cardenal narrates the impact of this aggression, noting that

by 1984, most of the national budget was expended on national defense and by 1989, the national inflation rate had skyrocketed.

Once the FSLN lost the presidential elections in 1990, Cardenal left his ministerial post. Five years later, he also decided to resign from the FSLN through a letter denouncing the corruption of the party's high-ranking leaders. He finally returned home and to direct ministry with the poor in 1996 when Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach readmitted him into the Society of Jesus. For the remainder of his life, Cardenal continued to be faithful to the promise that he first made at Medellín almost fifty years ago, through the Society's *Fe y Alegría* (Faith and Joy) international ministry for popular education.

Written in clear and direct prose, Cardenal's memoirs are a jewel that illuminate a coherent Christian life committed to personal and social liberation—a life whose solidarity with others generates hope both for its contemporaries, and also for the youth that follow.

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