1. Introduction

During the past years quite some literature has been published on church and state in Nicaragua. Virtually all of these publications derived their inspiration from the developments which had occurred since 1979. In that year the Sandinists succeeded in driving away dictator Somoza. The victory of the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional; Sandinista Front for National Liberation) meant a revolution in the relations between church and state, or rather in the relation between faith and politics. The fact is that, during the years previous to their victory, the Sandinists had indicated that they were in favour of a dialogue between socialism and christianity. Thanks to this openness a great many people professing the christian faith identified themselves with the struggle of the Frente. As soon as he had come into power, president Daniel Ortega declared that there was no discrepancy whatsoever between christianity and revolution. The poet Ernesto Cardenal (minister of culture under the Sandinists), Fernando Cardenal (his brother and minister of education), Miguel d’Escoto (minister of foreign affairs) and, in a wider context, the politically engaged christian basic communities are the living proof of this proposition.
The special relation which grew between faith and politics during the Sandinist revolution has attracted a great deal of international attention and has been the subject of frequent analysis. The studies concerned mostly concentrate on the Roman Catholic Church, in which especially the tension between the basic communities and the catholic hierarchy is given a lot of attention. In this article we intend to raise a less studied aspect of the relationship between church and state in Nicaragua, namely the role of the Pentecostal churches, which have come to occupy a more and more important position in this Central American country. It is estimated that in the year 1993 roughly one out of every five Nicaraguans were protestants. The protestant denominations are to be divided into a smaller group of so-called historical churches (such as the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua and the Moravian Church) and a great many Pentecostal communities; the latter constitute about 80% of the total number of protestants in Nicaragua. A lot of researchers hold that the Pentecostals have an ‘escapist’ faith. They are supposed to look forward eagerly to the coming of Christ, while being hardly interested in the here and now, let alone in politics, where one will only dirty one’s hands. In this article we intend to examine what has been the attitude of the Nicaraguan Pentecostals with respect to politics for the past fifteen years. Is it possible indeed to defend the position that the majority of the Pentecostal churches have adopted an escapist attitude? Or is the Nicaraguan reality after all more complicated than that? This article is to be divided into three parts. A first paragraph will give a detailed survey of the historical and theological roots of Nicaraguan Pentecostalism. It will be followed by an analysis of what has been the attitude of the Pentecostal churches with respect to the Sandinists. And, finally, we intend to examine what the perspectives are for the nineties.

2. Roots of Nicaraguan Pentecostalism

2.1. Historical development

The history of the Nicaraguan Pentecostal churches is generally divided into three periods: 1918-1965, 1965-1979 and 1979-the present. The first period starts in 1918, the year when a North American missionary of the Assemblies