PART ONE

BACKGROUND TO
PROTESTANT-SANDINISTA RELATIONS
CHAPTER ONE

PERCEPTIONS OF PROTESTANT-STATE RELATIONS IN REVOLUTIONARY NICARAGUA

Protestant-Sandinista relations remain relatively unexplored in any great depth. What little material there is falls into three broad categories. The first suggests the Sandinistas were Marxists who systematically persecuted Christians. A second view denies religious repression, instead claiming the majority of Nicaraguan Protestants actually supported the revolution and blaming insignificant counterrevolutionary fundamentalism for masking relatively harmonious Protestant-Sandinista relations. The final position argues that any Sandinista repression was a reaction to Washington's attempts to portray Nicaraguan Evangelicals as victims of a tyrannical regime in a propaganda war aimed at justifying U.S. intervention in the region. Consequently, Evangelicals became the focus of the unwelcome attention of state security, which was already suspicious of their North American links. Thus, the first of these views sees the Sandinistas as *proactively* engaged in persecution, the second regards them as *passive*, while the third considers them *reactive*.

*Sandinistas as Proactive*

Humberto Belli (brother of Sandinista poet Gioconda Belli) regards the Sandinistas as Marxists who persecuted Christians.1 He begins by seeking to establish the thoroughly Marxist-Leninist nature of sandinismo. In the 1970s, disagreements on how to achieve victory led to the emergence of three rival Sandinista factions: the Guerra Popular Prolongada (Protracted People’s War, GPP), led by Tomás Borge, Bayardo Arce and Henry Ruiz; the Tendencia Proletaria (Proletarian Tendency, TP), headed by Luis Carrión, Jaime Wheelock and Carlos Nuñez; and finally, the Terceristas (i.e. emphasising a third way), closely associated with Daniel and Humberto Ortega, and Victor Tirado. It was Fidel Castro who