

**WOMEN, RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE:
GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS IN ECCLESIAL BASE
COMMUNITIES IN ESTELI, NICARAGUA**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
degree of Master of Arts in International Development
Studies at Saint Mary's University

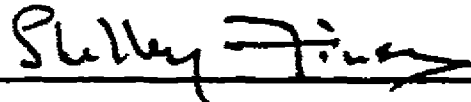
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ISBN 0-315-90954-4

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the CEBs of Estelí, Nicaragua, and in particular all the women from the CEBs who have been part of the research process and whose insights, creativity, humour and strength in the face of adversity have touched my life.

It is dedicated also to the members of my academic committee for their assistance and encouragement and in particular Dr. Helen Ralston for her guidance and patience.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to all of my family for their support throughout this endeavour and to Rick for his reassurance and accompaniment.

Esta tesis está dedicada a las Comunidades Eclesiales de Base de Estelí, Nicaragua y en particular a todas las mujeres de las CEBs quienes han sido parte de este proceso de investigación. Sus ideas, creatividad, humor y fuerza en situaciones difíciles han sido una inspiración para mí.

Está dedicada también a los miembros de mi comité académico por su ayuda y ánimo y en particular a la Dra. Helen Ralston por su dirección y paciencia.

Finalmente, esta tesis está dedicada a mi familia por su apoyo durante todo este esfuerzo y a Enrico por sus seguranzas y su acompañamiento.

ABSTRACT

Women, Religion and Social Change: Gender Consciousness in Ecclesial Base Communities in Esteli, Nicaragua

This thesis addresses the potential for Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs) to engage in gender consciousness work and contribute towards women's movements for social change. This potential is examined through both a review and critique of relevant literature and primary research in the CEBs of Esteli, Nicaragua, including an eight month participatory research project.

The conceptual framework draws upon both a Latin American sociology of religion which calls for a contextually specific examination of the relationship between religion and society and a gender and development approach which analyzes women's roles in production, social reproduction and community managing in the private and public spheres.

The research attempts to contribute towards the elaboration of theory from the standpoint of women. This involves a critique of the two bodies of literature outlined above for failing to provide an integrated framework within which the complex matrix of the everyday lives of women who are CEB members can be understood and, conversely, a contribution to this literature through the participatory research project. Another objective of the research project is to have a direct impact on the conscientization work of the CEBs and the women who participated in the project.

The thesis concludes that the potential within CEBs, as religious organizations, to engage in gender consciousness work and contribute towards women's movement for social change does exist but is dependent upon the broader social and religious context. The increasing pluralism and autonomy within women's movement in recent years facilitated the carrying out of the participatory research process in the CEBs of Esteli. Conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua posed both opportunities and limitations. On the one hand, the mode of religious production within the CEBs facilitated the exploration of concrete issues of concern to women (such as violence, health and work) as well as the engaging in religious production (for instance in terms of exegesis, hermeneutics and liturgy) from the standpoint of women. On the other hand, the patriarchal religious worldview of the Church (for instance its perspective on motherhood) posed limitations on the ability to engage in gender consciousness.

**Billy Burton
April 27, 1994**

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ACRONYMS

AMNLAE	Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinosa Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women
AMPRONAC	Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional Association of Women Confronting the National Problem.
ATC	Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo Rural Workers' Association
CDS	Comité de Defensa Sandinista Sandinista Defense Committee
CEB	Comunidad Eclesial De Base Ecclesial Base Community
CELAM	Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana Latin American Episcopal Council
CNF	Comité Nacional Feminista National Feminist Committee
INSFOP	Instituto de Formación Permanente Institute of Permanent [Christian] Formation
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional Sandinista National Liberation Front
JGRN	Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional Governing Junta of National Reconstruction
MCR	Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario Revolutionary Christian Movement
UNO	Unión Nacional Opositor United National Opposition

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Much of the political, sociological and theological analysis of liberation theology and the role and function of Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs) as new organizational models for the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America has focused on the progressive role of CEB members in class-based movements struggling for social change. Little consideration has been given, however, to the potential within CEBs to fulfil also a progressive role in terms of challenging structures of gender subordination. Most of the people who participate in the "Church of the Poor" are women, yet in both the practice of the CEBs and the literature which studies them, the many aspects of women's experiences, which combine in the complex matrix of their everyday lives, have not been taken into account.

This thesis explores the potential for CEBs to incorporate gender consciousness into their educational, or training (*formación*) work. The central question in this research process is as follows: What is the potential within Ecclesial Base Communities, as religious organizations, to

engage in gender consciousness work and contribute towards women's movement for social change?' This question will be explored through both a review and critique of relevant literature, and a case study based on research carried out with the CEBs of Esteli, a town in northern Nicaragua. The latter includes an eight month participatory research project ("Woman: Who Am I") which was carried out in 1993-4. The argument will be made that, while the potential exists to develop gender consciousness in CEBs, this potential is dependent upon the broader social and religious context. This context includes, in particular, the characteristics of women's movement in Nicaragua and the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church of which the CEBs are a part.

Chapter 2 presents the thesis methodology. It begins by establishing the research paradigm within which the research process is situated and then discusses the research approaches which will be taken. The latter includes an overview of how contacts were established with the CEBs of Esteli, how the participatory research project was set up and an overview of the two research standpoints which exist in this process: my own and that of the CEBs in Esteli.

In order to assess the potential for CEBs to provide a

¹ The term "women's movement" rather than "the women's movement" is being used in order to stress the dynamic and pluralist (and sometimes non-consensual) nature of women's movement. This term can be found in feminist literature. See, for instance, Gabriele Dietrich, Women's Movement in India, 1955 and Bell Hooks ("feminist movement"), Feminist Theory: From Margins to Centre, 1984.

liberatory space for women, it is necessary to situate the research question within the literature related to both religion and women, and the relationship of each to processes of social change. Chapter 3 reviews this literature. The first part of the chapter explores various theories related to the relationship between religion and society. The aim is to establish a sociological framework from a Latin American perspective within which the relationship between CEBs and the broader society they are a part of can be explored. A specific aim of this section is to demonstrate that religion is a "situated reality" and that religion, as liberation theology has demonstrated, does have the potential to play a progressive role in social change.

The second part of the chapter involves an exploration of various theoretical and policy approaches to women, with a particular focus on women's movement in Latin America. This section begins by outlining "gender and development" as a bottom-up approach to both development and the empowerment of poor women. This discussion includes an overview of both "women in development" and "women and development" approaches which have preceded the gender and development approach. This is followed by a discussion of the differences, and confluences, within women's movement in Latin America since the 1970's, with particular reference to the relationship between feminist and women's organizing. Finally, the potential to combine feminist praxis and grass-roots women's

praxis in Latin America through a gender and development approach is examined. The aim of the second part of this chapter is to situate women's organizing within CEBs as part of women's movement in Latin America and to establish an approach for the introduction of gender consciousness work into the CEBs.

The final section of chapter 3 discusses the particular challenges of engaging in gender consciousness within CEBs. Having established that religion at least has the potential to be revolutionary, and that the potential exists to analyze the dynamics of gender relations among grass-roots women's groups, the following questions can then be posed: Does religion also have the potential to be "revolutionary" with respect to gender? Are there specific limitations - or opportunities - posed by the CEBs as religious organizations for engaging in gender consciousness? What possible impact could the development of gender analysis and consciousness have on the future orientation of CEBs, and in particular in terms of the potential to contribute to women's movement?

Chapter 3 thus, provides an overview of the major issues dealt with in this thesis as seen in the general Latin American context. Chapter 4 seeks to situate the research question more specifically within the Nicaraguan context. This chapter focuses on the changing dynamics of Nicaraguan society during the Sandinista Revolution (1979 to 1990) and since the electoral defeat of the Sandinista National

Liberation Front (FSLN) in 1990.¹ This chapter has three main sections. The first provides a general overview of the political and economic climate of Nicaragua during this period. The second explores the emergence of CEBs within the context of the Sandinista Revolution and the internal divisions within the Roman Catholic Church. This section pays particular attention to the formation and development of the CEBs in Estelí. The final section reviews the changes within women's movement in Nicaragua during this time period.

Chapter 5 presents the actual experience of "engaging in gender consciousness" within the CEBs of Estelí. This experience will be contrasted against the reviews and debates outlined in the previous chapters. In addition to situating the activities of the CEBs within the broader context, the thesis aims to inform this broader context through the specific example of women addressing gender issues within a religious community.

Prior to outlining the thesis methodology in chapter 2, the following paragraphs explicate three concepts central to the research question: "gender," "consciousness" and "Ecclesial Base Community."

Gender

The terms "women" and "gender" are not synonymous. Women is a sex category and gender is a social construct. Gender

¹ Henceforth referred to as FSLN.

thus denotes "socially and culturally determined differences between men and women as opposed to biological differences" (Gallin & Ferguson, 1991:2). Women's lives are shaped and influenced by a number of factors, including for example class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, sexual preference, physical ability, age, and so on. Gender, thus, is only one of the many potential influences in women's lives. Although at an experiential level these influences may be inseparable, it is important to develop an analysis around each in order to understand the whole by better understanding the particularities (including gender) that make up the whole.

Consciousness

Consciousness is understood in its broadest sense in this thesis as "awareness." In this dimension, the development of consciousness, or "conscientization," is "characterized as a process in which persons achieve a deepening awareness, both of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality" (Guaajardo, 1990:82). Conscientization is both a subjective and objective process. Paulo Freire argues that "the basic condition for conscientization is that its agent must be a subject (i.e. a conscious being)" (1970:68). It is as conscious beings that we are both in the world and with the world, together with other people. On the other hand, the very process of conscientization requires a certain objectification, in that

it requires us to see reality as an object: "Conscientization is viable only because men's [sic] consciousness, although conditioned, can recognize that it is conditioned" (p.69). Human beings' subjective and objective understandings of reality interact in a dialectical fashion - each continually informing the other:

Society is a dialectical phenomenon in that it is a human product .. that yet continuously acts back upon its producer. Society ... has no other being except that which is bestowed upon it by human activity and consciousness (Berger, 1969:3).

A change in consciousness does not automatically or mechanically translate into a change in action. Awareness of reality and "the work of transforming that reality," rather, must be seen as two separate "moments" which, also, are in dialectical relationship (Freire in Guajardo, 1990:97). This is a key point in that this thesis explores the potential to develop an awareness of the existence of gender dynamics and the way they impact upon the lives of women. While it is hoped that this awareness will lead to concrete actions and thus contribute towards women's movement for change, it cannot be assumed that this process will be direct.

Kate Young, for instance, argues that women may in fact choose not to act in a given context:

... while women may suffer a common history of oppression and subordination, this experience is mediated by other experiences which may lead many of them to conclude either that they cannot change their situation or that attempting to do so will only worsen their present position which they have at least learned to cope with. Thus their lived experience of oppression is not translated into any action to change their situation or even to support others wishing to do so (Young, 1988:10).

Gender consciousness is related to the issues of identity

and strategy. The name of the participatory research in Nicaragua, for instance, was "Woman: Who Am I?" Clearly, this project had a strong gender identity focus. This includes the development of both individual/personal identities and collective identities among women in the group as poor women.

Developing a deeper awareness of individual and collective identities may not lead to direct action, but it does open up the possibility for the development of strategies for women's movement to address concrete issues related to violence, health, employment, the gendered division of labour within the household, women in the Church and so on.³ Although "identity" and "strategy" continually inform each other, the ability to organize around these issues will depend on other factors in addition to the development of consciousness. In the case of the CEBs of Estelí, these factors include the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church and characteristics of women's movements and the economic situation in Nicaragua.

Ecclesial Base Communities

Ecclesial Base Communities (Comunidades Eclesiales de Base - CEBs), or Christian Base Communities, are organizational models for the Roman Catholic Church which have

³ For an example of the relationship between collective identity and action to transform power relationships, see Amy Conger Lind's article on popular women's organizations in Ecuador (in Escobar & Alvarez, 1992:134-149).

emerged since the 1960's as a consequence of the rethinking of the relationship between the Church and the world in Latin American liberation theology.

The document from the 1968 Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellin, Colombia, for instance, stated that the CEB is the "first and fundamental ecclesial nucleus" which should assume responsibility for the "richness and expansion of faith as well as worship, which is an expression of faith" (1987:110). The 1979 Bishops' Conference in Puebla, Mexico also promoted the development of CEBs, stating that they represent the "hope of the Church" (1991:167).

CEBs are comprised of grass roots groups of people who meet regularly to talk about their experiences, to reflect upon these experiences through biblical interpretation and socio-economic analysis, and to take concrete steps to bring about change and social justice.

CEBs represent alternative organizational models for the Church in that they are more democratic in their structure than parishes, with a broader leadership base; they are community-oriented, meeting in people's homes; and they focus on people's lived experience of faith through reflections on everyday life.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Paradigm

We live in a world in which knowledge is used to maintain oppressive relations (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:15)

The concept of the scientific study of society emerged in an industrializing and rapidly changing Europe. The research methods developed within the social sciences reflected the rational and scientific mindset of that period (Westwood, 1991:80). This has included a positivist approach to data collection which assumes that the researcher should detach her/himself from the object of study in order not to bias the results. This kind of detachment and objectivity, however, is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. The result of appearing to be objective is that the knowledge created is presented as objectively verifiable, and therefore "true," when in fact it is embedded in a particular context and used to serve a particular agenda, such as the maintaining of "oppressive relations." For instance, evolutionary theories based on Social Darwinism which prevailed in 19th century

social science were used as a justification for European colonialism and imperialism (Garbarino, 1978:34).

Edward Said addresses the issue of the role of research in creating perceptions of certain realities. In Orientalism, he outlines the way in which an image of the "Orient" has been constructed through the academic writing of Western scholars. He defines Orientalism as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in **European Western** experience" (Said, 1978:1) [emphasis added]. Said notes that, "having transported the Orient into modernity, the Orientalist could celebrate his method, and his position, as that of a secular creator, a man who made new worlds as God once made the old" (p.121). Western scholarship, through its "objective" study of the Orient, thus, has created the Orient as an "other" in relation to the West.

Arturo Escobar has argued that a similar process has occurred within development discourse and practice, since the West and "North" have to a large extent created the institutions which define both the problems in, and solutions for, the "Third World":

The history of development is relatively recent and even precarious. It dates back to the early post-World War II period when the scientific gaze of the West focused on Asia, Africa and Latin America in a new manner. It was during this period (roughly from 1945 to 1960) that the institutional apparatus for producing knowledge and forms of intervention in and about the Third World (the World Bank, the United Nations, bilateral development agencies, planning offices in the Third World, development organizations on the local level) was actually created. The terms *Third World*, *underdeveloped areas*, *development*, and the like were inventions of this period, integral components in a new system for producing truth about these parts of the Third World (Escobar, 1992:65).

This "truth," Escobar argues, has "portrayed Third World societies as imperfect, abnormal, or diseased entities in relation to the 'developed' societies," with the "cure" being prescribed by Western experts (p.65). "Like the orientalist discourse addressed by Edward Said," Escobar argues, "development discourses have functioned as powerful instruments for shaping and managing the Third World" (p.65).

With respect to women and social science research, Dorothy E. Smith has pointed out the way in which sociology has been "written from the standpoint of men located in the relations of ruling our societies" and that we come to "know ourselves" through these standpoints as we "learn how to know society from sociology" (Smith, 1991:1-3).

Social science researchers such as Said, Escobar and Smith have begun to question the assumptions behind the dominant (i.e. traditional, orthodox, mainstream or classical) research paradigm (Maguire, 1987:11). It represents a research "paradigm," rather than a set of research approaches, because it is a "constellation of theories, questions, methods, and procedures which share central values and themes," and it is "dominant" because "for most social scientists and educators it is the only legitimate way to create knowledge" (p.11-12). An "alternative research paradigm," on the other hand, questions the shared values of positivist, dominant research in that it "acknowledges the degree of subjectivity inherent in all forms of knowledge

inquiry systems" and recognizes also that there exist subjective underlying assumptions about the "purpose for which social knowledge is created" (p.17).

Participatory research (PR) is an example of "one alternative paradigm approach to social science and educational research" (Maguire, 1987:34). PR has its origins in: (1) reconceptualizations of international economic development assistance, (2) the reframing of adult education, and (3) the ongoing debates within the social sciences which challenge the dominant paradigm (p.38). In Latin America, various forms of PR began to emerge in the 1960's as a criticism of "the North American and European model based on empiricism and positivism" which was "incompatible with the more urgent needs of the region's population, namely, the need for social change and a committed knowledge to aid in its realization" (Guaardo, 1990:103).

PR is based on a cyclical process of engaging in investigation, education and action (Maguire, 1987:35). There are three important characteristics of PR: (1) it stems from people's own experiences, (2) it has a transforming and liberating agenda, and (3) it is carried out within the context of popular culture and knowledge. In addition, PR is a collective process over which the people involved have control (Tandon, 1981:25). Tandon notes that the initiative for a PR project may originate internally or externally, but the key is for community or group control over the process.

PR falls within an alternative research paradigm. It is subjective, inductive and qualitative in its approach. It is not the case, however, that certain approaches are exclusively associated with one paradigm or the other. For instance, while we may be able to assume that a dominant research paradigm consistently uses deductive, objective and quantifiable approaches to data collection, it does not necessarily follow that an alternative research paradigm consistently uses inductive, subjective and qualitative approaches to gathering data. Research approaches are sometimes presented as opposing and mutually exclusive, when in fact they may both be part of the same research paradigm. Eithne McLaughlin has argued, for instance, that along with the growing acceptance of qualitative research, there has been a "perhaps understated attack on the very existence of a dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative approaches" (1991:293).

The question, thus, is not whether to choose subjective, inductive and qualitative research methods over objective, deductive and quantitative ones, but what the knowledge being generated will be used for. The knowledge being generated through this research process falls within an alternative research paradigm because of the uses to which this knowledge will be put.

This thesis focuses on the ability for CEBs, as religious groups, to engage in gender consciousness. This is not a

neutral question, but is being explored in order to help improve the condition and position of women. This, in turn, has both a specific and a broad focus. The specific focus is the women who participated in the research in the CEBs of Esteli. The broader focus is the contribution of this research to the literature in the areas of the sociology of religion and gender and development regarding women in religious organisations. This thesis aims to make an original contribution to the literature in that there has been relatively little overlap between the sociology of religion and gender and development theory and practice.

2.2 Research Approach

The thesis adopts a "triangulation approach" to the research process. The approach assumes that "no one data collection method could ever be sufficient" (McLaughlin, 1991:304). It involves three principal methods of data collection: (1) analysis of secondary data (books, periodicals, magazines, newspapers) gathered and/or consulted in both Canada and Nicaragua, (2) meetings with selected religious, women's and community organizations in Nicaragua,¹

¹ I attended meetings in both 1992 and 1993. Some had been organized through the SCM Leadership Development Programme (see below) and others were organized through the CEBs or independently. These included: Agricultural Cooperatives (Miraflores), ATC (Rural Worker's Association - Esteli), UNAG (National Union of Farmers and Ranchers - Esteli), INPAMU (an organisation which works with working and street children - Esteli), Maria Ramirez, Sandinista National Assembly member (Managua), Indigenous People's House (Matagalpa), Puntos de Encuentro (women's organization - Managua), AMULAE (Leon and Esteli), the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs

and (3) research in the CEBs of Esteli, including participant observation, interviews with CEB members and leaders (1992) and a participatory research project (1993).

The following section outlines how my contact with the CEBs was established and how the research question evolved in the context of discussions with the CEBs. This includes an overview of the difference between my own research standpoint and that of the CEBs.

Relationship to the CEBs in Esteli

I went to Nicaragua for the first time in 1987. At this time, I was working on a leadership development programme organized by the Student Christian Movement of Canada.² During this and two subsequent trips to Nicaragua (in 1988 and 1989) with the same SCM programme, I was able to gain first-hand experience of the work of the CEBs in Esteli.

In 1991, I presented a proposal to the SCM Board of Directors to undertake a research project with the CEBs. I presented it first to the SCM rather than approach the the

(Matagalpa), the women's committee of CEPAD (an umbrella organization for Protestant churches - Esteli), INSOP (an organization which was linked to the CEBs in the 1980's - Esteli) and the CEBs of Managua. I also attended, along with several women from the participatory research group, a week-long conference in Managua organized by a popular education group, "Teyocoyani." The theme of this conference was: Towards a new Christian Valuation (valoración) of women.

² The SCM is a national, ecumenical movement founded in Canada in 1921, and a member of the World Student Christian Federation. Through "local units" in university campuses, members of the SCM explore and take action upon issues related to faith and social justice.

CEBs directly because I wished to have the institutional support of a Canadian organization with links to the CEBs. An important aspect of participatory research is the establishing of trust among the people involved and the link with the SCM facilitated this process. In addition, I hoped that my research in Nicaragua would help strengthen the institutional links between the CEBs and the SCM. The proposal was accepted and presented on my behalf to the Ecclesial Base Communities in Estelí, where it was also accepted.

I spent two months in Nicaragua in May and June of 1992 carrying out research. The principal objective was to determine whether the CEBs included gender analysis in their educational work. In addition to observing and participating in various meetings (weekly neighbourhood meetings, weekend workshops and coordinating meetings) I also interviewed ten women who are CEB members and several CEB leaders. At the time, I was not sure if I would be able to return to Nicaragua, but nonetheless held discussions with members of the Coordinating Committee regarding what I would do if I were to return.³ It was decided at this time that, if I were able to return to Nicaragua, it would be to engage in gender consciousness work within the CEBs.

³ The work of the CEBs of Estelí is coordinated by a committee of eight to ten people which is responsible for planning, leading and accompanying groups, implementing programmes and evaluation. This work is carried out through separate commissions for youth and adult groups. These commissions include: (1) Education (adults only), (2) Finances and Solidarity, (3) Administration/Coordination and (5) Communication.

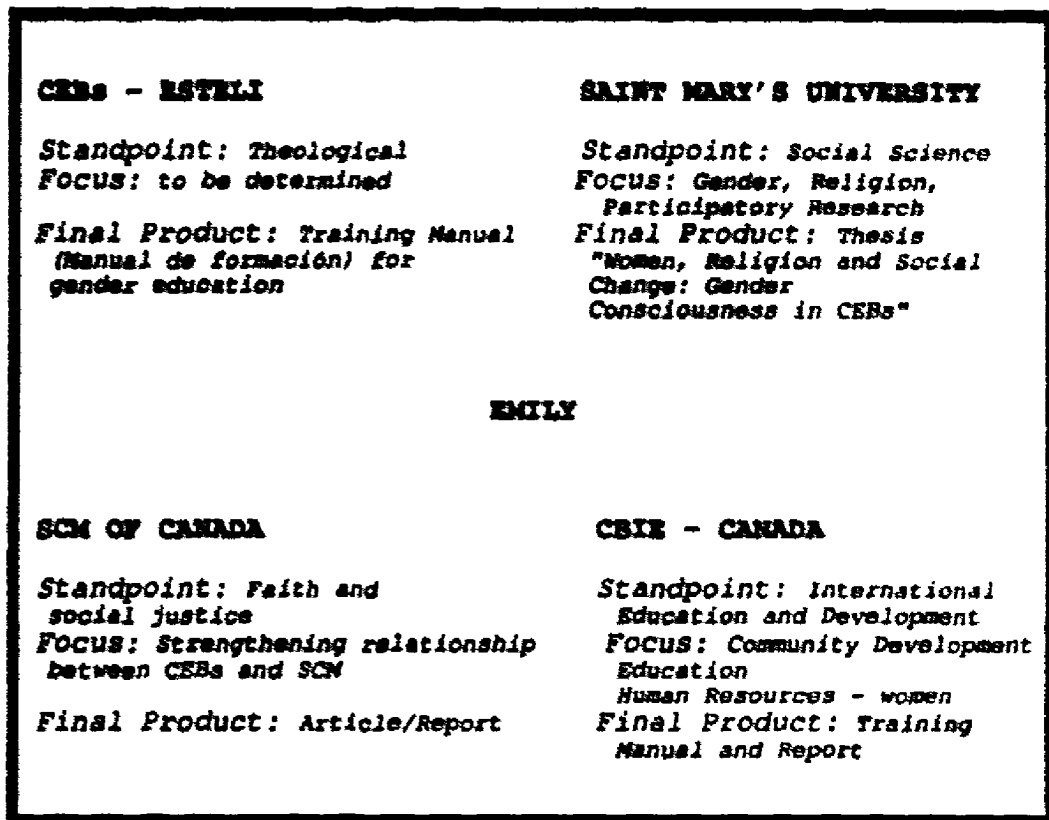
In September of 1992, I applied to the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) for a "CIDA Awards for Canadians" grant to return to Nicaragua. This application was approved, and I returned to Nicaragua in May, 1993. I spent the first three weeks becoming reacquainted with the CEBs and trying to determine exactly how the participatory research process would fit into the work of the CEBs - both organizationally and in terms of the methodologies being used within their educational work.

In June, I presented a proposal for discussion to the Coordinating Committee of the CEBs. This presentation had three parts. The first involved a discussion of the concept of "gender consciousness." We began with a biblical reflection on the story of Martha and Mary (Luke, 10:38-42), which addresses the dilemma of women's roles. We then discussed what was meant by gender and gender consciousness.⁴

The second part involved a presentation of the different "actors" involved in the research process. This was summarized using the following diagram:

⁴ I also gave Coordinating Committee members copies of an article I had written for the SCM National Magazine ("All Things New") as a report on the research I had carried out the previous year. Part of this discussion involved reviewing the section in this report which discussed gender.

Figure 1: Actors in Participatory Research Project



The aim of the diagram was to demonstrate that there are different institutions or organizations associated with this project, and that the focus of the project varies according to the standpoint of each organization. By placing myself in the middle of the four organizations, I highlighted my connection to each of them, including the different ways in which I am accountable to them. I also wished to emphasize that the thesis has a sociological, or social science approach rather than a theological one and that, while I would attempt to

interpret the project from the standpoint of the CEBs, I was ultimately the one who would write the thesis and therefore my own interpretation would play a significant role. (The question of research standpoints will be returned to below).

The next part of the meeting involved determining, as a group, what the exact focus of the project would be for the CEBs. The following parameters were determined: (1) that it would be a project of the Education Commission, (2) that two women from each of the 11 barrios with adult groups would be invited to attend, (3) that the project would last for six months, from mid-June to mid-December and (4) that three members of the Coordinating Committee would participate in the project.

We then discussed what the methodology of the project would be. In keeping with the need within PR for participants to have control over the research process, we realized that the methodology could not be exactly determined until the group was formed. We felt, however, that it could have the following general components: experience, biblical reflection, data collection (internal and external), interpretation and analysis and action.⁵

This meeting was a turning point in the research process in that the project moved from being "Emily's research" to being a CEB project. From this point on, I was one, along

⁵ The methodology developed did have these general components, although it was varied slightly. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

with the three CEB leaders, of the four project coordinators, as well as a project participant. The way in which the participatory research project developed from this point on will be mapped out in Chapter 5.

Research Standpoints

As was mentioned above, my own standpoint in this research process is different from that of the CEB members. That of the CEB members is primarily "theological," in that they see this project as part of their overall work of "building the Reign of God." The perspective of the CEBs is based on the experience of being poor, of being Catholic and struggling within the Church "in conflict," and of doing theology based on these experiences.

The CEBs in Estelí which are the focus of this study were formed in 1981. Although not a Sandinista organization, they did see themselves as being to a large extent part of the revolutionary project. Since the defeat of the Sandinista government in 1990, however, the CEBs have been in a process of reflection and evaluation regarding their work. They feel that they perhaps relied too heavily on the government (for example, through the Sandinista Defense Committees to carry out community development projects) to solve the problems of the community, and in the process also lost sight of the need to be involved in an on-going process of conscientization within the CEBs. They are interested in moving into new

areas in this educational work, and as such have been receptive to this research process.

Thus, a main objective of the CEBs in participating in this process has been to expand the scope of their conscientizing work to include a systematic examination of gender, which in turn is part of a larger and longer process of "building the Reign of God."

My own research standpoint, on the other hand, is primarily sociological in that I am examining the CEBs as a socially constructed institution which interacts with the broader society of which it is a part. As stated above, however, it is not possible, nor necessarily desirable, to maintain complete objectivity in doing research. My personal opinions regarding the potential for religious institutions to be liberatory for women thus influence this research process.

Although I am a baptized Catholic, I was not, for the most part, raised as a Catholic. As an adult, I have participated in different religious organizations, including the SCM. Although I have an interest in Christianity, my relationship to organized religion has been ambiguous, partly because of the patriarchy of the Church. The participation of Christians in revolutionary and social struggles in Latin America has been an inspiration to me. When it comes to women, however, my feelings about the potential for the church to be liberatory are both "optimistic" and "suspicious."

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a feminist theologian, states

that if "religion is a major barrier to change towards a just social order, one ... cannot just negate it, for this leaves its negative power intact" (in Eck & Jain, 1987:viii). The emergence of CEBs has been part of a process of significant change within the Catholic Church in Latin America. It has been possible to develop a critical class consciousness within certain sectors of the Catholic Church, and I am optimistic about the possibility of developing a critical gender consciousness as well. Also, from a "participatory" or "bottom-up" approach to development, the important point is that the women who will participate in this research are religious. To negate the religious dimension of their lives as being oppressive is not useful or realistic. Thus, the "religious consciousness" of CEB members must be part of the starting point in the research process.

At the same time, however, religious institutions do present obstacles for women that are not present in secular organizations. Thus, I am also approaching this research process with a certain "hermeneutics of suspicion." As Shelley Finson has pointed out, this suspicion is not in regard to the women themselves, but rather "in regard to the context within which and out of which they are functioning," namely, the Church (in Kirby & McKenna, 1989:33).

My involvement in the participatory research process has been, therefore, part of a broader process of developing an understanding of the role of CEBs, from a sociological

perspective, in contributing toward women's movement for change.

A French worker-priest in Nicaragua, in talking about the "Reign of God" in a mass, said that many people who do not call themselves Christians are working to build the Reign of God, while many who call themselves Christian, are not. Ernst Bloch's concept of "concrete utopia" is perhaps the closest secular equivalent to the religious notion of "Reign of God."⁴ This thesis falls within an alternative research paradigm in that the knowledge being created attempts to be an expression of my commitment to the creation of "concrete utopias" through feminist and liberatory praxis. Although my perspective is sociological and that of the CEBs is theological, these standpoints come together in that we are both working, in different yet overlapping ways, to "build the Reign of God."

In summary, the methodology for this thesis falls within the framework of an alternative research paradigm in that the knowledge being generated is not "neutral" but aims to help improve the condition and position of women in two ways: (1) through the introduction of gender analysis into the conscientization work of the CEBs (and specifically through

⁴ Bloch distinguishes between "unrealistic dreams of the future" as "abstract utopias" and "images of the future that are grounded in authentic intuitions of the ills and contradictions present in society" as "concrete utopias." Concrete utopias "negate the most oppressive elements of this society and present a vision of human life that, even if as such unrealizable, summon forth new ways of thinking and acting that could lead to actual social change" (in Baum, 1975:171). A planning workshop of the Coordinating Committee of the CEBs in September, 1993, began with the question "What is the Reign of God?" Everyone agreed that it was both "distant and utopian" and a "sign of hope" for the present.

the women in the participatory research project acquiring a more systematic understanding of the impact of structures of gender subordination on their lives) and (2) through a contribution to the literature in the area of women, religion and social change. The approach to the research question is a triangulation approach, with both primary (participant observation, interviews and participatory research) and secondary data collection. The methodology, thus, is directed towards contributing to both the integration of bodies of theoretical knowledge (feminist and development theory and sociological approaches to the study of religion) which have had little overlap and the praxis of liberation of Nicaraguan Catholic women organized at the grass-roots level through Ecclesial Base Communities.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: Women, Religion and Social Change in Latin America

The revolutionary potential of Christianity is self-evident to the millions of Christians who have struggled for social change in Latin America, often with the inspiration and guidance of a revolutionary biblical hermeneutics. Understood in a broader context, however, this is only one of the many ways in which religion has had an impact upon society, and vice versa. One need not search too long to find also examples of the oppressive role of religion, and Christianity in particular - the Crusades, the Inquisition and the colonization of indigenous peoples in the Americas for instance. With respect to women, the Catholic Church has been responsible for the creation of a religious and cultural value system in which women are caught between the models of Eve and Mary, always striving to achieve the impossible ideal of the self-sacrificing, virginal mother while having to bear Eve's burden of being responsible for the sins of "mankind."

How then, does one begin to make sense of these seemingly contradictory roles of Christianity? The approach which will

be adopted here is to explore religion in terms of the inter-relationship between religion and society. This inter-relationship is not static, but must be examined within the particular historical, economic and religious context of a given society. The chapter aims, thus, to establish a conceptual framework for a sociological approach to the study of religion within the context of women and religion in Latin America. The objectives in establishing this conceptual framework are two-fold. The first is to demonstrate that religion has, in some circumstances, the potential to be an emancipatory force in society. Having established this, the second objective is then to explore the emancipatory possibilities of religion for women. Rather than developing a "universal theory" regarding women, religion and social change, this thesis explores the question of the emancipatory potential of religion for women by comparing the "theoretical" possibilities with the actual experience of working on an educational ("gender consciousness") project with women who are members of a religious community. In this way, the theory informs the primary research (educational project) and the educational project, in turn, contributes to the theoretical literature and debates.

The conceptual framework will be established in three parts. The first explores different sociological approaches to the study of religion with the aim of establishing a framework for examining the relationship between religion and

society within the Latin American context. The second section explores various approaches to women within development literature with the aim of establishing a framework for examining the relationship between feminist and grass roots women's praxis within the Latin American context. Finally, part three combines the first two sections to develop a framework for the study of women, religion and society within the Latin American context. Thus, we return to the original question: "What is the potential within CEBs, as religious organizations, to engage in gender consciousness work and contribute towards women's movement for social change?"

3.1 Religion and Social Change: Towards a Sociological Understanding of Latin American Liberation Theology

The project of the sociologist is to describe and explain how different religious groups are formed, persist or change in society, and how they are related to social change (Ralston, 1985:9).

Sociology of religion does not pretend to provide a framework which encompasses and explains all of human religious activity. It is an attempt, rather, to explain the religious insofar as it is a social phenomenon which is socially and contextually situated. As is the case in any process of social inquiry, however, a consensus does not exist among theorists as to the changing nature of religion and its

connection to the social context. The following section provides a brief overview of different sociological approaches to the study of religion. A critique of earlier evolutionist, functionalist and Marxist approaches will form the basis for the argument that the "project of the sociologist" is to contribute towards a comparative perspective on the different relationships which exist between religious groups and social change.

19th and Early 20th Century Approaches

Early sociological studies, carried out primarily in the nineteenth century by European scholars, were part of the attempt to interpret the changes occurring in European society as a result of the social and economic upheavals of the time. In their analysis of religion, they turned to the evolutionary models of changes in the natural world put forth by Charles Darwin to develop theories and models of the movement of human society through evolutionary stages.

Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), for instance, believed that societies progressed through stages of animism to polytheism to monotheism (Garbarino, 1977:30). Auguste Comte (1798-1857) believed that, as human societies progressed through primitive and intermediary to scientific stages of development, they also moved from a theological phase to a metaphysical and then positivist phase in the development of ideas (Inkeles, 1964:30). Sir James Fraser (1854-1941),

writing somewhat later, came up with another three-fold evolutionary scheme in which society moved through the stages of magic, religion, and science.

Evolutionary perspectives hold the assumption that societies will inevitably progress through a set of linear stages to reach an era of modernization in which a religious worldview is replaced by a rational and scientific one. This progression of all human societies through a linear sequence towards a modern industrial form of social and economic organization is not necessarily happening, however, nor is it necessarily a sign of progress.¹ Furthermore, modern industrial societies are not abandoning entirely a religious worldview for a positivist, rational and scientific one.²

Another sociological approach to religion is encompassed by a functionalist perspective within the social sciences. Functionalism "sees society as an ongoing equilibrium of

1. Evolutionary theories of social change have been precursors to twentieth century modernization theories. Generally speaking, modernization theory assumes that all societies either are, or should be, moving towards modernization by emulating the European development model of shifting from rural agricultural to urban industrial societies, and that the transition towards modernization is defined as progress. See Bjorn Hettne (1991) for a critique of the "modernization paradigm" of development.

2. For many, modernization and "secularization" go hand in hand. Secularization asserts that religion is becoming less and less important in society (Greeley, 1982:1) as an increasing number of people "look upon their world and their own lives without ... religious interpretation" (Berger, 1969:109). Many authors have pointed out, however, that in fact religion is not disappearing with industrialization and modernization. Roger O'Toole, for instance, asserts that the "unwillingness of religious bodies in the Third World to make their exit quietly," among other groups, can be regarded as "unshakable evidence of a religious will to survive, and indeed to triumph" (1984:4).

social institutions which pattern human activity in terms of shared norms, held to be legitimate and binding by the human participants themselves" (O'Dea, 1966:2). Functionalism, thus, is based on an equilibrium model of society which sees conflict as a transitory or accidental "dysfunction." Religion, in this context, is one of the "social institutions" which plays a role in maintaining social cohesion, which in turn helps to maintain a society in equilibrium. If religion is not fulfilling its function of social cohesion and equilibrium, this is seen as an anomaly (Maduro, 1989:118).

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), for instance, attempted to explain, using cross-cultural data, how institutions bound people together and maintained social cohesion, or social "solidarity." (Garbarino, 1978:37-8). The functionalist perspective with respect to religion can be critiqued on the assumption that religion will always fulfil the same function - of "psychological security" and "social cohesion" - and that this function will "converge with others towards the maintenance of the internal harmonious equilibrium of a society" (Maduro, 1989:118).

Karl Marx is another theorist who has had a significant impact on the study of religion. Although Marx is most often associated with his theory of religion as "the opium of the people," he in fact went through different stages in his thinking.

In the perspective of the "early Marx," as reflected in

his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" the critique of capitalism is connected to his critique of religion through the concept of alienation. Marx felt that religion represented a form of sacred alienation and "false consciousness" because it objectified people from themselves. In other words, if a person looked to the "fantastic reality of heaven" in search of a supernatural being, this represented a form of false consciousness because this supernatural being is an "other," a semblance of self, a non-human being (Marx 1978[1843]:53). Religion, thus, created an illusory reality, in the same way that a drug such as opium would.

Marx argued, in 1843, that having unmasked "human self-alienation in its sacred form," it was necessary to likewise unmask it in its secular form (Marx, 1978 [1843]:53-4). Marx, in fact, saw "the criticism of religion" as being "the basis of all criticism" (p.53). If workers could make the shift from false to true consciousness in the realm of the sacred, then likewise it could be done in the realm of the secular, and specifically in terms of acquiring a true consciousness regarding their alienation under capitalism.

The early writings of Marx have been described as a reflection of "vulgar materialism." These writings arose in large part as a critique of idealism, and in particular Hegelian idealism. In his later writing, however, he begins to fuse the material and ideal in a dialectical manner rather than depending on vulgar materialism. This is evident in his

1845 Theses on Feuerbach in which he "presents his position as the dialectical transcendence" of both the old materialism and old idealism, retaining thus both "the affirmation of the objectivity of the external world" and "the transforming capacity of human nature" (Gutiérrez, 1988:18). While Feuerbach had argued for the existence of a universal human essence, Marx countered with the argument that "subjective questions about human existence," including "religious sentiment" were "human sensuous activity" rooted in practice. That is, that human essence, including religious belief as an aspect of human essence, is itself a social product (Marx, 1978 [1845]:143).

Having established that religion is the quintessential form of alienation in 1843, Marx goes on two years later to argue that religion is a social product and must be considered in the context of human activity and practice rather than as a universal configuration of human existence. If this is so, then would it not be possible to construct religious sentiments that were not alienating? Had this not existed prior to the time period he was writing in, and did it not exist simultaneously in parts of the world other than the one he was writing about? Roger Lancaster has argued that, had Marx taken this idea of religion to its logical conclusion, he would have had to rethink his theory of religion:

... had Marx reworked his conception of religion as a form of representational practice ... he might have drawn radically different conclusions about religion's function in cross-cultural settings (Lancaster, 1988: 190).

The Marxist theory of religion as alienation, false consciousness and an obstacle to political practice (and thus human liberation) was relevant to the context within which Marx was writing. It must however, "be subjected to the tests of past and present history, and hence be open to correction" (Ugalde, in Maduro, 1989:xx).

Marx coincides with evolutionist theorists in that he sees society as moving along a linear continuum in which religion will cease to be necessary in a scientific and rational world. Marx and Marxist theorists have differed from functionalist theorists in that they use conflict rather than equilibrium models to explain social organization and change. When taken as a universal theory, however, Marxist theory "coincides with functionalism in defining religion as a social institution tending always to fulfil the same equilibrating function in society ("opium of the people") - playing a destabilizing, revolutionary role only by way of exception" (Maduro, 1989:156).

In different ways, evolutionist, functionalist and Marxist approaches attempt to develop universal theories regarding the role of religion in society. Max Weber, writing somewhat later, adopted a different approach. Rather than study a specific society in its historical progression, he argued for the need to examine the relationship between religion and society from a comparative perspective.

This was not entirely new. Durkheim, as we have seen, used cross-cultural data. Durkheim felt, however, that the comparative method could be used to "discover general laws about society and its institutions, including its religious institutions" (Beteille, 1992:1860). The key point of departure in Weber's theorizing on religion is that the comparative study of different religious systems does not necessarily lead to the formulation of general laws. Gregory Baum has argued, for instance, that although Weber's sociology of religion distinguishes between magic, priestly religion and prophecy, these are meant to be "ideal types" rather than "concepts representing ... existing social realities" (1975:165-6). Although Weber argued that religious "breakthroughs" occurred (due to the presence of charismatic power or authority) he did not believe in linear evolution, nor did he believe in the existence of a universal ethics. He was, rather, "personally convinced that present in the human world were many diverse and irreconcilable values ... which could never be brought together in a single synthesis" (p.167). Weber's contribution is thus significant because he does not attempt to develop general or universal laws regarding the relationship between religion and society but, rather, recognizes the need for a comparative approach which explores the different ways in which this relationship manifests itself in both historical and contemporary settings.

While there are limitations, and contradictions, among

the different approaches to the study of religion which have been outlined, they also all have in common the fact that they see the focus of sociological study as being the social origin of religion, and "the conditions and effects of a particular type of social behaviour" (Weber, 1967:1). In addition, although Marx's theory of religion as alienation cannot be universalized, and, indeed runs counter to the argument being formulated here, a Marxist analysis of class conflict does inform the perspective of religion as a situated reality which will be explored subsequently. Finally, Weber's negation of the existence of a universal ethic likewise facilitates the establishing of a contextually specific exploration of religion.

A Latin American Sociology of Religion

As we have seen, sociology, as the "scientific study of society," emerged in the 19th century "as at least partially the outcome of the changes, divisions, conflicts, reactions, and threats" in Europe "under the sweeping force of nationalism, liberalism and capitalism" (Maduro, 1991:166). The establishing of sociology allowed for the "scientific study of religion" as an aspect of society. The models which attempted to explain the relationship between religion and society, some of which have been outlined above, were, however, almost entirely based on this nineteenth century European context. Thus, many of the conclusions which were

drawn regarding the role of religion in society must be likewise limited to this context.

Otto Maduro argues that a similar process is underway in Latin America, albeit "at a more limited level," and that "this process is partly as a result of the development of LALT [Latin American Liberation Theology]" (1991:168). He argues that the Latin American "realities" in the post-war period have been quite different from those of 19th century Europe and, as such, the specific context (historical, social, economic, political, cultural) of Latin America must be the point of departure for a properly Latin American sociology of religion (1989:33). Therefore, prior to a delineation of a Latin American sociology of religion, a brief outline of the emergence of liberation theology as it has emerged in the "Latin American context" is required.

Latin American Liberation Theology

Many authors see Latin American Liberation Theology (LALT) as being part of the prophetic stream within the Roman Catholic church in Latin America which has always been on the side of the "oppressed" - indigenous people, black people, poor peasants, workers, etc. Rosino Gibellini, for instance, speaks of the "non-academic theology of brave missionaries" such as Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas who spoke out against the exploitation of indigenous peoples by the *Conquistadores* during the period of Iberian colonialism in

in Latin America. Montesinos and las Casas are part of a "prophetic line which blossomed again in many periods through other figures and in other historical situations" (Gibellini, 1987:1).

Latin American Liberation Theology, while part of this prophetic stream, is also unique to the socio-historical context it is a part of. Its emergence in the 1960's can be attributed to two inter-related factors. One factor involves changes internal to the Roman Catholic Church, originating in Europe with the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) and later interpreted by Latin American Christians and theologians based on their own experiences and realities. The social and economic changes occurring in Latin America in the post-World War II era have also had an impact on the development of liberation theology.

Vatican II (1962-1965) represented the acceptance by the Church of the modern world.¹ (Baum, in Martin & Gill, 1980:125). It was an attempt to "rethink the nature of the Church, the world, and the proper relation between the two" (Levine, 1986:8). At Vatican II, the Church's interest

¹ This is not to say that the Church had not been present in the world up to this time. The Church of the first centuries (until its institutionalization as the religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in the fourth century) oriented itself "towards a new and radical service of people" (Gutiérrez, 1991:144). The prophetic stream within the Latin American Church which dates to the colonial era has also already been noted. The medieval Christian Church was influenced by philosophical ideas originating outside the Church, "particularly since the injection of Aristotelian thinking" (Robertson, 1986:73). One of the significant aspects of Vatican II is its looking to sociological explanations of the modern social world.

in sociological issues, and particularly modernization and development, began to emerge. This council was an important beginning in the promotion of internal change in the Catholic Church which included a new way of looking at the world. It represented, however, to a large extent the optimism of the 1960's of Western European Theologians largely identified with bourgeois culture (p.125).

The first Latin American Bishop's Conference following Vatican II, held in Medellin, Colombia in 1968, set about interpreting Vatican II according to the reality of Latin America in order to clarify the "Church's proper role in the region's continuing transformations" (Levine, 1986:8). The sociological analysis undertaken during Vatican II was expanded and reinterpreted according to the Latin American context of urbanization, industrialization and a dependent position in the world capitalist system.

Liberation theology was critical of the "developmentalism" (*desarrollismo*) of the 1950's and 1960's, which was associated with modernization models, and drew on dependency theories to elaborate a structural analysis of poverty and underdevelopment (Gutiérrez, 1991:16). Dependency theorists, broadly speaking, saw development and underdevelopment as being inter-related in that the underdevelopment of Latin America was a by-product (with its roots in the Colonial era) of the development of

industrialized capitalist countries.⁴

Liberation theology has also been influenced by Marxist theory, for instance regarding the importance of economic factors in "understanding the world of the oppressed," and regarding class conflict and violence (Boff & Boff, 1988:28 & Levine, 1986:9):

When dealing with the poor and oppressed and seeking their liberation, how do we avoid coming into contact with Marxist groups (on the practical level) and with Marxist theory (on the academic level)? This is ... hinted at in the use of such terms as "dialectical" or "historical-structural" explanations of the phenomenon of socio-economic poverty (Boff & Boff, 1988:27).

An understanding of "oppression" (the historical and structural causes of poverty, underdevelopment and institutionalized violence) are situated, in liberation theology, in the "praxis of liberation of the oppressed." This praxis of liberation is, in turn, based on the "oppression-liberation dialectic" which has been a part of Latin American history since the European conquest, and involves a search for a "complete and integral liberation" (Boff & Boff, 1988:68). This has involved "popular movements and Christian groups" coming together "in the struggle for social and political liberation" (p.68). Three levels of "liberation" have been identified within liberation theology: (1) liberation from "oppressive socio-economic structures,"

⁴ Dependency theory also examines the role of local elites in the incorporation of countries into the global market and the various forms dependency has taken given the diversity of patterns of growth in different Latin American countries. For an overview of dependency theories see Hettne, 1990 and Kay, 1989. For an analysis of dependency and liberation theology, see Gutiérrez, 1991.

(2) personal liberation, "by which we live with profound inner freedom in the face of every kind of servitude," and (3) liberation from sin, which is seen as "the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings" (Gutiérrez, 1991: xxxviii). These three levels of liberation are seen as encompassing "integral development" because liberation is not limited merely to its socio-economic aspect.

The point of departure in liberation theology is not sociological. Nor, in fact, is it theological per se. The point of departure is, rather, a pre-theological phase, that of the "lived experience of faith." Liberation theology has been defined as "faith confronted with oppression" (Boff & Boff, 1988:12) and as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the word of God" (Gutiérrez, 1991: xxix):

Discourse about God comes second because faith comes first and is the source of theology ... the effort at reflection has an irreplaceable role, but one that is always subordinate to a faith that is lived and receives guidance within the communion of the church (Gutiérrez, 1991:xxxiii-iv).

Liberation theology is thus fundamentally concerned with questions of faith. Moreover, theological and sociological "mediations" follow from these faith experiences. Liberation theology in Latin America has been, simultaneously, a result of, reflection of, and rationale for the emergence of new social groups concerned with a "radical transformation of the entire Latin American socio-religious scene" (Maduro, 1991:166).

The following section, building upon both the historical

background of the development of sociological perspectives on religion as well as the concrete circumstances within which liberation theology emerged in Latin America, outlines a Latin American sociology of religion as a theoretical framework within which these relationships can be explored.

A Latin American Sociology of Religion

In his 1989 book (originally published in Spanish in 1979), Religion and Social Conflicts, Maduro sets out a three-fold articulation of the way in which religion and society are connected. In a 1991 article ("Some Theoretical Implications of Latin American Liberation Theology for the Sociology of Religions"), he expands his analysis to include a fourth factor related to the importance of individuals within religious institutions. Following is an outline of this framework, based on both the 1989 book and 1991 article.

The theoretical framework developed by Maduro is as follows: (1) religion is shaped and influenced by the social context, (2) religion has relative autonomy vis à vis society, (3) religion has an impact on societal change and stabilization, and (4) individuals, and their creativity, have an influence on both religion and society.

(1) The Shaping Influence of the Social Context on Religion

Maduro argues that "every religion is a situated reality," and, more precisely, it is situated in a specific

mode of production (Maduro, 1989:41).¹. The way in which a society is structured around its mode of production, in turn, limits and orients the possibilities for action of any form of religious organization within it. The possibilities for action are limited and oriented in the sense that people within a given society, and a given religion, have neither an infinite set of simultaneous alternatives to choose from nor finite alternatives that are all equivalent to each other (p.42).

Maduro's thesis on the impact of the social context has in common with Marxist theory the idea that religion is a social product. He differs from Marx, however, in that Marx saw religion as encompassing essentially one finite possibility - that of religion as alienation. He further differs from Marx in that, while Marx argued that societies move through different stages of the development of productive forces (with only one particular mode of production being possible in each stage), Maduro argues that society represents a structured reality in which several modes of production are possible. Maduro, however, also can be called into question because of his exclusive emphasis on the mode of production of a particular society as the activity which "makes possible and supports all other human activities, including ... religious

¹ Maduro defines mode of production in Marxist terms, in which the central structure of each society (its infrastructure) is "constituted by a population's specific organization in relation to its material (its natural and developed) resources, in view of the satisfaction of its needs" (1989:41).

beliefs and practices" (p.44). This point will be returned to below in the discussion on incorporating gender analysis into the sociology of religion framework.

Maduro argues further that societies, broadly speaking, are characterized by either communitarian or asymmetric modes of production (1991:48). Religious institutions in Latin America are formed by an asymmetric mode of production which is characterized by unbalanced power relations and "a structured context of oppression, especially after the European invasion" (p.173).

Vatican II, as well as the Medellin and Puebla conferences, can be seen as examples of religious institutions being shaped by their social context. As was noted above, Vatican II was an attempt on the part of the Catholic Church to "move into the world." Likewise, Medellin and Puebla were attempts to respond to changes occurring in Latin America in the economic, political and social spheres.

(2) The Internal Conflicting Dynamics of Religious Institutions.

In addition to being shaped and influenced by society, religious institutions also possess "relative autonomy" in the sense that "structures, conflicts, and transformations occurring on the level of an entire society as such do not directly, mechanically, or automatically influence religious teachings and practices within that society" (Maduro, 1989:87). Thus, a religious institution has certain internal

dynamics which will partially determine what actions are "highly likely, merely probable, or just plainly impossible to take place" (1991:175). For instance, a woman may live in a country where sterilization is legal, but may be constrained and/or prevented in making the decision to have this operation because of the ethical opposition to it in the religious institution to which she belongs.

The concept of "religious production" (the production of certain types of religious teachings and practices - doctrines, prayers, sacraments, rites, etc.) is also central to an understanding of the internal dynamics and relative autonomy of religious institutions. Maduro argues that societies with class stratification have a greater degree of specialization and differentiation in the area of religious production. These societies are characterized by a greater distance between material and religious production; the latter being assumed by a body of religious functionaries rather than being shared equally among members of society (1989:85-7). The existence of a body of religious functionaries is partially a result of the shaping influence of society upon religious institutions. Once established, however, this internal division of religious work may directly influence which forms of organization, and which teachings and practices, are possible, desirable, acceptable, unacceptable or impossible within religious institutions. (p.86). CEBs can be seen as engaging in a new mode of religious production

through their emphasis on lay leadership and participation of members in theological reflection and in liturgy which reflects the lives of the poor.

The assertion that religion has relative autonomy vis-à-vis society is a recognition, therefore, that religion is not absolutely independent of society (being a product of it) but that it is also not determined in its entirety by society (1989:87).

(3) The Impact of Religion on Societal Change and Stabilization

In addition to being influenced by society and possessing certain internal dynamics which limit or allow certain actions within religious institutions, Maduro argues that religious institutions are able to exert influence upon society. The concepts of "worldview" and "hegemony" are both key to this argument.

Human beings "whether they know it or not - produce their social relationships" and they produce these relationships through actions limited and oriented by (among other things) a shared worldview. (Maduro, 1989:115). Furthermore, one of the "basic aspects of every religion is its function in shaping a determinate worldview" (p.115):

The common interest entertained by all human beings, social groups, and communities to have a worldview that will permit them to situate and orientate themselves, and to act, in the most satisfactory manner possible in their socio-natural milieu becomes, for some societies and social groups, a properly religious interest. (p.116-7).

Maduro argues that a religious worldview developed by any given society or social group functions as a "terrain of mediation" which "opens up determinate possibilities for activity" and also "limits and orients the very activity it enables" (1989:115-17). Thus, religion can have an influence upon society through a religious worldview because this worldview forms the consciousness and identity of the people who adhere to it. Maduro also notes that, in societies with class stratification, the production of a religious worldview is carried out by a body of religious functionaries.

The role of Christians who joined the armed struggle in Nicaragua to overthrow the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza is an example of one religious worldview which determines specific actions. Although they were accused of being communist both by the Somoza regime and by the US government, many people were in fact motivated by Christian beliefs which were expressed through a revolutionary biblical hermeneutics.

The concept of worldview is connected to that of hegemony. A dominant class, or bloc, for instance, will use their hegemony to exert a certain religious worldview. The opposite, however, is also possible. In other words, a dominant class or bloc will both legitimize its dominance, through religious production, practices and discourses, as "something desired by supernatural and metasocial forces," and deligitimize (i.e. present as not desired by supernatural or metasocial forces) any "individuals, groups or movements"

which threaten this dominance.^{*} The accusation of the Church hierarchy in Nicaragua that the CEBs are too "political" and have strayed from the properly spiritual place of religious belief is one such example.

Thus a religious group, through its religious worldview, is able to exert influence upon society, for instance through the establishing of hegemony over or within this society. In Latin America, the Catholic Church was able to establish hegemony from the time of Spanish and Portuguese conquest until independence and the liberal reforms of the 19th century which sought to undo the Church-state alliance. The Church's patriarchal religious worldview is another aspect of the hegemony of the Church in society. In the past twenty or thirty years, the emergence of liberation theology and the participation of thousands of Christians in revolutionary struggles and social movements in Latin America represent an attempt to counter the dominance of a repressive state apparatus and create a "popular" hegemony.

The potential for religion to play an active role in social change is, as Maduro points out, both limited and variable. The actions taken are influenced by the social

^{*} This is a key aspect which differentiates hegemony from the concept of dominance. Raymond Williams, for instance, notes that the concept of hegemony includes but also goes beyond "articulate and formal meanings, values and beliefs which a dominant class develops and propagates" (Williams, 1977:110). Following Gramsci, who originally re-interpreted the Marxist concept of hegemony, Williams argues that hegemony "sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms as practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living" (p.110).

context just as they in turn influence this context, and are also either constrained or supported depending on the internal dynamics of a particular religious group or institution. An important point, however, is that the potential for religion to play an active role in social change exists. This potential, for instance, the motivation to participate in struggles to transform unjust social structures through Christian conviction, runs counter to both the functionalist notion that religion will always play a stabilizing role in society and the Marxist theory of religion as alienation. The continued predominance and importance of religion in Latin America (including the growth of Protestant and Evangelical Churches) also contradict the evolutionist thesis that religion will disappear as societies progress.

(4) The Influence of Individuals and their Creativity on Religion and Society

Individuals interact with their religious contexts in a similar way that religion interacts with the social context of which it is a part. Individuals, as creative actors, charismatic leaders and unique human beings, are influenced and shaped by the world in which they live just as they have the potential to influence and shape it in turn.

Much of the analysis on Latin American liberation theology has been carried out at a "macro" level which does not address the agency of individuals within religious institutions. Madeleine Adriance, in her study of the role of

pastoral agents (priests, religious and lay people) in the Ecclesial Base Communities in Brazil, points out that:

Despite all the information on the relationship of religion to social change that has been generated by studies of base communities, very little has been written about the people who facilitate their development at the grassroots level (Adriance, 1991:293).

The role of individuals within religious organizations has particular relevance in that one of the criticisms of the sociology of religion is that the analysis has not critically incorporated an analysis of gender. Yet, women have, historically, played a key role in the Church. In the CEBs in Esteli most of the pastoral agents, as well as the CEB members, are women. Yet, given the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church, all of the priests, bishops and cardinals are men. What does this say about the society-religion relationship? Why has it not been adequately addressed in the literature?

To attempt to answer these and other questions, it is necessary to move beyond the sociology of religion literature. The following section reviews theoretical and policy perspectives on women's subordination. This section focuses on the literature which has emerged in the area of gender and development, with a particular focus on theory and practice which has emerged within women's movement in Latin America since the 1970's. Some attention has been given in the latter body of literature to women's participation in grass-roots Church groups, but primarily as a means of differentiating

these "women's" groups from "feminist" groups. Analytical concepts from gender and development in the context of women's movement in Latin America will then be combined with analytical concepts from Maduro's framework in the context of Latin American liberation theology in the final section of this chapter.

3.2 Women and Social Change: Towards an Integration of Feminist and Grass-Roots Women's Praxis in Latin America

As we have seen, Ecclesial Base Communities, as religiously-based social movements, began to emerge in Latin America in the 1960's and 1970's. This was in the context of both repressive military regimes (or nominal democracies) and the dependant position of Latin America within the world capitalist system. Women were (and continue to be) active participants in CEBs and other grass-roots organizations. During the same time period, explicitly feminist organizations also emerged in Latin America.

What are the links between feminist praxis and women's organizing? This section aims to explore these links and suggests, in keeping with a "gender and development" approach, that these links should be "bottom-up" rather than "top-down." That is, that women organizing in the popular sectors around

a wide variety of issues stand to benefit from the analysis of power dynamics in gender relationships which has evolved in the past thirty years of feminist movement in Latin America. The starting point in this process must be, however, the lived experiences - including needs, priorities and aspirations - of women in the popular sectors rather than the imposition of feminist theories which, although stemming from feminist praxis, do not necessarily stem from the experiences of poor women. The experience of women in the popular sectors, in turn, is able to contribute towards the understanding of gender relations - and the way in which they intersect with class, race and underdevelopment - within women's movement.

This analysis will be formulated in three parts. The first outlines gender and development (GAD) as an approach to development from the standpoint of poor women in the Third World. This section includes an overview of both "women in development" (WID) and "women and development" (WAD) approaches which preceded the emergence of GAD (and continue now). The second section provides an overview of women's movement in Latin America since the 1970's. The final section seeks a fusion of the first two by examining the potential for introducing gender analysis into grass roots women's groups from the standpoint of the women who are members of these groups.

"WID, WAD, GAD"

Three distinct approaches, in terms of policy and praxis, can be delineated which examine the condition and position of women in developing countries. The first, WID, remains the preferred approach among most governments and lending agencies and is embedded in a "modernization approach" to development. The second, WAD, originates in a Marxist framework for understanding women's oppression and has been prevalent among many groups associated with the Left in Latin America. The third, GAD, although influenced by socialist feminism, seeks to develop a bottom-up strategy for the empowerment of poor women. The following section outlines in more detail each of these approaches.

"Women in Development"

In 1970, Ester Boserup published Women's Role in Economic Development. Eva Rathgeber sees the "Women in Development," or "WID" approach as having emerged out of Boserup's research. Rathgeber states that this research focused "scholarly attention on the sexual division of labour and the differential impact by gender of development and modernization strategies." (1988:2). Beneria & Sen also state that Boserup's book represents a "comprehensive and pioneering effort to provide an overview of women's role in the development process" (1986:141).

Boserup argues that women were detrimentally affected by colonial agricultural policies aimed at replacing subsistence

agricultural systems ("female farming systems") with the cultivation of commercial crops for export. This was because European extension agents ignored the vital role women played in agriculture and focused on incorporating men into export crop cultivation:⁷

The Europeans, accustomed to the male farming systems of their home countries, looked with little sympathy on this unfamiliar distribution of the workload between the sexes and understandably, the concept of the 'lazy African men' was firmly fixed in the minds of settlers and administrators. European extension agents in many parts of Africa tried to induce the under-employed male villagers to cultivate commercial crops for export to Europe (Boserup, 1970:19).

While Boserup's work has been applauded as a pioneering exploration into the differential impact of development on men and women, it has also been critiqued by feminist writers who feel Boserup's analysis is incomplete. Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen (1986) for instance, critique Boserup's analysis based on three weaknesses: (1) the lack of an explicitly outlined theoretical framework, (2) the taking as a given the western, capitalist model of development, and (3) the lack of analysis of the role of women in reproduction.

Boserup does not explicitly state a theoretical framework

⁷Boserup's work is based on research on women and subsistence agriculture in Africa. She points out the different roles women and men had in agricultural production prior to European colonization. In many parts of Africa, men were responsible for the felling of trees (in systems of shifting cultivation), hunting and warfare (1970:19). Women were responsible for the tasks directly related to food production, including: removal and burning of felled trees; sowing or planting in the ashes; weeding and harvesting the crop; and carrying in the crop for storage or consumption (p.17). This represents a system of female farming where the fieldwork is done exclusively by women. She also distinguishes female farming systems where men help with the field work, as well as male farming systems, where the field work is undertaken predominantly by men. She associates the latter with agricultural systems which use a higher level of agricultural technology (for example, the use of the plow versus the hoe), and focuses on Asia as an example of this.

that forms the basis of her research. Beneria and Sen argue, however, that her assumptions are embedded within the framework of neo-classical economics. This can be seen, for instance, in her focus on individual values, biases and preferences (of European extension agents) as causal factors rather than an analysis of systemic forces of capital accumulation which "influence the labour market and the process of wage formation" (Beneria & Sen, 1986:14).

Boserup's conclusion that women are marginalized in the process of economic development does not lead to an overall critique of this process, but rather to a call for changes in policy to redress this problem and allow for women to participate more fully in the modernization process. Thus, the underlying assumption is that "modernization is both beneficial and inevitable in the specific form it has taken in most Third World countries" (p.145). Boserup's analysis is limited to women's role in production - subsistence agricultural production. She does not examine the connection between women's work as farmers and their role in reproduction, for instance within the domestic sphere.

Women's Role in Economic Development was part of a growing body of literature on women in the development process which began to emerge in the 1970's which focused on "integrating women into development." This perspective has come to be known as the "Women in Development" approach. This term was first used by the women's committee of the

Washington, D.C. chapter of the Society for International Development (Rathgeber, 1984:2). Three distinct policy approaches within WID have emerged since the 1970's: Equity, Anti-Poverty and Efficiency. Each of these will be reviewed briefly before passing on to a discussion of Marxist approaches to "women and development."

The Equity Approach

This approach is rooted in liberal feminist assumptions about women's condition and position in society, and in a belief that "the necessary legal and administrative changes would ensure that women had equal access to work and to its economic rewards (Jacquette, 1982:271). One of the first aid organizations to adopt an Equity approach was USAID, through an amendment to Section 113 of the US Foreign Assistance Act, the "Percy Amendment." This section stated that bilateral assistance be administered "so as to give particular attention to those programs, projects, and activities which tend to integrate women into the national economies of developing countries" (USAID, nd:2).

Although this approach calls for the active participation of women in development, as well as for certain structural changes, it does not recognize the need for deeper structural transformation, particularly with respect to class distinctions and the international organization of production. Thus, the Equity Approach focuses solely on the relationship

between women and men. In addition, this approach has tended to be elaborated by first world feminists, thus representing a "top-down" perspective.

The Anti-Poverty Approach

The realization in the early 1970's that the benefits of economic growth and "modernization" were not reaching the poor led to the emergence of the Basic Needs Approach (BNA) to development. The BNA called for a "straight relationship between development strategy and elimination of poverty rather than waiting for the 'trickling down' effects of growth" (Hettne, 1990:167). This approach was adopted by several United Nations agencies. The ILO, for instance, focused on employment creation, while the World Bank called for "redistribution with growth." (p.168). The anti-poverty approach grew out of the basic needs approach in that low-income women were identified as a "target" group. It was thought that increasing the "productivity and income of women in the lowest income houses" would "promote economic growth" (Buvnic, 1982:16). Thus, women's subordinate position was seen primarily in terms of their poverty, rather than in terms of their status vis-à-vis men (Moser, 1989).

Although this approach represented an acknowledgement that "trickle down" was not working, at the level of macro-economic decision making, very little in fact changed. As Sen and Grown have pointed out, the "methodology adopted for the

new lending lines marked little change from the [World] Bank's established support of commercialization and market integration and expansion (1987:38).

The Efficiency Approach

This is the most recent approach to women in development. It emerged in the 1980's with the imposition of structural adjustment programmes, primarily by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, as a means for debtor nations in the Third World to address balance of payments problems. The objective of structural adjustment programmes is to restructure national economies by reducing the role of the state (privatization and cut-backs in social spending) and promoting export-led growth and trade and price liberalization. These policies are designed to create greater "efficiency" by allowing the market to operate free from government intervention. One of the areas in which the efficiency approach relies on women is in providing social services that are reduced or eliminated as a result of decreases in state spending:

With the increasingly inadequate state provision of housing and basic services such as water and health, it is women who not only suffer most, but also who are forced to take responsibility for the allocation of limited resources to ensure the survival of their households (Moser, 1989:1801).

The efficiency approach relies on women "stretching" their time. For instance, women have primary responsibility for child-care, and so will spend more time with sick children

(rather than having them go to a doctor or hospital); women tend to be responsible for providing meals and so will perhaps spend longer gathering fuel and water or preparing less expensive meals and women are responsible for the education of their children and so will take on extra work to pay for school books or quotas. In some cases, women and girls will also eat less than boys and men within the family, and boys will be given preference over girls for education. This represents a shift in the provision of social services from the paid economy (the state) to the unpaid economy (women's "volunteer" work). The efficiency approach does not question the engendered division of labour in productive and reproductive tasks. In fact, "efficiency" results in longer working days for women rather than a decrease in their already overextended responsibilities. Also, women are often hardest hit with lay-offs which are the result of government cutbacks because they tend to be over-represented in the so-called "helping professions" such as teaching, health care and child care. The main focus of this approach is not poverty per se, but "development," as defined by institutions such as the IMF and World Bank.

All of the policy approaches within the WID framework fall within the modernization paradigm. Whether the focus is on women's subordination relative to men (equity), improving the condition of poor women by focusing on their productive roles (anti-poverty), or focusing on the development process

itself and seeing women in terms of their "delivery capacity" to provide social services (efficiency), none of these approaches acknowledges the existence of conflict rooted in class struggles or the position of Third World nations within the global capitalist system. None of them recognizes, for instance, the contributions of dependency theory or Marxist analysis (Rathgeber, 1988:6). As such, they do not fundamentally question the modernization process. Furthermore, the WID approach overlooks the influence and impact of the intersection of race, class and gender and does not challenge the basic social relations of gender or recognize the relations of exploitation among women (p.6).

"Women and Development"

The Women and Development approach (WAD) has its theoretical roots in Marxism and Marxist feminism. A Marxist analysis of women's subordination has some elements in common with the WID approach in that it focuses on women's productive roles. The understanding of these roles, however, is based on an analysis of the process of capital accumulation and class antagonism rather than on the influence of technology (in the case of Boserup's analysis) and on ways of increasing women's productive capacity (anti-poverty, efficiency) within the context of capitalist modernization processes:

The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male. (Engels in Tucker, ed.,

Marxists, and early Marxists in particular, relied heavily on the analysis put forth by Friedrich Engels in his monograph, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State." Engels argued that the root of women's subordination can be found in the shift from communal to private property, and the shift from subsistence to surplus agricultural economies. In this process, men acquired greater control over women because men had greater control over "domestic animals and land under settled farming conditions, (Jacquette, 1982,273). The creation of surplus involved a change from production for use to production for exchange, in which men controlled the latter through the marketing of livestock and crops and women became primarily responsible for production for use. Men, in order to control their accumulating wealth, had to be able to identify their heirs, and hence communal, matrilineal systems of social organization were replaced with family relations based on monogamy and social relations based on private property under capitalism (Maguire, 1984:29).

Contemporary Marxists have built on this analysis, focusing on women's relation to the means of production under industrial capitalism. They argue that the above relationships became more deeply entrenched as factory production further separated production for use (reproductive work within the home) from production for exchange (wage

labour outside the home) (Maguire, 1984:29). This served the profit interests of the capitalist class because "the role played by women as unpaid family workers and in reproducing the labour force" made it possible to "pay workers less than subsistence, and thus to increase capital accumulation" (Jacquette, 1982:274). Also, women's productive labour outside the home was subject to even lower wages than men's because their labour force participation was seen as being secondary to their "primary" role within the domestic sphere as wives and mothers.

Marxist feminists, while still analyzing women's subordination within the context of capitalism, place greater emphasis on "women's and men's separate relationship to the means of production" (Maguire, 1984:30). They have argued that early and contemporary Marxists have paid insufficient attention to domestic work, and call for the use of the concept of productive domestic labour as well as productive wage labour (p.30).

Marxists have argued that the key to women's emancipation is their incorporation into the paid labour force accompanied by the socialization of domestic tasks such as child care. The principal critique of early, contemporary and feminist Marxists is that they continue to explore gender relations exclusively within the context of class relations and do not engage in an analysis of patriarchy.

The "woman and development" approach has had little

impact on planning and policy-making in non-socialist countries. As was outlined above, most of the policy approaches to women within mainstream development institutions and agencies have been within the framework of modernization theory. The WAD approach has had a significant impact, however, within both left-wing political parties and social movements in Latin America, a point which will be returned to below.

"Gender and Development"

Several authors (Jacquette, 1982; Maguire, 1984; Rathgeber, 1988) attribute the theoretical roots of the "Gender and Development" approach to development to socialist feminism:

[GAD] ... finds its theoretical roots in socialist feminism and has bridged the gap left by modernization theorists, linking the relations of production to the relations of reproduction and taking into account all aspects of women's lives (Rathgeber, 1988:10).

Within a socialist feminist framework, a Marxist class analysis and a feminist analysis of gender were fused to form a critique of "capitalist patriarchy" (Eisenstein, 1978). According to Eisenstein, "many socialist feminists were radical feminists first (p.35). Other authors attribute the emergence of socialist feminism "in part as an attempt to deal with the "unhappy marriage" of Marxism and feminism" (Maguire, 1984:31). Whatever the precise theoretical trajectory of socialist feminism, the main point in its original analysis

was the need to examine the intersection of class and gender, thus identifying "the social construction of production and reproduction as the basis of women's oppression ..."
(Rathgeber, 1988:10).

On the other hand, other authors stress the origins of the GAD approach in Third World women's movement. Caroline Moser's for instance, defines GAD as the "Empowerment Approach," stating:

The origins of the empowerment approach are derived less from the research of First World women, and more from the emergent feminist writings and grass-roots organization experience of Third World women (Moser, 1989:1815).

In "Two Halves Make a Whole: Balancing Gender Relations in Development," a training manual for gender and development education, the authors state that GAD has its origins in both

Third World women's learning from efforts made to integrate them into mainstream development and the growing efforts of women from both North and South to develop alternative analysis and actions. (CCIC et al., 1991:12).

There is not a clear consensus in the literature as to the origins of GAD, which makes the task of outlining the essential elements of this approach that much more difficult. Broadly speaking, however, by focusing on gender rather than women, this approach recognizes the need to examine the social construction of gender relations, rather than looking in isolation at particular roles women have. There is also the recognition that gender relations and identities are not static, but vary culturally and over time (CCIC et al., 1991:16).

Several analytical concepts are used within socialist

feminism/GAD which are useful in trying to understand the "complex matrix" of women's lives. These include the following: production, reproduction and community managing; the private versus the public sphere and practical gender needs versus strategic gender interest. The following paragraphs outline each of these concepts before exploring the question of strategies for the empowerment of poor women within a socialist feminist/GAD approach.

Productive work is defined as either labour related to subsistence agricultural production, or labour which has an exchange value, such as remunerated work within the formal or informal labour force.⁹

Reproductive work refers to both the biological and social reproduction of society. Biological reproduction refers to pregnancy, child-birth and lactation. Social reproduction involves both domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing and activities involving the provision of services such as education and health care as well as emotional and psychological support for members of society

⁹ This definition differs, for instance, from that given by Maria Mies in her 1982 article, "The Dynamics of the Sexual Division of Labour and Integration of Rural Women into the World Market." In this article, she argues that productive labour has been defined too narrowly as being labour which produces surplus value: "[T]he separation from and the superimposition of surplus-producing labour over life-producing labour is an abstraction that leads to the fact that women and their work are being 'defined into nature'" (Mies, 1982:4). Hence, subsistence production, as well as the "production of life," should also be considered productive labour. In this thesis, however, the "production of life" is considered reproductive labour.

(Brydon & Chant, 1989:10).⁹

Community managing work includes women's participation in communal kitchens, public health campaigns, community-based income generation projects and other projects such as forming child-care centres or obtaining essential services (water, sewerage, electricity). As we have seen, certain development policies, such as the "efficiency approach," rely on women's contribution in the meeting of these community needs. Caroline Moser argues that women take on these responsibilities "within their gender-ascribed role of wives and mothers" (1989:1801). Thus, community managing work can be seen as an extension of women's roles in social reproduction. An indication of this is that, while women are most often "community managers," men tend to be community leaders (p.1801).

Although many women work outside the home, the attitude persists that "women's place is in the private sphere of home and family, and men's, the public realm of workplace and politics" (NACLA, 1993:16). Much of the work of social reproduction is carried out within the private sphere.

⁹ Brydon & Chant in fact distinguish between "physical reproduction," which they see as encompassing domestic tasks such as cooking cleaning and washing, and "social reproduction" which they see as encompassing the provision of services and emotional psychological support (1989:10). Caroline Moser, in distinguishing between productive and reproductive work, does not differentiate the latter, but sees it as encompassing "childbearing and rearing responsibilities ... required to guarantee the maintenance and production of the labour force" (1989:1801). The "middle ground" has been adopted here of differentiating only those reproductive activities which are biologically determined from those which are socially determined.

Women's involvement in community development, although carried out in the public sphere, often comes out of an extension of women's household roles. Thus, while community managing work is mobilizing women at the grass-roots level, it does not represent a complete shift from the private to the public sphere or a complete transformation of gender roles in which women are predominately responsible for social reproduction and men for production.

GAD calls for a critical examination of women's roles in production, reproduction and community managing in order to reduce women's work and to provide a starting point for the restructuring of the relations of gender, class and race. Thus, the GAD approach recognizes that, with the exception of biological reproduction, men's and women's roles in production and reproduction are socially rather than biologically constructed and therefore can be "reconstructed."

A distinction is also made within the GAD approach between practical gender needs and strategic gender interests. The concept of practical and strategic interests was first articulated by Maxine Molyneux in her analysis of women and the Sandinista Revolution:

Strategic interests are derived in the first instance deductively, that is, from the analysis of women's subordination and from the formulation of an alternative, more satisfactory set of arrangements to those which exist ... Practical gender interests are given inductively and arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labour ... these are formulated by the women who are themselves within these positions rather than through external intervention (Molyneux, 1985:232-3).

Part of the critique of the WID approach stems from the

realization that most WID programmes are addressing women's practical needs, but ignoring their strategic interests. In fact, meeting practical needs may in some cases contradict strategic interests. For instance, micro-enterprise projects may meet women's practical needs by providing a source of income. If they are based on "traditional" women's skills such as sewing and cooking, however, they may be reinforcing a division of labour based on gender (Moser, 1989:1804). In addition, micro-enterprise programmes are often reformist in nature, designed to discourage people from organizing to fight against unjust economic relations which force people into the informal economy or into relying on micro-enterprise initiatives. On the other hand, projects which focus on "non-traditional" occupations, or which offer skills training in trades normally considered to be "men's work," begin to challenge the division of labour based on gender which assumes certain roles to be "natural" for both women and men.

Another key element of GAD is the strategies adopted to restructure unequal relations of gender, class and race. In Moser's articulation of the Empowerment Approach, for instance, there is an emphasis on "bottom-up strategies" to "raise women's consciousness to challenge their subordination" which comes out of the recognition that "... strategies will not be implemented without the sustained and systematic efforts by women's organizations and like-minded groups (Moser, 1989:1816).

This strategy recognizes that there are many different types of women's organizations and that "... feminism cannot be based on a rigid concept of universality that negates the wide variation in women's experience" (Sen & Grown, 1987:18). This statement is at odds with the above assertion that GAD has its roots in socialist feminism. The latter could only be completely true if all Third World researchers, policy-makers, activists and members of women's organizations were socialist feminists. This is not to deny the important contributions of socialist feminism. The simple equation of socialist feminism with Gender and Development, however, does not hold true when taking strategies and methods into consideration. Many Third World women's organizations are in fact not feminist although they are organizing around and acting upon a wide variety of issues and concerns which affect women's lives. As the following section shows, this is the case within women's movement in Latin America. The emphasis on a bottom-up approach which begins with women's experiences, however, provides the possibility of incorporating an engendered analysis of women's lives into the existing praxis of grass-roots women's groups.

Women's Movement in Latin America

Although feminism as a specific political force has only emerged in Latin America in the past thirty years or so, women

have been active in Latin American struggles for centuries.¹⁰ During the twentieth century, many women became involved in transformatory struggles in Latin America through political parties and/or social movements. These parties and social movements have included struggles for human rights as well as against ethnic and racial discrimination. In many countries in the region, struggles of national liberation have been a major axis of mobilization. As in the Nicaraguan case, these struggles have been against both domination by local elites (who controlled the state apparatus, including the military) and external domination, often in the form of U.S. imperialism.

The "Marxist tradition" in Latin America

In addition to the endogenous emergence of dependency theory in Latin American, much of the analysis of the Latin American reality in the post-World War II period among the Left has drawn from Marxist theory.¹¹ This had led to an analysis of women's subordination which, in keeping with a WAD

¹⁰ See Latin American and Caribbean Women's Collective (1983) for a discussion of women who have been involved in different Latin American struggles, for example in the wars of independence against Spanish colonialism.

¹¹ Dependency theorists for the most part overlooked "the woman question" in their original analysis of the integration of Third World countries into the global capitalist system on unequal terms. Subsequent analysis has broadened the dependency position to see the "marginalization of women" as "an extreme and telling example of the marginalization of the periphery" (Jacquette, 1982:273).

approach, is based on an economically deterministic and class-based analysis.

Many revolutionary political parties focused on "incorporating women into production" as a means to women's emancipation. As we shall see in the following chapter, the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua was no exception to this, and saw "women's interests" as being "promoted principally through the defense and consolidation of the Revolution" (FSLN, 1987). Despite the claims of many men within the Left that feminism was a divisive ideology originating from middle class sectors in northern imperialist countries, many women now identified as feminist began as activists within left-wing political parties and developed a feminist analysis precisely because of the sexism and male-domination, including the "parties' consistent sacrifice of women's issues for other matters deemed more salient to transforming society" within the Left itself (Butler Flora, 1984:74).¹²

In 1981, in Bogotá, Columbia, for instance, the first of

¹² Although feminism has developed in Latin America within the context of the specific concerns of Latin American women, this has not been a completely endogenous process. Feminism in Latin America has been influenced by women's movement in other parts of the world. This has included "the exposure to feminism and women's organizations that Latin American women got while in exile, and exchanges with North American and European feminists through solidarity movements" (Stolitz Chinchilla, 1993:17). This dynamic is not unique to feminism. We have seen, for instance, the influence of Marxism - originally a European framework of analysis - within the Latin American left. The key point is that "external" analyses are not mechanically transposed to the Latin America context but are incorporated where appropriate. As one Nicaraguan woman commented: "Feminist theory is like a telephone - we use it if it is convenient to us, but don't if it doesn't meet our needs" (1992 Meeting with AMMLAE representative, Estelí).

six regional feminist conferences, or *encuentros*" was held. The main "axis of discussions" in the meetings at Bogotá was women's double militancy and "the historical conflict with the male Left" (Sternbach et al., 1992:405). During the early years of the feminist movement, this "legacy of the Left ... led early feminists to privilege class over gender struggles" (p.401). Gradually, a Marxist analysis of class antagonisms was fused with an understanding of patriarchy and gender subordination.¹³ The analysis which has emerged is in keeping with socialist feminist and gender and development approaches outlined above. Latin American socialist feminists attempted to:

synthesize the contradictions between class and sex, between production and reproduction, and between the public and private realms (Butler Flora, 1984:71).

The distinction between the public and private sphere has also been made in terms of the connection between militarism and patriarchy. Feminists argued that military policies were rooted, not just in cultural or economic determinants, but in "the authoritarian foundations of patriarchal relations in the so-called private sphere: the family, male-female relations, and the sexual oppression of women" (Sternbach et al.,

¹³ An analysis of race was for the most part lacking in the original conceptualization of socialist feminism and continues to be inadequately addressed, although some writers have expanded the socialist feminist analysis to include an analysis of race relations. Because of their participation in anti-imperialist struggles, and against repressive Latin American states, socialist feminists in Latin America also acknowledged the need to examine dependency and underdevelopment. Socialist feminism, thus, "... is growing to combine understanding of the connections as well as contradictions of gender, class, race and underdevelopment (Maguire, 1984:31).

Although it is difficult to follow the precise trajectory of thinking, it would appear that in this dimension - an analysis of sexuality and violence - socialist feminism incorporates certain aspects of what has been categorized as "radical feminist" thought. In contrast to Marxists who emphasized class antagonisms under capitalism as causal factors in women's oppression, radical feminists have emphasized patriarchy, or "men's striving for domination and power over women" as the "primary motivating force of history" (Maguire, 1984:26).¹⁵ The second Latin American Feminist *Encuentro*, held in Lima, Peru in 1983, reflected this move

¹⁴ Anada Fineda, a Nicaraguan woman who was active in the struggle against the Somoza regime and later became director of AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan Women's Association, has told the story of how, after being imprisoned by the National Guard, she was raped seventeen times in three days (Times in Eck & Jain, 1987:33-4). This dynamic is of course not new. Carolyn Lehmann notes, for instance, that during the colonial era in Latin America the "Spanish soldier's booty during colonization consisted in his right to sexually use all the indian [sic] women in his territory" (Lehmann, 1990:11). The rape of women during war is not a "by-product" of violent conflict, but a particular form of political repression. See also Hernández and Murguialday, *Mujeres indígenas ayer y hoy*, 1993:128.

¹⁵ There are at least two streams of thought within radical feminism. While both focus on an analysis of patriarchy, one sees relations between men and women as socially determined, and incorporates elements of Marxist and Marxist feminist analysis. The other sees male-female differences as being, at least to some extent, biologically determined. (Douglas, 1990:43). Susan Brownmiller, in her analysis of rape, for instance, asserts that: "Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times, along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe" (Brownmiller, 1975:5). While an extensive examination of this debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, the important point is that, while socialist feminism focuses on the social construction of relations of production and reproduction and thus rejects biologically deterministic arguments, it has gained valuable insights from radical feminist analysis which focuses on the construction of sexuality and male-female relationships under patriarchy.

towards an inclusion of "patriarchy and gender relations."¹⁶

Women's movement in Latin America continued to grow throughout the 1980's to reflect a shift away from its exclusive association with the Left and, in conjunction with this, the pluralism which exists among Latin American women. As the document from the 1990 Regional Feminist Encuentro in Argentina states, this growth in the movement:

has touched on social differences, which has brought into view and into our thoughts, slowly but with unquestionable strength, the reality of poor women, of indigenous women, of black women; colouring the movement with the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic characteristics of the continent (ISIS International, 1990:20).

This documents also notes that the "diversity in dealing with the feminist perspective" is "conflictive and complex" (p.20-1). The next section examines one of the complex aspects of women's movement in Latin America. That is, how to introduce gender analysis into "non-feminist" women's groups without assuming certain groups of women who are involved in feminist praxis have "the answers" which must then be communicated to women from the popular sectors who are "uninitiated" into feminism.

"Grass-roots" or "Popular" Women's organizations

As has been pointed out, most Latin American women who

¹⁶ The Lima encuentro highlighted two key aspects of women's movement in Latin America. On the positive side, for the first time "there was a public response to the demands of lesbians that their presence within Latin American feminism be recognized" (Sternbach et al., 1992:412). On the negative side, there was criticism of the lack of space in the encuentro "to confront racism" (pp.412-13). Both of these issues continued to be addressed in subsequent encuentros.

are active in a wide variety of movements, including organizing around and acting upon issues and concerns which affect women's lives, do not define themselves as feminist. Sternbach et al., for instance, distinguish feminists groups which emerged from the Marxist tradition in the Left (and initially saw themselves as the "vanguard" of the women's movement) from working-class women's groups, often "under the tutelage of the Catholic Church and the male left" which "formed at the neighbourhood level to provide the basic necessities of life" (1992:401). In addition to feminist groups and groups organizing for basic needs, Rosa Cañadell identifies two other types of women's groups: those organizing around human rights issues, and those fighting against ethnic discrimination (unpublished, n.d.).¹⁷

Human rights organizations have emerged in many countries within the context of military dictatorships.¹⁸ Some of these organizations have been formed specifically by women, usually in their position of mothers or wives of the

¹⁷ In addition, women's groups also exist which are politically conservative. *El Poder Feminino* (EPF) in Chile is one such example. EPF (Feminine Power), was a women's group, comprised mostly of members of the Chilean bourgeoisie, which organized demonstrations against the left-leaning United Popular government of Salvador Allende. EPF, although a women's organization, "was scarcely a feminist organization given that it glorified machismo, the existing sexual division of labour, and the nuclear family" (Beneris & San, 1982:163). *Acción Feminista Dominicana* (AFD or Dominican Feminist Action) is another example of an organization which, despite its name, supported the interests of the dominant classes - first the Trujillo dictatorship and then the government of Joaquín Balaguer. (Butler Flora, 1984:83-6).

¹⁸ CODEFAM (Committee of the Relatives of Political Prisoners, the Assassinated and the Disappeared-Marianela García Villas) in El Salvador and GAN (Mutual Support Group) in Guatemala, for instance.

"disappeared" or assassinated. The Mothers of the "Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina, COMADRES (Committee of Mothers of Assassinated, Imprisoned and Disappeared as Political Prisoners) in El Salvador, CONAVIGUA (National Council of Guatemalan Widows) and the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs in Nicaragua are some examples. According to Cañadell, these women have been the first to denounce the violation of human rights and constitute an important nucleus from which to denounce military repression.

Many black and indigenous women are involved in struggles against racial and ethnic discrimination. The awarding of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú, a Quiché from Guatemala whose parents were both killed by the military and who has been a strong activist for indigenous rights, is an indication of both the severity of the repression faced by indigenous peoples and the strength and determination present in their struggles. Some indigenous women have pointed out the difficulty of including their "specific situation as women" in their organizing. Many indigenous organizations, they say, are led by men who do not see the situation of women as being substantially different from that of the rest of the community (Hernández & Murguialday, 1993:132). On the other hand, indigenous women have often not seen their particular struggles reflected within feminist movements. During the 1975 conference in Mexico City to mark the beginning of the United Nations Decade on Women, for instance, Domitila

Chúngara, an indigenous woman from Bolivia, stated that: "feminism has nothing to do with us indigenous women" (p.147).

Women in Latin America are no exception to the disproportionate representation of women as "community managers" organizing around basic needs. Particularly in the 1980's and 1990's, with the "debt crisis" and imposition of neo-liberal policy reforms, women have been the backbone of many community survival strategies:

In keeping with their socially ascribed responsibilities as wives, mothers and nurturers of family and community, women have taken the lead in the day-to-day resistance strategies of Latin America's popular classes. In every country in the region, women have participated disproportionately in movements to secure better urban services, to protest the rising cost of living, and to secure health care and education for their children (Sternback et al., 1992:401).

While women's organizing at the community level may represent a "resistance strategy," it may also be in keeping with the "efficiency approach" as outlined above, particularly when these strategies do not incorporate attempts to challenge national and international economic policies. As Caroline Moser has pointed out, these activities can also be seen as an extension of women's roles within the private, or domestic sphere in social reproduction. The shift from the private to the public sphere does not necessarily challenge existing gender roles. Thus, while aid agencies may applaud women's "participation" in development, these initiatives may in fact be reinforcing both women's traditional roles and macro-economic policies which are embedded within a neo-liberal modernization framework.

There is, however, usually "opportunity in crisis" in that tangible benefits can arise from these efforts. In addition to the benefits to family and community members and possible challenges to the prevailing economic order, participation in these organizations may also provide the opportunity for the development of leadership and organizational skills for women. In addition, these groups, while initially organizing around "practical" community needs, may provide organizational and networking space within which gender-specific issues can be addressed.

Women's participation in CEBs is another example of women's organizing at the grass-roots level which has not had an explicit gender analysis. The CEB activities may include any one - or a combination - of the three activities outlined above: human rights, ethnic and racial discrimination, and basic needs/survival strategies. The CEBs in Nicaragua focused on human rights violations in the 1970's as a result of the escalation of the repression of the Somoza dictatorship. They have also been involved in meeting community needs through specific projects or by making demands on the government (against rising transportation costs for example). During the 1980's, the CEBs participated in projects organized by the Sandinista government.

Women's movement in Latin America has been influenced by, or embedded in, the various approaches to women in the development process which have been outlined. Feminist

movement emerged to a large extent within a WAD approach due to the influence of Marxism and has been moving toward a GAD approach which is influenced by a broader range of feminist theory, in particular socialist feminism. Feminism has also emerged in many Latin American countries in the context of the transition to democracy (Jacquette, 1991). The political and economic context of the 1980's and 1990's - of modernization and the imposition of neo-liberal macro-economic reforms - has however, meant that women's movement is continually challenged by the need to be part of organizing efforts within the popular sectors to meet basic needs, while at the same time adopting a critical perspective on women's participation in the process of meeting these needs.

Gender Analysis in Grass-Roots Organizations

Having provided both a general overview of policy and practice related to women in the development process, and then examined some of these issues within the context of feminist and women's movement in Latin America, we may now turn to the question of the potential to introduce gender analysis into grass-roots women's groups.

The potential hinges upon the relationship - direct or indirect - between "feminist" and "popular" women's groups. In turn, this is related to the problem of criteria for defining what constitutes feminist/women's movement. This issue surfaced, for instance, during the fourth Latin American

Feminist Encuentro, held in Taxco, Mexico in 1987. The participation of women with a wide variety of organizing experience, including many Central American women who saw themselves as belonging more to "women's movements" than "feminist movements," created tensions.

Some women felt frustrated with the "lack of feminist discourse" among women from the "women's movement" and with the need to "start from zero" at every encuentro (Sternback et al., 1992:424-5). Furthermore, there was the feeling that "movement energies should not be consumed by the *mujeres'* [women's] efforts to secure running water or adequate sewage for working-class women" but should focus on the promotion of an "alternative 'women's culture'" and with "those issues that community groups and progressive parties are never going to address - such as abortion, domestic violence, and sexual and reproductive freedom" (p.425).

While the problem of having a space within which to explore feminist ideas (a problem which has been perhaps particularly acute for lesbian women who must confront homophobia within the movement) is a real and legitimate one, the feeling that "true feminists" are being somehow pushed aside by non-feminist women is problematic. Certain groups of women were able, initially, to create a space within which to explore feminist issues in part because of their relative privilege, for instance in terms of access to resources, vis-à-vis other women. The pluralism within the women's

movement, rather than pushing one group out, represents a multiplicity of different - sometimes overlapping but sometimes competing - interests. The statement that feminists must be continually explaining the basics of feminism seems to deny the possibility that they are also in a position to learn from the experiences of women whose main concern may be running water and access to sewerage. In other words, this delegitimizes the possibility for a continually evolving feminist praxis which is informed by, among other things, the experiences of women in the popular sectors.

In adopting a gender and development approach which seeks to develop feminist praxis from the standpoint of poor women in Latin America, this thesis takes the perspective that feminist praxis must not be based on a top-down perspective in which feminist theory is translated to, or imposed upon, women of the popular sectors.¹⁹ Rather, theory is always evolving as it is continually informed by practice, and vice versa.

¹⁹ This transition from a top-down to a bottom-up approach is evident among many feminist organizations working with popular sector women's groups. In Peru, for instance, several groups which were coordinated through the *Comité Coordinador de Organizaciones Femeninas* (Feminine Organizations Coordinating Committee), "reformulated their strategy from one of attempting to 'give' poor women what the feminists thought they needed to one of trying to respond to the expressed needs of poor women themselves, which at times were even in conflict with the ideals of the feminist group" (Butler Flora, 1984:83).

3.3 Women, Religion and Social Change: Towards an Understanding of Gender Consciousness in Ecclesial Base Communities

The sociological approach to religion outlined by Otto Maduro, while critical and rigorous, is nonetheless lacking in a gender-based analysis. Maduro focuses on a population's organization in relation to material needs (mode of production). He outlines how this influences religious organization, for instance with respect to a "religious mode of production" in class-stratified societies and also how it impacts upon the relationship between society and religious institutions, influencing each other through the struggle for hegemony which can be rooted in a religious worldview - of either the dominant (hegemonic) bloc or the one opposing this dominance.

Maduro does not address, however, the gender dimension of the relationship between religion and society. This is an important oversight in that: (1) the Roman Catholic Church has been a product of patriarchal as well as class-stratified societies, (2) religious production within the Church has been carried out primarily by men and from men's point of view (in the context of hierarchical authority), and (3) the Catholic Church in turn has created a patriarchal religious worldview which has been used to maintain male dominance. In other words, the Catholic Church has both reflected and

contributed towards the subordinate position of women in society. In addition, the religious production of the Church has created specific obstacles for women within the Church.

This patriarchal religious worldview can be seen, for instance, in traditional Catholic theology which sees women in terms of the Eve/Mary dichotomy. Women are seen as being responsible for the original sin of Eve which caused the downfall (and therefore the need for redemption) of humanity. The Virgin Mary represents the other side of this dichotomy. In contrast to Eve's sexuality and sinfulness, Mary, as the virginal and pure woman devoted to her son, offers the model of a sacrificing and non-confrontational mother to women. A model which, however, is unattainable for women:

The image of the perfect woman, singularly blessed by God, without sin or fault, both virgin and mother has not been able to serve as a realistic model for human women, who have been more often compared to Eve (Nines, 1991:286).

Although Mary's significance for Roman Catholic theology has varied in the history of the Church, the focus on the conciliatory and sacrificing virtues of Mary as the mother of Christ and the purity of Mary through her virginity have been fairly constant.²⁰ These images of Mary, which continue to

²⁰ For instance, during the Middle Ages, the Church focused on the uniqueness of Mary, ascribing her the status of "co-redemptrix" with Christ. The Protestant Reformers of the 16th century, on the other hand, argued that Jesus could be the only mediator between God and humanity. Marian devotion continued to be strong in the Catholic Church, however. The Church dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption of Mary (1950) further reinforced the notion of Mary's purity and quasi-divinity. The second Vatican Council represents a departure from this in that it asserts the "sole mediatorship of Jesus" and Mary is seen as being fully human and thus "sharing with all other human beings the need for redemption in Christ" (Nines, 1991:287).

exert considerable influence in Latin American Roman Catholicism, have been for the most part created by men due to the patriarchal religious worldview (which is reinforced through the patriarchal structure) of the Church.²¹

An exploration of socialist feminist and other theories of women's oppression within the context of women's movement in Latin America has highlighted some key differences between feminist and other women's organizations; provided analytical categories (such as production, social reproduction and community managing) for addressing women's inequality; and addressed the question of feminist/women's praxis. Insufficient attention has been paid in this literature, however, to the specific question of women's roles within religious institutions and the extent to which these may possess both limitations and opportunities for women:

During the past years, ... women have come together in international forums to discuss a wide range of topics: women and work, women and education, women and development, etc. For the most part, the focus has been on the political, economic and social concerns of women. Nonetheless, what has often emerged from this discussion is the extent to which many of these issues are rooted in deeply held values and attitudes, or in religions. Little attention has been focused directly upon the religious or value dimensions of various programs of social change (Eck & Jain, 1987:5).

There is an emerging body of literature which examines the possibility for gender analysis/women's emancipation within CEBs in Latin America. This literature recognizes the revolutionary potential of religion as it has been expressed

²¹ Pope John Paul II's 1988 apostolic letter, "On the Dignity of Women," for instance "emphasizes the feminine 'vocations' of motherhood and virginity" (in Alvarez, 1990:337).

through the emergence of liberation theology but argues that this theology must include a theology from women and "from the situation of women's oppression" (Támez, 1983:20).

Participants in a 1979 seminar in Mexico ("The Latin American Woman: The Praxis and Theology of Liberation") for instance, concluded that the development of the "People's Church" remains limited

insofar as it has not explicitly posed the issue of women as a specific challenge with regard to the buildup of the Church, its ministries, its organic setup, and so forth. It is not elaborating or systematizing any theological reflection that has been reformulated on the basis of the alternatives posed by feminism (Ferro, 1981:33).

Sonia Alvarez points out that, for this "reformulation" to happen, a "fundamental contradiction" within liberation theology in terms of its perspective on women must be addressed (Alvarez, 1990). On the one hand, liberation theology (in keeping with much of the tradition of the Left in Latin America) relies on a reductionist analysis of women's oppression which is largely based on a Marxist analysis.²⁷ On the other hand, liberation theology holds an "essentialist" perspective on women, thus reinforcing many of the prevailing

²⁷ As we have seen, liberation theology, in its "socio-analytical mediation" has drawn upon the social sciences to help understand the world of the oppressed. While this has included women as a category among the oppressed, the focus on Marxism has led to the analysis of women's oppression within this framework:

... the socio-economically oppressed (the poor) do not simply exist alongside other oppressed groups, such as blacks, indigenous peoples, women ... the "class-oppressed" ... are the infrastructural expression of the process of oppression. The other groups represent "superstructural" expressions of oppression and because of this are deeply conditioned by infrastructure (Boff & Boff, 1989:29).

attitudes within the Roman Catholic Church as a whole.

The class emphasis within liberation theology has led to some positive reformulations of women. The image of Mary, for instance, represents a departure from traditional Catholic theology in that she is no longer seen as passive but rather as a strong woman who is on the side of the poor.¹¹ The emphasis on the special virtues of women and the centrality of motherhood, however, are one example of the lack of a critical gender analysis within liberation theology.

In her research on women in CEBs in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Sonia Alvarez found that priests who are sympathetic to liberation theology are not necessarily willing to address "gender-specific issues that directly challenged Church moral doctrines" (p.399). The priest of a local parish was supportive of Mother's Clubs which focused on training courses for women. When women's involvement led to discussion of issues which contradicted Church doctrine, however, conflict arose between the parish and the group:

The priest had supported the group's original proposal of developing an occupational training course for neighbourhood women. But as the content of the group's discussions became more radical - challenging some of the core doctrines of the Church regarding sexual norms, the family, and contraception - his support waned, eventually leading to overt conflict between the core organizers of the women's group and the local parish (1990:398).

Eventually, some women in the group decided to leave the

¹¹ The Mary of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), in particular, is seen as a "prophetic witness" to God's plan for liberation of the oppressed: "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty" (Luke 1:52-3).

Church to form an autonomous women's organization. Alvarez concludes that the "continued political hegemony of the Church in the urban periphery ... severely circumscribes the nature, content, and political direction of gender- and class-based politicization among the popular classes" (1990:401).

The Church thus possesses specific limitations to the liberation of women. The question of addressing gender concerns with women who are members of CEBs cannot be explored entirely within the context of women's movement and feminist debates, but must be explored also in its religious dimension. The converse is also true. That is, liberation theology requires a gender-based analysis to understand women's lives beyond either economically or biologically deterministic frameworks.

One area of confluence between liberation theology and a gender and development approach is the emphasis on praxis. Both call for approaches to the understanding of social reality which begin with people's experiences. If the methodology of liberation theology is taken to its "logical conclusion," it should be able to address gender issues because many CEB members, if not most, are women and gender is one of the factors which shapes their lives. The same is true for a gender and development approach. That is, for many women who are CEB members, their worldview of reality is a religious worldview. Therefore, both women's religious belief and their participation in religious organizations should be

included in a "bottom-up" approach to women's empowerment.

The question of gender consciousness within CEBs, thus, is being examined by integrating a sociological perspective on religion (which sees LALT as both influenced by, and influencing society, and the Catholic Church as possessing internal religious dynamics) with a gender and development approach to understanding women's movement in Latin America. These two perspectives can be integrated by building upon Otto Maduro's formulation for a Latin American Sociology of Religion as follows:

(1) The Shaping Influence of the Social Context on Religion:

How are the CEBs being shaped and influenced by both the broadening of women's movement in Nicaragua and Latin America and by the current political and economic crisis in Nicaragua?

(2) The Internal Conflicting Dynamics of Religious Institutions

What are the internal dynamics within the CEBs that determine what is possible, likely, not likely or not possible in terms of engaging in gender analysis and conscientization, for instance, with respect to providing an institutional space within which these issues can be explored and in terms of developing a non-patriarchal mode of religious production? This question must be addressed with respect to the current divisions and conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church in Nicaragua.

(3) The Impact of Religion on Societal Change and Stabilisation

What impact would these changes have on Nicaraguan society and specifically in terms of contributing towards women's movement in Nicaragua?

(4) The Influence of Individuals on Religion and Society

How are individual women influenced by engaging in gender consciousness and how do they in turn influence other people (other women in the CEBs, their family, community and so on)?

CHAPTER 4

THE NICARAGUAN CONTEXT 1979 to 1994

Introduction

In the previous chapter, issues of theoretical concern in the formulation of the research question were outlined. An attempt was made to situate this analysis in the context of the emergence of both liberation theology and women's movement in Latin America. This chapter situates the research question more specifically within the Nicaraguan context. The aim, in keeping with the theoretical framework which has been outlined, is to examine both the internal conflicting dynamics of the Roman Catholic Church and women's movement in Nicaragua. The following chapter then examines the impact both of these have on the potential to engage in gender consciousness within the CEBs. Many of the changes within the Church and women's movement, in turn, are related to Nicaragua's unique situation as a country which has undergone a revolution. The first section of this chapter, thus, provides an economic and political backdrop to Nicaragua.

4.1 Political and Economic Context

The overview of the Nicaraguan context provided in this section places particular emphasis on mass and popular organizations in terms of their dependence on, or autonomy from, the state in the context of Nicaragua's fluctuating economic situation.¹ While these organizations have been mobilized into social movements throughout this period, the reasons for their mobilization and their relationship to the state have not remained constant.

New social movement theorists have argued that, while the way in which political and economic settings shape movement dynamics must be recognized, social movements require autonomy from political parties and the state in order to develop collective identities and strategies for action (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992). The development of collective identities can be seen as a process of engaging in the production of meaning from daily life (p.320). This production of meaning may include, for instance, cultural, ethnic, religious or gender-based meaning. The development of collective identities shapes the way in which organizations and movements are formed which, in turn, have the ability to challenge political and economic structures at national (and perhaps international)

¹ The term mass organizations refers here to those organizations with direct ties to the FSLN, such as ANWLAE, the CDSs, Juventud Sandinista and the ATC. Popular organizations, on the other hand, are those which are not Sandinista (although they may have Sandinista members). This latter group includes the CEBs.

levels.¹ In an ongoing cyclical-dialectical process, collective identities shape organizations and social movements and vice versa.

Prior to 1979, in particular during the 1978-9 insurrectionary period, social movements focused primarily on the overthrow of the state. From 1979 to 1990, with the successful overthrow of the state, mass organizations functioned as vehicles for popular mobilization under the direction of the revolutionary government, which eventually led to a loss of autonomy for mass and popular organizations. Although the FSLN conceived of itself as the vanguard of Nicaragua's "Popular Sandinista Movement," the fact that it was also the state subverted the work of the movement to national interests. Since the late 1980's mass organizations have begun to exert greater autonomy from the FSLN and, in particular since 1990, a multiplicity of social actors, organizations and movements have emerged which are independent of both the FSLN and the new government.

The Nicaraguan Context Prior to 1979

¹ This does not mean, however, that the goal of social movements will always be structural transformation of society. Escobar and Alvarez, for instance, argue against the "teleological temptation" to view social movements as valid only when they led to "transformational projects." "Quotidian resistance," the challenging of power relations in everyday life, is an important aspect of many social movements which focus on the production of collective identities, such as those related to women and indigenous peoples. Social movements must be seen as cycles in which "protest actions" can "revert to everyday resistance" and quotidian resistance "can just as surely explode" into protest when the environment shifts" (1992:324-5).

Nicaragua's pre-revolutionary context included a history of external intervention and internal elite domination. The external intervention in Nicaragua's affairs since the mid-1850's has come primarily from the United States.³ Internal political and economic control of Nicaragua was held by the Somoza dynasty from the 1930's up to 1979, when the last of the three Somozas was sent into exile. The National Guard, set up in 1927 by the United States, was the military arm of the Somoza state apparatus which maintained control through repression of the opposition.

The Nicaraguan economy prior to 1979 was almost completely privately controlled.⁴ The personal wealth which was amassed by the Somoza family alone from the 1930's until 1979 is astounding.⁵ This grew from an estimated \$50 million

³ This has included, for instance, the support of the brief presidency of American filibuster William Walker in 1856-7, the signing of the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty in 1914, which granted the US exclusive property rights (in perpetuity) over an inter-oceanic canal zone and military intervention (Smith, 1993:87). The US marines landed in Nicaragua for the first time in 1909 to support the Conservatives against the Liberal José Santos Zelaya. The marines occupied Nicaraguan territory almost permanently from 1912 to 1933 (Walker, 1991:6). Despite its consistent intervention, the United States has never had strong economic interests in Nicaragua as it has elsewhere in Central America. In keeping with "Manifest Destiny," the United States has been interested in Nicaragua as part of its desire to maintain stability and control in the region as a whole (Coraggio, 1986:33).

⁴ Economically, Nicaragua developed along dependent capitalist lines with an emphasis on the agro-export sector. The coffee industry had been developed in the 1870's, and the commercial production of cotton was introduced on a large scale in the 1950's. These, along with sugar and meat, represented Nicaragua's primary exports in the pre-1979 period.

⁵ Anastasio Somoza García, the first of the three Somozas to rule Nicaragua, became one of the richest men in Central America largely through his holdings in the agro-export sector. By 1942, eight years after taking power, he was the largest landowner in Nicaragua with 51 cattle ranches and 46 coffee plantations. Somoza received \$400,000 a year from US companies "he had exempted from taxes and social contributions" (Weber, 1983:16-17). By the 1960's, the Somozas also had significant

in the 1950's to over \$500 million in 1979 (Booth, 1993:35).*

During the 1960's, the Alliance for Progress and establishing of the Central American Common Market (CACM) stimulated growth in the commercial and industrial sectors.¹ John Booth and Thomas Walker have argued that the economic growth model adopted by Nicaragua and other Central American countries during this period was, however, based on "the traditions of dependent capitalism and class exploitation." (1993:14-16). Rather than leading to "trickle down" development for Nicaragua's poor, most of the benefit from this rapid growth "accrued to Nicaraguan investors in joint ventures with foreign multinational corporations" (p.35). Booth and Walker go on to note that:

The bulk of the Nicaraguan economy came to be concentrated in the hands of three huge financial groups, each centered around a local bank with links to corresponding foreign banks. The heart of one of these groups was the Somoza family ... Meanwhile, the situation for the common citizen had become simply intolerable. (p.35-6).

Poverty, foreign domination and elite control had existed in Nicaragua since the colonial era. One of the specific characteristics of the economic policy of the post-World War

interests in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. This included the food processing and textile industries, sea and air transport, and tobacco plants and cement factories. Finally, in the 1970's they moved into the services and banking sectors (p.17).

*Other estimates are more conservative, but nonetheless alarming. Henry Weber, for instance, states that the Somoza fortune grew from an estimated "\$10 million at the end of the war" to \$150 million in 1979, not including assets owned abroad (1981:18).

¹ Per capita gross domestic product, for instance, rose an average of 3.9 percent between 1962-1971 and an average of 2.3 percent between 1972 and 1976 (Booth & Walker, 1993:62).

II era, however, has been the rapid pace of growth. The commercialization of cotton production and increase in manufacturing resulted in high urban growth rates.⁴ This growth was accompanied by a rapid concentration of income and increase in poverty. Wages were kept low through the repression of unions, while employment opportunities failed to keep up with the rapid pace of growth (p.62-3). Finally, high inflation in the 1970's led to increases in consumer prices. The combination of economic policies which did not benefit the poor, the rapid pace of income concentration during the 1960's and 1970's, and the maintenance of this system through elite political control and repression led to increasing popular unrest during this period.

Resistance to the Somoza Regime

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was formed in 1961 in exile by Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge and Silvio Mayorga. The FSLN was inspired by the struggle against US domination in Nicaragua during the occupation by US marines. This struggle was led by General Augusto César Sandino, from whom the FSLN took its name. The FSLN combined this sense of nationalism with a Marxist analysis of the internal dynamics of class exploitation in Nicaragua. In the

⁴ The percentage of the urban population rose from 41.7 percent in 1960 to 58.7 percent in 1987, while the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture decreased from 62 percent in 1969 to 39 percent in 1980 (Booth & Walker, 1993:176).

words of Carlos Fonseca: "Socialist and national demands ... are combined in the Sandinist People's Revolution. We identify with socialism, while retaining a critical attitude to the socialist experiences" (in Weber, 1981:21).

The FSLN launched a guerrilla campaign in rural areas of Nicaragua in the 1960's. Despite limited initial success, by the mid-1970's the FSLN had managed to develop a base of support in rural and urban areas.⁹ In addition to the clandestine organizing and armed insurgency of the FSLN, two other factors contributed towards the coalescing of the opposition to the Somoza regime. One was the widespread government corruption following a devastating 1972 earthquake in Managua, in which an estimated 10,000 people were killed and the government squandered \$US 60 million in relief funds (Smith, 1993:122). The other was the escalation of National Guard repression. Both these events led to the amalgamation of diverse opposition forces, including "women's organizations, neighbourhood and student groups and trade unions" into the United People's Movement (MPU) in July, 1978 (p.126).

⁹ The FSLN launched this campaign with the strategy of "prolonged people's war" - the "slow accumulation of forces from the guerrilla bases in the mountains" (Smith, 1993:124). After a series of crushing military defeats, they abandoned military activity from 1970 until 1974. By this time, a second faction had emerged within the FSLN, the "Proletarian Tendency," which advocated a strategy of organizing the urban workers and building mass organizations. A third faction then emerged, the "Terceristas." The Terceristas participated in the guerrilla war but sought to "incorporate progressive sectors of the middle-class opposition into a broad alliance led by the FSLN" (p.124). The Tercerista perspective also acknowledged the growing spontaneous insurrection against the dictatorship in the late 1970's.

As was noted in the previous chapter, many Christians participated in the struggle to overthrow Somoza. CEBs were organized among the urban and rural poor as a "tool for teaching the gospel" (Booth & Walker, 1993:64-5). In keeping with the ideas of liberation theology, the CEBs reflected upon the gospel in light of their own experiences. This often led to the adoption of a critical stance vis-à-vis the dictatorship. As Margaret Randall notes:

The great majority of Christian revolutionaries are not Marxists; their understanding of reality does not come from an ideology which they have studied or which "has been imported," but rather from consciously analyzing what surrounds them (1983:29).

Four of the more well-known of these examples of the development of critical, revolutionary consciousness within CEBs were the Rigüero, San Pablo Apóstol and Open III communities, all in Managua, and Solentiname, an island community at the southern end of Lake Nicaragua (Forrohar, 1989:124-141; Kirk, 1992:65-82; Randall, 1983).

In 1973, university students who had helped form the Rigüero community formed the *Movimiento Cristiano Revolucionario* (MCR). The MCR, which quickly spread to many poor barrios in Managua, was originally involved in pastoral work but by the mid-1970's had begun collaborating with the FSLN, "providing militants with safe houses and recruiting people for the Frente" (Williams, 1989:81). In rural areas people became involved through the Delegates of the Word movements (of note among these were the organizing efforts of

the Capuchin Fathers in the province of Zelaya) and CEPA (Centre for Agrarian Education and Promotion) which had been formed by the Jesuits in 1969 (Foroohar, 1989:147-152).

In the context of the repression of the Somoza dictatorship, Christian communities and movements provided a space for organization and mobilization (Dodson, 1986). Johannes Van Vugt goes as far as to argue that the revolution succeeded because of the existence of CEBs as secondary organizations which "enabled an ideologically acceptable and organizational opposition against the regime" (1985:2).

The FSLN, as has been outlined, represented a synthesis of nationalist and Marxist thought. In addition to the connection which developed between the FSLN and Christian groups, many FSLN members were also Christian.¹⁰ The revolutionary process, thus, represented a confluence of these three elements: *Sandinismo* (nationalism), Marxism and Christianity:

The FSLN's political agenda called for the building of democracy and socialism within the context of Nicaraguan reality, which included... the historic anti-imperialist and nationalist project of Sandino, the influence of liberation theology, and the Marxist inspired leadership of the Sandinista Front (Smith, 1993:132).

In September, 1978, the FSLN called for a national insurrection (Smith, 1993:127). The United People's Movement was replaced with the National Patriotic Front (NPR) which

¹⁰ Indeed, many joined the FSLN as a result of participating in Christian groups.

included sectors of the bourgeoisie.¹¹ The military force of the FSLN, in conjunction with "massive and direct popular combat participation" led to the overthrow of the Somoza government on July 19, 1979 (p.67).

The FSLN in Power: 1979 to 1990

The confluence of *Sandinismo*, Marxism and Christianity represents a revolutionary experience unique to the Nicaraguan context, and indeed to Latin America as a whole. The programme of the new government was also unique in that it attempted - with varying degrees of success throughout the revolutionary period - to balance the need to defend and represent the interests of the poor majority for whom the revolution had been fought (popular hegemony) against the interests of the bourgeoisie (national unity). The FSLN government attempted to do this through a commitment to a mixed economy, political pluralism and non-alignment.

The State, Mass Organizations and Economic Policy

The defeat of the Somoza regime in 1979 led to a complete disintegration of the state, including the National Guard.

¹¹ The bourgeoisie, while not necessarily supportive of the Sandinistas, was opposed to Somoza. The Broad Opposition Front (Frente Amplio Opositor - FAO) had been formed following the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro (opposition leader and husband of Nicaragua's current President, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro). The FAO was backed by both the US and the Catholic hierarchy and "strive ... to negotiate an end to the Somoza regime before the FSLN could overthrow it militarily" (Booth & Walker, 1993:66). When they realized this could not be achieved, they "turned to the Sandinistas as the last option to defeat the regime" (p.66).

The FSLN thus had to start from scratch in establishing the new revolutionary state. The FSLN itself was governed by a nine-member National Directorate (which had been formed in 1979), led by Daniel Ortega. Shortly after the revolutionary victory, a five-member Government of National Reconstruction, led by the FSLN, was set up.¹² The "Junta," as it was known, ruled by decree until a Council of State was set up in May, 1980.¹³

The 47-member Council of State, although dominated by the Sandinistas, had representation from middle class business sectors, the Church and professional organizations. In addition, the Council served as a channel for the direct participation of mass organizations in national decision-making.

The growth and institutionalization of these mass organizations was a "distinguishing feature of the organization of the new state" (Smith, 1993:146). The FSLN had three objectives in fostering the growth of mass organizations. The first was to promote popular participation in the resolution of society's problems. The second was to

¹²The five members were: Daniel Ortega, Sergio Ramirez, Moisés Hassan (all three Sandinistas), Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo.

¹³ The National Directorate wielded a great deal of influence over both the Junta and the Council. Two non-Sandinista members of the Junta, Chamorro and Robelo, resigned in 1980, and the Council of State was the first major test of the fragile multi-class alliance which had toppled Somoza. COSEP, the umbrella organization for business, for instance, fought against the inclusion of further mass organizations which had participated in the insurrection, although the Sandinistas won out in the end (Smith, 1993:144-5).

"develop a seedbed of revolutionary cadres to consolidate the party," and the final was to mobilize people in the defense of the revolution (Serra, 1991:60).

During the first four years of the revolution, the government focused its economic policy on the reconstruction of the economy and the provision of basic needs. The United Nations has estimated that "the direct damage to infrastructure, plant, equipment and inventories" as a result of the war was US\$481 million. (Fitzgerald, 1985:207). This was in addition to at least US\$1.5 billion in capital flight which left the National Treasury almost bankrupt (p.207). The government relied to a large extent on volunteer labour from the mass organizations in the reconstruction efforts.

The government was also committed to the expansion of social programmes and income distribution (Utting, 1991:3). This led to high expenditures in health, education and other social services. "From the very beginning," Harvey Williams notes, "the role of the mass organizations in generating popular support and participation was a key factor in the success of social-sector programs" (1991:189). The 1981 Literacy Crusade is one example of the new government's commitment to social spending. A huge undertaking which mobilized 50,000 volunteer *brigadistas*, it reduced the illiteracy rate from 50 to 23 percent in one year (Arnove &

Dewers. 1991:97).¹⁴ Popular Education Collectives were set up after the Crusade to maintain literacy skills. Health campaigns were also organized using volunteer brigades to carry out country-wide immunization campaigns. In the first two years following the triumph, 739 schools were built, most of them as community projects (Williams, 1991:190). In addition, 300 clinics were built between 1979 and 1984 and a free, comprehensive health care system was established (earning Nicaragua the acclaim of the World Health Organization in 1983 for the greatest advances made in health care by a developing country) (Collinson et al., 1991:95; Williams, 1991:193).

In addition to social spending, the government provided inexpensive credit to peasant producers and food and consumer subsidies (Utting, 1991:3). An agrarian reform was also introduced in which approximately 20 percent of the land under cultivation was turned into either state farms or cooperatives. This involved lands which had been owned by *Somocistas*. Medium-sized holdings, particularly those involved in the export sector, were not expropriated since the export earnings generated from these holding were a vital source of revenue. In addition, in keeping with its objective of national unity, the government did not want to antagonize

¹⁴ Arnove and Dewes note that, although the "Ministry of Education claims that the illiteracy rate was reduced to 12.96 percent," it excludes 130,000 adults who "were considered unteachable or learning impaired." If this population is included, "then the illiterate rate was reduced to approximately 23 percent by the end of the campaign" (1991:97).

the middle class.

Peter Utting notes that, in the early 1980's, with international support for the basic needs approach, relatively "high rates of economic growth were achieved" and "the levels of living of large sectors of the population generally improved" (1991:3). By 1984, however, government priorities had shifted from basic needs to the defence of the revolution.

The US government, although originally not overtly hostile to the new government under President Jimmy Carter, became a strident opponent of the Sandinistas under Ronald Reagan. In 1981, the U.S. began financing a counterrevolutionary military force, the *contras*, which was made up largely of ex-National Guard members. In response to the war, a state of emergency was declared in 1982 and, in late 1983, the government imposed a draft (the "Patriotic Military Service") which became increasingly unpopular as the war escalated (Walker, 1991:88-9). In 1985, the U.S. also placed a full economic embargo against Nicaragua.

The combination of military and economic aggression had a devastating effect on the economy. From 1984 to 1987, the economic policy of the government was directed towards the war, with defence priorities consuming a significant portion of expenditures. In 1984, for instance, an estimated one third of the budget was spent on defence (Molyneux, 1985:241), while it constituted an estimated 65 percent of government spending in 1986 (Soule, 1991:44). As an attempt to

accommodate large military expenditures, price controls were introduced (Utting, 1991:4-5). In addition, the war adversely affected production output which, in turn, resulted in a decrease in exports (from \$431 million in 1983 to \$295 million in 1987) (p.6). Another effect of the war was that it led to a decrease in resources available to the mass organizations and for national social programming.

In 1984, the state of emergency was temporarily lifted for the holding of national elections. The FSLN won a majority government with 61 of the 96 seats in the new National Constituent Assembly, which replaced the Council of State as the country's national governing body (Reding, 1991:29). One of the effects of the disintegration of the Council of State was that the direct channel for participation of mass organizations in national decision-making was removed. Mass organizations, and people from the popular sectors generally, then relied exclusively on other channels of direct communication to the government. These included open assemblies, radio programs and the newspapers (the "Public Mailbox" section in Barricada, the government newspaper, for instance) (Serra, 1991:53).

Following the elections, the government continued to rely on the mass organizations, but did so from an increasingly "vertical" perspective in which priorities were determined at the upper levels and the mass organizations were responsible for implementation but not project development. The urgent

need of the government in defence and maintenance of production during the war was one of the reasons for this increasingly vertical approach.¹⁵ This led to contradictions, however, because the government relied on mass organizations to meet national objectives (for example, in recruiting people for the military draft or providing volunteer labour during the coffee harvest), while at the same time provided few resources for local needs. This subordination of the mass organizations to the state in the context of the war and the economic crisis led to a decline in the legitimacy (and membership) of the mass organizations from 1985 to 1988 (Serra, 1991:65).

By 1988, there was at least partial recognition on the part of the FSLN that its vertical style needed to be changed.¹⁶ In addition, the Central American Peace Process had been initiated and the contras had been militarily defeated. The combination of these factors led to some revitalization within the mass organizations. A key aspect of this revitalization, however, was the establishing of greater autonomy vis-à-vis the FSLN. In addition to criticism from

¹⁵ Another reason was that, in keeping with the commitment to national unity, the state wanted to be able to exercise control over the mass organizations to protect the interests of the bourgeoisie (Corrajo, 1985:73).

¹⁶ In Region I (a northern region which includes the department of Estelí), for instance, an experiment in "participatory investigation" was launched with the aim of "consciousness-raising at the community level and the promotion of grass-roots discussion of ways in which to improve local conditions" (Serra, 1991:68). Regional development planning, thus, was "addressed from the bottom-up" (p.68).

the mass organizations regarding the Frente's top-down decision-making, another factor which contributed towards the increasing autonomy of the mass organizations was the government's implementation of unpopular economic policies between 1988 and 1990 which involved the adoption of neo-liberal reforms. Two policy reforms were introduced in 1988 (February and June). Included in these reforms were the devaluation of the córdoba in order to make exports more attractive and the beginning of the rationalization of the state apparatus.

The latter involved a reduction of government price controls, the elimination of government subsidies in agricultural inputs, the indexing of loans to inflation, and government lay-offs and employment freezes (Soule, 1990:38-9). "Overall," notes Soule, "the June package looked [like] an orthodox IMF-sponsored proposal" (p.39). One of the key differences, however, was that it was self-imposed and as such Nicaragua could not count on special assistance packages from the IMF and other international lending institutions (Utting, 1991:11).

The 1989 national budget called for a further 20 percent reduction in government spending (Utting, 1991:8). Eight thousand public sector civilian employees and 13,000 military personnel were laid off (p.8). The government, as part of the restructuring of the economy, attempted to devise a social pact with private enterprise which included engaging them in

a "national dialogue about the state of the economy" (p.9). Tomás Borge, one of the original founders of the FSLN, acknowledged that the government had "'sacrificed' the working class in favor of the economy as part of a strategic plan" (p.11).

In 1990, national elections were held in which the UNO (a coalition of 14 parties, most from the centre-right and right led by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro), won by a 55 to 41 percent margin (Reding, 1991:42). The FSLN, however, with 32 of the 92 seats in the National Assembly, continued to be the single largest political party in the country. The defeat of the Sandinistas appears to have stemmed from two inter-related factors. The first was the inability to reverse the economic crisis faced by the country, and in particular the devastating effect of the 1988-89 austerity measures on the poor. A second was that people felt voting for the UNO would end the war and along with it the military draft. Unfortunately, both the economic crisis and violence have continued in post-1990 Nicaragua.

Grass-roots Autonomy and Economic Crisis: 1990 to 1994

The UNO coalition had come together to present a united force large enough to win the 1990 elections. The UNO's campaign victory did not, however, ensure internal cohesion of the new government (Vickers & Spence, 1992:537). Two factions emerged within the UNO. The first constituted the executive

branch which, although headed by President Chamorro, was "effectively controlled" by Minister of the Presidency Antonio Lacayo. (p.537). The second involved "ultraconservative" UNO National Assembly members and, at least for the first part of the UNO government, was led by Vice-President Virgilio Godoy (p.537).

The first faction has worked with the FSLN, while the second has consistently attempted to decrease Sandinista influence in the government and armed forces. The FSLN has generally adopted a policy of working with the government to try and solve the country's problems. In the words of Maria Ramirez, Sandinista National Assembly member:

We have tried to be a responsible opposition, although this implies a political cost for the Frente. If the government manages to feed the people and the Frente does not, then we applaud them (Meeting, May, 1992).¹⁷

In addition to conflict over ties to the FSLN, the members of the UNO and centre block have also been divided over economic policy. These two factors are, however, related. The centre block and the FSLN both have supported the concertación process of forging ties between government, business and labour to develop compromise austerity packages. The far-right, on the other hand, feels that Sandinista influence in the nation's affairs must be diminished as a

¹⁷ The FSLN, however, has been internally divided over policy reform. In November of 1993, for instance, the Sandinista bench introduced a proposal to regulate the privatization of state properties with the logic that, if privatization could not be stopped, at least they could try to make it more beneficial for the workers. Many FSLN leaders, including Daniel Ortega, opposed this proposal, arguing that the FSLN must take a stronger position of opposing the privatization process altogether (Barricada International, Jan. 1994:24).

prerequisite for eligibility for foreign aid (IHCA, 1993:5).

Despite these differences, none of the political forces in the country have been able to come up with a viable economic alternative, attesting to the hostile international climate for dependent countries. It would appear that the spectrum of economic policy alternatives has been narrowed to gradations of the neo-liberal model.¹⁸ As the Central American University publication, "Envio," states:

Nicaragua is once again at a critical crossroads ... The problem is not only that the international aid is running dry, but also that the country is heading towards economic collapse. And if that were not serious enough, the truly critical part is that no political force - not the right-wing UNO opposition, not the government and not even the FSLN - is really working on a national alternative to the now exhausted model the country has been using... (IHCA, 1993:3).

The "now exhausted" economic model seems to have life in it yet. Since the 1990's, the Chamorro government has focused on Nicaragua's re-integration into the international market and the servicing of the international debt, which grew from \$1.65 billion in 1979 to \$10 billion in 1993. Global market re-integration is to be achieved by focusing on the export sector. Further currency devaluations have been introduced and attempts have been made to keep labour costs low to make

¹⁸ Although limited, there are economic choices which can be made. For instance, a 1993 government report calls for the need to "adjust" the adjustment process through: the use of foreign aid to boost production by stimulating the private sector rather than using it to service the country's debt (Barricada International, 1993:9). Unfortunately, pressure from international lending agencies to address balance of payment problems makes this alternative difficult to implement.

exports more competitive (Larson, 1993:5).¹⁹ The government has also focused on expenditure cuts within the state sector as a way to generate revenue in order to pay foreign debt arrears, which in turn will help pave the way for new multilateral, government and commercial bank loans. This has involved further lay-offs, salary freezes for those still employed and privatization of state enterprises and social services.

The overall trend towards neo-liberal economic adjustment appears to be intensifying rather than abating. In March of 1994, for instance, President Chamorro and members of her economic team met with Michael Camdessus, director of the IMF. During the meeting, the IMF set out its terms for the negotiation of new loans. These included the following: an additional 5,000 lay-offs of state workers; further privatization of state-owned enterprises, utilities and services (including health, education, communication, transportation and the national oil company); the restructuring of state banking; the reduction of protectionist measures on imports and the limiting of worker benefits achieved in collective bargaining agreements (NicaNet, 1994).

¹⁹ Because of a drop in international prices for Nicaragua's commodities, however, exports have not increased. In fact, exports decreased from \$332 million in 1990 to an estimated \$217 million in 1992 (Larson, 1993:5-6). It was also hoped that an increase in exports would help finance the increase in imports, which rose 63 percent from 1989 to 1992 (p.5-6). With the end of the US embargo in 1990, part of the increase in imports has been accounted for by luxury consumer items which few can afford to buy.

The IMF also suggested the renegotiation of Nicaragua's \$10 billion debt. The Chamorro government has said it will sign the agreement, in exchange for \$200 million in loans over the next two years.

The combination of the realigning of the political scenario and the economic crisis have resulted in significant changes at the grass-roots level. One change is that it is easier for Sandinista-based mass organizations to oppose a government they are not attempting to work with (Haugaard, 1991:175). The privatization of the economy, reduction in government spending and increasing unemployment are all cause for popular protest.²⁰ Another change is that grass-roots mobilization is no longer defined primarily as popular organizing through Sandinista mass organizations. Many organizations have felt the need to develop autonomy from the FSLN as a political party in order to open up the possibility for greater pluralism and an emphasis on "grass-roots democracy" which is concerned with the strengthening of civil society as much, and perhaps more, than it is with opposing the state (Light, 1991).

The CDSs (Sandinista Defense Committees) for instance,

²⁰ Labour strikes, sometimes violent, by transportation, customs, sugar and other organized workers in response to the privatization process and increasing prices have been frequent during the past four years. In addition, several groups, particularly in northern Nicaragua, have taken up arms as a way to pressure the government to comply with demobilization agreements it has made regarding land, housing, employment and credit for producers. While some of these groups are made up of demobilized army personnel (recompas), other are ex-contras (recontras). In addition, some groups have emerged which are a combination of the two (revuelcos).

have been replaced with the *Movimiento Comunal* (Communal Movement) which includes members from across the political spectrum. New movements, such as the environmental and gay/lesbian rights movements, have emerged. The CEBs in Esteli have always been a grass-roots, or popular, organization rather than a mass organization. Nonetheless, they were very influenced by the revolutionary process in their attempts to develop a religious identity as the "Church of the Poor." As shall be seen in the following section, the 1990 elections have also initiated a process of reflection for the CEBs which has included an evaluation of both their relationship to the FSLN and their relationship with the institutional Church. This emphasis on pluralism has been a positive one for women's movement in Nicaragua, which has acquired the autonomy necessary to develop more democratic forms of organizing and address issues of concern to Nicaraguan women (including the "production of meaning" regarding gender identity) which were not sufficiently articulated or acted upon during the 1980's. This will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

4.2 The Catholic Church and the Estelí CEBs

In the first section of this chapter, the participation of Christians in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship was noted. Following Maduro's framework, the CEBs, and the Church hierarchy as well by the end of the 1970's, can be seen as having responded to the social context of oppression under Somoza, particularly with the escalation of repression and human rights abuses in the late 1970's. In addition to responding to this situation, we can also see the potential for religion to influence social change as people took action based on their Christian convictions, or "religious worldview" to overthrow the dictatorship. Furthermore, this action represented a challenge to the dominant hegemony of the US-supported Somoza regime and an attempt to replace it with a popular hegemony.

Within Nicaragua's revolutionary context, many CEBs saw their role as living out, in concrete terms, the preferential option for the poor that had emerged from the CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Council) conferences in 1968 and 1979. Although there were ongoing conflicts between the Church hierarchy, led by Archbishop (later Cardenal) Obando y Bravo, and the FSLN which affected the development of the CEBs ("Church of the Poor," or grass-roots Church), the conflicts between the hierarchy and the CEBs resulted primarily from differing perceptions within the Church itself regarding what

is considered to be "properly religious" and what the Church's role in society should be:

Probably the most serious challenge for the progressive sector [of the Church] is the counter-offensive which has been launched by the Nicaraguan hierarchy, CELAM and the Vatican, who blame progressive priests and religious for the divisions within the Church and for attempting to create a "Popular Church" outside the authority of the bishops (Williams, 1989:58).

This section reviews the formation and development of the CEBs in Esteli with particular reference to the internal dynamics of the Roman Catholic Church in terms of the way in which these internal dynamics have determined what is "likely, possible, not likely or not possible" within the CEBs of Esteli. These internal dynamics, of course, cannot be separated from the broader context of which they are a part. As such, reference will be made also to the relationship of both the Church hierarchy and the CEBs to the Sandinista government and mass organizations during this period.

In September of 1993, the Coordinating Committee of the Esteli CEBs undertook an "oral history" of the CEBs from 1981 to the present.²¹ They saw the CEBs as having gone through the following five phases since 1981: formation, growth, growth and conflict, decline and survival. These five phases will form the backdrop for the discussion of these issues.

²¹ This oral history (*Recorriendo nuestra historia*) was traced through the experiences and recollections of current CEB leaders using the following questions: (1) What were the CEBs like when I joined? (2) How many members were there? (3) What did the groups do? What was happening in society? (4) Which organizations did the CEBs have ties to? (5) How did I enter the CEBs? What have I learned? (6) Who were the leaders? (7) How many groups were there? (15.09.93)

Key aspects of the development of the CEBs with respect to both the larger Church body and the broader social context will be interwoven within each of these phases."² These aspects include: (1) the new mode of religious production within the CEBs, (2) the CEBs and the Revolution, (3) the CEBs and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and (4) the significance of individual agency within the Catholic Church for the future of the CEBs.

**1981-1983: Formation
CEBs and a New Mode of Religious Production**

Johannes P. Van Vugt, in his study of the CEBs of Esteli, notes that they were first formed in 1976 "under the directives of a sympathetic bishop" (1991:38). These CEBs emerged from communities that were first organized in assemblies around lay Delegates of the Word. Courses (cursillos) in "catechetical instruction and social service" were "the first form of motivating the laity to be active in the Church" (p.37-8). Through the CEBs, people became involved in the resistance against Somoza as had happened elsewhere in the country. This included, for instance, protesting against human rights abuses and the defence of families of the

² In addition to secondary sources and the oral history process, this overview also draws upon formal interviews I carried out with CEB leaders, informal conversations with CEB leaders and members and, finally, my own "participant observation" during three short trips in 1987, 1988 and 1989, a two month stay in 1992 and a six month stay in 1993.

disappeared (p.38). Van Vugt notes that, following the triumph of the revolution, the bishop withdrew his support for the local CEBs¹³ and, "with the assistance of missionary religious" the CEBs formed their own headquarters, *Instituto para Formación Permanente* (Institute for Permanent Christian Formation, INSFOP)" (p.39).

This account is somewhat at odds with that given by the CEBs during my two research trips to Esteli. In both interviews I carried out and the 1993 oral history, they date the formation of the CEBs to 1981. Furthermore, according to them, the relationship with INSFOP was never a smooth one and by 1987 there was no longer a formal connection between the CEBs and INSFOP.

The pre-1979 CEBs appear to have had little overlap, in terms of membership and leadership, with the CEBs that are the focus of this study which were formed in 1981. INSFOP, however, is one point of confluence between the two. When the foreign missionaries Van Vugt refers to arrived in Esteli (in 1981), they began organizing independently in poor barrios in

¹³ Many of the CEBs which had formed in Nicaragua prior to 1979 developed independently of the hierarchy (Dodson, 1986:89). The hierarchy of the church, in a June 1979 pastoral letter, recognized the legitimacy of the struggle, including armed insurrection, against the dictatorship (Aragón & Loschke, 1991:30). Following the triumph, however (with the exception of a November 1979 Pastoral letter which spoke of "this demanding moment" in which the "preferential option for the poor can be concretized" (in D'Escoto, 1981:194), the hierarchy became increasingly critical of both the new government and the CEBs following the revolutionary triumph.

Esteli under the authority of Bishop Rubén López Ardón.²⁴ One of the Belgian priests served as a link between these emerging CEBs and the group of people who would form INSFOP a few years later (Interview, 03.11.1993). INSFOP served as an umbrella organization which coordinated CEB activities and offered resources and meeting space.

The first communities established by this group of foreign missionaries were in Juana Elena Mendoza, José Benito Escobar and Aristeo Benavides, three congruent barrios on the east side of the Panamerican highway in the parish of Guadalupe. Groups were formed by visiting people and inviting them to introductory talks (*charlas de iniciación*) which looked at themes from everyday life, for instance related to the family, children and the community. About one year after beginning the organizing work in the communities, the first retreat was held. At this time, there were approximately 30 to 35 people in the CEBs.

The CEBs in the three barrios mentioned were formed in keeping with the concept of CEBs as new organizational models for the Catholic Church. This is reflected in the following three areas: (1) a change in who is responsible for religious production, (2) a different concept of "Church" in a locational sense and (3) the religious production itself (theological reflection and liturgy).

²⁴ These foreign missionaries, along with a community of Salvadoreans, were refugees from the war in El Salvador. They included two Belgian priests, a Belgian religious and two Salvadorean religious.

In Chapter 2, Maduro's argument that, in societies with asymmetric modes of production generally, religious production is assumed by a body of religious functionaries, was reviewed. Within the Roman Catholic Church, this body of religious functionaries has authority which is maintained through a hierarchical and patriarchal structure. One of the significant aspects of the CEBs is that they "advocate the decentralization of Church decision-making and authority" (Williams, 1992:129). This represents an attempt to move towards a model of Church that is more a "community of disciples" than a model of Church as an institution.²

Within this decentralized model, religious production is shared more equally among members. Lay people participate as leaders (pastoral agents) within the church and clergy are "copartners" (Williams, 1992:129). In 1981, all of the leaders in the CEBs were priests or religious. As new groups emerged and people within these groups became involved in conscientization and training (*formación*), they gradually began to assume leadership positions. By 1993, most of the members of the Coordinating Committee were lay people (and most of these were women). This shift towards greater lay leadership appears to be a result of more than a decade of

² See Helen Ralston's "Models of Church: A Cross-Cultural Perspective" which discusses traditional, liberal and radical models of Church. The radical model views the Church as a community of disciples. CEBs are an example of this radical model in that they "express new and original forms of religious consciousness among poor, oppressed and believing people in Latin America" (1985:20).

formación work as well as the increasing distance between the CEBs and the hierarchy of the Church.

This concept of Church as a community of disciples rather than as an institution is also reflected in the organizational structure of the CEBs in a locational sense. During this formation period of the CEBs, the communities undertook fund-raising efforts such as raffles and cultural events to build a chapel (*La Capilla de Guadalupe*) on parish land in the José Benito Escobar barrio. Two current CEB leaders, in reflecting upon that time, say that people felt the Chapel belonged to them and that it was almost like a community centre. Rather than being a project that came from above, this chapel emerged from the efforts of the people themselves and this effort gave them a sense of community.

In addition, however, a key aspect of the CEBs is that they focused on "the Church going to the people" instead of the "people going to Church" (Interview, 11.06.1992). This involved small groups, usually of eight to twelve people, gathering for weekly reflection meeting in people's homes, rotating the location each week among CEP members. The weekly reflection meetings were the focal point of the CEBs in that they provided an opportunity for people to come together informally within a structure which allowed for everyone to participate.

During the weekly meetings, reflections would usually be

based on a biblical text.²⁶ Rather than the priest being the only person invested with the authority to read and interpret the Bible, people were able to reflect upon the texts and relate them to their own lives. As Soledad,²⁷ a CEB leader in 1992, has noted, this new way of expressing faith took some adjusting to:

I talked to the priest and he invited me to a meeting. In the meeting I went to I felt embarrassed because it was a way of meeting that was different from what I was familiar with, in which people were made to participate, be a subject ... So, I was embarrassed when they asked me something and almost felt badly... It wasn't like in other times when the Bible was read and nothing more had to be said because everything was said already. But I did like the explanation that was given, of how to live the reality and learn to reflect on the Bible (Interview, 11.06.1992).

The weekly reflections have followed the same general format from 1981 to the present. Four "moments" can be identified in the meetings. Liturgy (song and prayer) is used to open and close meetings. Reflection on a biblical text, discussion of concrete issues or problems ("life") and discussions about how to solve these problems ("action") form the body of the meetings. There is no set order, however, to the reflection, life and action moments. Meetings often begin with the reading of a biblical text, but in some cases, a concrete problem would come up at the beginning of the meeting. This seemed to vary depending on the situation. Contrary to the methodology of liberation theology which calls

²⁶ In addition, popular booklets and manuals, for example ones with cartoons instead of text, and non-biblical texts, including Church documents, have also been used as the basis for reflection.

²⁷ At the request of the CEBs, pseudonyms for CEB leaders and members are used in the thesis.

for a "socio-analytical" mediation, the CEBs, at least in the weekly meetings, appear to rely more directly on people talking about and seeking solutions to community problems: "We don't arrive at a meeting with a speech. People themselves bring things out" (Interview, 11.06.1992)."

Finally, another key point of departure in the CEBs mode of religious production is in terms of liturgy. Masses, although still held, did not take as central a role in the life of the community and involved greater lay participation." Many of the songs sung during masses and weekly meetings also represent a departure from the traditional church. Songs of the *Misa Campesina Nicaragüense*, for instance, written by Nicaraguan singer Carlos Mejía Godoy, reflect an image of God and of Jesus more in keeping with the everyday experiences of poor and working people. Jesus is given a specific class identity as a *Cristo trabajador*, (worker Christ) and God is a God who accompanies the poor:

" The lay leaders, as pastoral agents, clearly do have a directive role in the CEBs. Their objective, however, is to decrease their role as much as possible as groups mature and local leaders emerge. After centuries of a model of Church which excludes significant participation, however, this is a gradual process. For instance, many groups (adult groups in particular) feel that being visited by one of the coordinators is what gives the group legitimacy. One of the sources of conflict with INSOP appears to have been that INSOP was too directive in its style. This point is echoed by Van Vugt, who notes that, even though the CEBs "purport to be dialogic, ... providing the documents to be studied and the mode of analysis maybe leading participants to ...[an]... interpretation of their social situation ... that is not necessarily open or consensual and may very well be submitting the members to merely another form of authority imposed, albeit more democratically, from the outside" (1991:48).

" One lay leader, for instance, talked about how she was asked to pass out the Host during communion and was so surprised by this it made her nervous: "I was afraid I was going to stick it in their noses!" (Interview 11.06.1992).

You are the God of the poor,
the God humane and simple,
the God that sweats in the streets,
the God with a weather-beaten face.

That is why I talk to you
just like I talk to my people,
because you are the God of the working people,
Christ, you're a working man too.²²

The CEBs can thus be seen as engaging in a mode of religious production which is a departure in significant ways from the tradition of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua. They involved a horizontal structure with leadership and participation shared more equally by lay people and clergy and in which people's homes become the locus of "Church" and the biblical reflections and liturgy stem from people's concrete reality and seek to change this reality.

As was mentioned, the bishop of Estelí was aware of, indeed had authorized, the setting up of these new CEBs. López Ardón was one of the more progressive bishops in Nicaragua in the early 1980's (Interview, 11.06.1992; Kirk, 1992:150). Within the hierarchy of the Church as a whole, however, there was increasing concern over the direction the grass-roots Church was taking. The CEBs' decentralized structure and active participation of CEB members in popular movements (including mass organizations and government-run social programmes such as the Literacy Crusade) preoccupied the hierarchy because of its lack of control over CEB activities

²² From *Vos sos el Dios de los pobres, Misa Campesina*. (Translated in Lancaster, 1988:79-80).

and the feeling that they were straying from their properly religious role by being involved in the revolution. The hierarchy's discontent was not limited to the CEBs. It was also critical of the participation of clergy within the Sandinista government. This centred on three priests, Ernesto Cardenal, Minister of Culture (who had led the Solentiname community prior to 1979), Fernando Cardenal, Minister of Education and Miguel D'Escoto, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The preoccupations of the Nicaraguan hierarchy were also felt by the Vatican. In a June 29, 1982 letter to the Nicaraguan bishops, Pope John Paul II "denounced churches characterized as non-institutional, non-traditional, or alternative (Crahan, 1989:52). The tensions within the Church were deepened even further as a result of the March 4, 1983 visit of Pope John Paul II. Over half a million people crowded into Managua's July 19 Plaza to listen to the papal address. Many wanted to "hear a message of peace" and expected the prayers and blessing of the pope for Nicaragua's heroes and martyrs, including seventeen people who had been killed by the contras just the previous day. The pope, however, emphasized Church unity in his speech and the need for the people to "live united" with their bishops, to pray for the Church and to be true to their faith (Kirk, 1992:148). The pope's speech also included "admonitions about unbelief and atheistic education" (the latter an attack on the government) which, as members of a theological reflection

group noted in an article in the newspaper *El Nuevo Diario*, "sounded strange to us, as we experienced the presence of Christian motivation in the revolutionary process" (in Crahan, 1989:54). As Margaret Crahan notes, the pope's criticism of the grass-roots church "rests on the belief that it undercuts the authority of the bishops and their role as interpreters of the Church's official position on doctrine and morals" (p.52).

This atmosphere of polarization had reached the archdiocese of Esteli by the end of 1983. Bishop López had moved from being supportive to indifferent and then critical. One European priest I talked to, for instance, went to see Bishop López several times shortly after arriving in Nicaragua, but was never granted a meeting. According to the priest, the bishop knew he was a "Sandinista priest" and therefore did not want him working in the parish (Interview, 31.10.1993).

1984-1985: Growth CEBs And the Revolution

By 1984, two of the clergy who had arrived in 1981 from El Salvador had their "contracts broken by the bishop" (Interview, 31.10.1993). They did continue to work in the communities, however. In fact, despite the increasing conflict with the hierarchy, the period of 1984-5 was one of growth for the CEBs. Three new groups emerged and there were about 150 members by the end of 1985 (Meeting, 15.09.1993).

CEB groups became involved in organizing community

development projects (*proyectos sociales*) during this time. These included, for instance, sewerage and potable water projects, an income-generating *mercadito* (little market), and selling clothes to raise money to install electricity in one of the *barrios*. They were also involved in helping to recruit people for military service and, somewhat later, began organizing coffee brigades and participating in urban land takeovers (Meeting, 15.09.1993). During this time, a community centre (*El Despertar*) was purchased "in anticipation of future conflict" with INSFOP and the hierarchy as a meeting and gathering place for the CEBs (Interview, 03.11.1993).

The CEBs saw (and still do) their work as being a combination of pastoral (conscientization and *formación*) work and the organization of social projects. In theory, the pastoral work and social projects were combined in the sense that living out a preferential option for the poor involved more than reflecting upon lived experiences but taking concrete action to change reality. In practice, however, although the CEBs did initiate some projects of their own during this period, for the most part CEB members became involved in FSLN projects organized through the mass organizations, particularly the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDSs). In retrospect, however, they feel this was one of the failings of their work during the 1980's (Interview, 11.06.1992). This was because the FSLN-sponsored projects, as was mentioned in the first section of this chapter, tended to

be planned from above:

Some people said: "Why go off and do something on our own? That would be a ... parallel activity, to take people away from their barrio to ... start a project." So, in this sense, we were careless because we didn't continue with the conscientization of the people. That is to say, it seemed better for people to become involved in the barrio. They were good projects, but very "assistentialist." It wasn't conscientizing work but rather "slogan" work (*consigna y no consciencia*) - to solve problems for people. That's okay. That's not wrong [to solve people's problems]. What was wrong was the way in which it was done. So, both the Frente and ourselves, we made a mistake. What is the problem we are having now that we cannot bring people together? (Interview, 11.06.1992).

This lack of integration in the work of the CEBs because of their participation in the revolutionary process is a problem which, according to CEB leaders as well as scholars who have studied the Church in Nicaragua, did not originate during the 1960's, but had its roots in the insurrectionary period. Perhaps because of the urgent need for mobilization against the dictatorship, many people became directly involved in these activities, neglecting as a consequence the pastoral side to their work. One CEB leader notes, for instance, that the *movimiento de cursillistas* which had formed in the mid-1970's in Estelí was involved in "clandestine reflection to organize the struggle against the dictatorship" but it did not have a "clear, critical vision of transforming the Church" (Interview, 11.06.1992).²¹

This problem persisted beyond the triumph of the

²¹ Aragón and Loschcke also point out that the participation of the CEBs in the insurrection made it difficult for them to develop a process of coordination and organization that would allow them to be "subjects of transformation and change" within the structures of the Church itself (1991:31).

revolution because of the CEBs' "active collaboration" in the tasks of the revolution." On the positive side, projects were implemented that were beneficial to people. On the other hand, although the CEBs were attempting to "transform the Church" by living out a preferential option for the poor, their engagement in this very process led to a loss of autonomy because it was done by associating themselves with government-sponsored projects. As such, their work was not sufficiently rooted in their own identity as religious organizations. "To avoid becoming merely another mass organization," Philip Williams notes, "the CEB movement needed to develop its own separate identity within the revolutionary process" (1992:133). Finally, the CEBs' active collaboration also fuelled the hierarchy's constant accusation that the "Popular Church" was an arm of the FSLN.

1986 to 1987: Growth and Conflict CEBs and the Hierarchy

The CEBs were probably at their peak in 1986. Sixteen communities existed, and new youth groups were in the process of being formed. Many youth became involved through the

² Philip Williams distinguishes three distinct positions within the progressive Church in terms of their collaboration with the Sandinista government (1992:131). The first, direct participation, involved clergy who participated directly in the government. The second, active collaboration, included people who participated in government social programmes and mass organizations. The third position, passive collaboration, recognized the conflicts which active collaboration brought with the hierarchy and attempted a more conciliatory stance of generally supporting the "revolution's objectives" but being critical of "unnecessary government abuses" (p.132).

"first communion movement" and leaders were emerging from groups almost as soon as they had been formed (interview, 15.09.1993). "Life" themes such as alcoholism and courtship were explored in weekly meetings and retreats. The book, Christians. Why Fear the Revolution? was also one of the aids used in study groups. In addition, every Friday night a Way of the Cross (*Via Crucis*) was held through the main streets in Esteli.

By this time, thousands of people had been killed in the war and the U.S. administration was launching its campaign for increased military aid to the contras. In response to a situation that many saw as a "reliving of the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion," in February, 1986, Miguel D'Escoto led a 200 mile "*Via Crucis* for Peace and for Life" from Jalapa, a town on the northern border, to Managua (Reding, 1987:47). Over 100,000 people took part all together and it is estimated that 20,000 people participated in the eighth station in Esteli (p.47). The Friday night *Via Crucis* continued the "Evangelical Insurrection" which had been started by D'Escoto and focused also on denouncing the war. The Church hierarchy was sometimes criticized during the *Via Crucis* for consistently refusing to speak out against contra atrocities." The different positions taken by the CEBs and

" In fact, several bishops "were openly identified with the armed opposition" (Dodson, 1991:177). During a trip to Washington which coincided with D'Escoto's *Via Crucis* for instance, Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega, "endorsed contra leaders Arturo Cruz and Adolfo Calero as true 'democrats.'" (p.178). Obando y Bravo, following his appointment as

the hierarchy on the war highlighted and intensified the division within the Church. While the CEBs supported the military draft, the hierarchy actively denounced it. The hierarchy had consistently admonished the CEBs and progressive clergy generally for engaging in political activity that was not appropriate for Christians. The grass-roots Church, on the other hand, had difficulty accepting that the hierarchy was behaving in a neutral fashion, as is evident in the following letter from a group of Christian activists:

How can you say, Sr. Cardinal, that you do not support the counterrevolutionaries if you have never condemned their crimes...? How can you say that you do not favor them, when you know full well that now, in the United States-your words and letters are helping the U.S. government to convince the Congress to approve more than 100 million dollars in military aid for the counterrevolution? ... You cannot deceive us, or yourself, by claiming that you are neutral (in Kirk, 1992:196).

The conflicts between the hierarchy and the CEBs in Esteli worsened in 1987 when their Church, the Capilla de Guadalupe, was physically occupied and taken over by the priest and a group of parishioners from Esteli's Cathedral.²⁴ The group from the Cathedral had occupied the Church in order to regain it from what they considered the "Sandinista"

Cardinal, launched his own "Crusade for Peace" in which "the need for dialogue and reconciliation with the contras" was a constant theme (Kirk, 1992:185).

²⁴ One Sunday morning, a procession from the Cathedral in the centre of town moved into the José Benito Escobar barrio and occupied the Guadalupe Chapel. People from the CEBs were gathered on the left side of the Church, and Cathedral parishioners on the right, each with their own guitars and song books. The base communities held their Mass (based on the *Misa Campesina*) with a priest from a neighbouring town, with the Cathedral priest standing - arms folded - facing the altar the entire time. As soon as the Mass was finished, another Mass was officiated by the Cathedral priest.

Church. After several days of negotiation with the Bishop of Estell the CEBs lost the Chapel to the Cathedral. This incident is a further example of the internal divisions within the Church. The division is essentially a religious one, in that both the CEBs and the hierarchy have strong ideas about the best way to live out their faith. These ideas, while significantly opposed, nonetheless both represent ways of expressing religious belief and identity within the context of the broader society within which they are embedded. The hierarchy of the Church has consistently attempted to legitimize itself (and delegitimize the CEBs) through "religious production, practices and discourses" by using its position of dominance within the ecclesial structure (and society generally) to support its particular religious worldview. The insistence that the CEBs must obey the bishops in the interest of Church unity attests to this. The equal insistence that the CEBs are engaged in political activity while the hierarchy is maintaining neutrality is an attempt on behalf of the hierarchy to delegitimize the CEBs.

The participation of the CEBs in the revolution is an indication of the potential for religious groups to be actively involved in social change and yet it is precisely this active involvement that is a source of contention for the hierarchy. Thus, the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church influence the extent to which the CEBs have been able to play an active role in social change.

Although the Nicaraguan context of the 1980's was a highly polarized one due to the revolution and counterrevolution, not all the problems within the CEBs lay with the hierarchy. As has been pointed out, their relationship with INSFOP, an organization which was anything but accommodating to the hierarchy, was also not smooth. During this period, tensions which had been building with INSFOP grew worse. These tensions stemmed from different perceptions between the CEBs and INSFOP regarding the role of the latter. The CEBs felt that, rather than being "at the service of the communities," the middle class leadership of INSFOP had its own vision regarding the direction of the CEBs and had begun to impose its own agenda.³⁵ In 1986, the CEBs formed a coordinating committee which was independent of INSFOP, which met in the Community centre *El Despertar*. The communities continued to be centered around people's homes (for weekly meetings) and the *Despertar* for *convivencias* and educational workshops (*talleres de formación*), which were held about once a month. The *convivencias*, or celebrations, usually centred around a specific theme, such as Mother's Day, and included cultural activities such as dancing and playing

³⁵ In addition to what they perceived as the authoritarian structure of INSFOP, there was also the problem of INSFOP undermining their own organizing efforts. The CEBs felt that INSFOP was intruding in their work by going into barrios where groups were already organized and trying to "take people away" by having "convivencias with *camales*" (Interview, 03.11.1993). In other words, INSFOP could draw people because it had more resources to buy food for meetings, but also used this as a means to control the base communities.

games (often including *piñatas*, for instance). If there was a priest available, the *convivencia* would end with a mass.

1988-90: Decline

During this time, the CEBs were still involved in coffee picking brigades, health brigades, raising money for projects through fasts, vigils for peace and the *Via Crucis*. Weekly meetings, *talleres de formación* and *convivencias* continued to be the focal point of the CEBs. Membership, however, was declining in the CEBs. Several factors seem to have contributed to this. A decade of conflict with the hierarchical Church, and in particular the continued accusations from the hierarchy that the CEBs were the *Iglesia Sandinista* (Sandinista Church) created conflict for many people. Some left the communities to rejoin a parish; others remained Catholic but only nominally (attending mass once a week for instance) while others left to join one of the many emerging Protestant churches. Although this appears to be a minor factor, some people also left because they felt uncomfortable with "being asked questions" and having to participate in meetings. The deteriorating economic situation and decline in government support for the mass organizations may also have been a factor.

1990-1993: Survival

The Importance of Individuals in the Catholic Church

The CEBs have been in a "survival" phase since the 1990 elections. Having been "abandoned" by the hierarchy because of their support for the revolution, they now feel abandoned also by the party they worked so hard to support. In a February, 1993, letter I received from them, they spoke of the "political anarchy and economic crisis" in Nicaragua and their disillusionment with the "FSLN as a vanguard party." "Only God and the people" they said, "will save the people."

While they remain uncompromisingly committed to the "Church of the Poor," there is concern over the future direction of the comunidades. During my six months in Nicaragua in 1993, I attended several meetings in which the future of the CEBs was discussed. They have not discounted the possibility that the CEBs will disappear altogether. They feel that if they are to survive it is necessary to reconcile with the hierarchy.

It is not clear, however, what the position of the hierarchy is with respect to this. The Church hierarchy in Esteli, now under Bishop Juan Avelardo Mata,²⁶ has begun (once again) to set up CEBs.²⁷ This is part of the "New

²⁶ Bishop Schlaefer, of the Atlantic Coast, was the only Bishop in 1993 with sympathies towards the Church of the Poor. With his death in 1993, all of the current Bishops, including Avelardo Mata, are conservative.

²⁷ The term CEB is becoming more and more ambiguous as it refers to CEBs formed in different times under different circumstances. In Esteli alone, for instance, there are CEBs that were formed in 1976, those formed in 1981 and, now, the New Evangelization CEBs being formed since 1992. In a September, 1993 meeting of Esteli clergy, a discussion was held regarding the term "CEB." Some felt they should do away with it altogether, because of its controversial history. Others felt they should

Evangelization" initiative which grew out of the 1992 Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The "Santo Domingo" document which emerged from this fifth CELAM conference reinforces the commitment present in CELAM documents from Medellin and Puebla to the CEBs as the "live cell of the parish" (1992:42). The document makes clear reference, however, to the need for CEB animators to be in communion with the bishop and for CEBs to be wary of ideological and political manipulation:

The CEB ... should be animated by lay people, men and women who are adequately prepared ... the animators should be in communion with the respective parish priest and the bishop ... When there does not exist a clear ecclesial foundation and a sincere search for communion, these communities cease to become ecclesial and can become victims to ideological or political manipulation (#61 and 63, p.42).

The document goes on to state that:

We feel it necessary to ... ratify the validity of the ecclesial base communities, fostering in them a missionary spirit and a spirit of solidarity and searching for their integration in the parish and in the universal church ... [and to] elaborate plans of pastoral action that assure the preparation of lay animators ... in intimate communion with the parish priest (#63, p.42).

This short section on the CEBs, less than a page long in total, mentions three times the need for CEBs, and lay leaders in particular, to be in communion with the priests, bishops and the universal Church. In addition, it makes specific mention of the dangers of political manipulation of the CEBs. Clearly, this text is a response to CELAM's concern over what it sees as the politicization of the preferential option for the poor.

keep it, which they have (Interview, 31.10.1993).

There seems to be general agreement among CEB coordinators that the hierarchy is continuing in its attempts to marginalize them. The setting up of the new CEBs which, in keeping with the Santo Domingo document, are developing under the direct guidance of parish priests and the bishop, is one instance of this. CEB leaders feel, however, that it will be possible to become re-connected with the hierarchy because the situation is not as polarized now as it was during the 1980's. Despite the setting up of the New Evangelization CEBs, there are clergy working within the institutional structures of the Church who are sympathetic to the CEBs. As one of these priests noted: "Maybe, as time passes and the CEBs are less associated with the Sandinistas, this [re-integration] will become possible" (Interview, 31.10.1993). In addition, although the CEBs were generally actively involved in supporting the revolution in the 1980's, there were CEB members, and in one case an entire group, who did not (Interview, 24.06.1992).²⁸

Thus we see that the role of the bishop and individual priests, as well as CEB pastoral agents, will be very influential in determining the future direction of the CEBs. This relates to the fourth aspect of Maduro's formulation which involves the influence of individuals on both religion

²⁸ In addition, many CEB members, in particular the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs, continue to attend INSOP-sponsored events, indicating that conflicts at the level of leadership are not necessarily felt directly by members.

and society. At the level of the hierarchy, the inclinations of the bishop, towards or against the CEBs, can be significant. Bishop López, as has been pointed out, was one of the more progressive in the country and this seems to have had an effect on the establishing of the CEBs. The current bishop is more conservative, and the CEBs feel that, if he were to be replaced with a more sympathetic bishop, this would have a significant impact on their ability to re-integrate.³⁹ The role of individual priests in developing links with local parishes will also be very important.⁴⁰

The role of the priests is also significant in that the current absence of a priest in the CEBs provides both opportunities and limitations. On the one hand, the increase in lay participation and flexibility to engage in projects without possible opposition stems from the current absence of a priest in the CEBs. On the other hand, this absence also diminishes the legitimacy of the CEBs as part of the Catholic Church. The holding of masses, even if it is only once a month or once every two months, continues to be important to many CEB members. When I asked what the potential influence would be of having a permanent priest again, CEB coordinators responded that it depended on the priest: "a priest can either

³⁹ There are rumours that Cardenal Obando y Bravo is considering him as a likely successor and as such will want to transfer him to Managua.

⁴⁰ There has already been some dialogue between CEB members and parish priests. In El Rosario, a barrio on the northern edge of Estelí, for instance, CEB members have been visited by the priest and some have begun attending the local Church.

bring people together or paralyse [the work]" (Interview, 03.11.1993). With a sympathetic priest, they felt there would not be a problem. I was particularly interested, of course, in this question insofar as it related to the ability to engage in gender consciousness within the CEBs. Again, they felt it would depend on the priest. This question will be explored further in the following chapter.

The importance of the priests and bishops is, of course, directly related to their position within the Church hierarchy. The further up they are in this hierarchy, the greater their potential to determine the future of the CEBs (what is likely or not likely for them). They are, in turn, limited or enabled in their actions by their superiors.

The role of pastoral agents as mediators between the hierarchy and CEB members will also be significant. Although the CEBs are engaged in new modes of religious production in which structures of authority are not as rigid as they are within the hierarchy of the Church, CEB leaders nonetheless play a very important role in both planning and coordinating CEB activities and in articulating the vision of Church which the CEBs represent. Most leaders have participated in regional and national networks and conferences and some have participated in international ones.⁴¹ Thus, while most leaders are from the community themselves (i.e. not middle

⁴¹ For instance, while I was there one CEB leader spent four months in Brazil participating in a popular theology and popular education course.

class and not foreign), their development as leaders in the CEBs has given them a broader perspective on the Church than most CEB members." All of the CEB leaders are aware of the history of the CEBs and the internal conflicts with the hierarchy, for instance. The members of the Coordinating Committee, therefore, will to a large extent be the spokespeople in representing the interests of the CEBs, for instance to sympathetic clergy.

While the CEB leaders see their work as building a consciousness of Church which is different from that of the traditional Church, most CEB members do not make as clear a distinction between the CEBs and the hierarchy. For instance, while many people prefer to participate in the CEBs rather than going to the Cathedral because they see the latter as a "place for rich people," they do not have the same awareness as CEB leaders regarding the intentionality within the CEBs of engaging in "religious production" which is distinct from the hierarchy. As was pointed out in the Chapter 2, liberation theology is concerned with the "lived experience of faith." Vilma, one of the CEB coordinators, for instance, said that for many people participating in the CEBs is like a "calming of the conscience." According to Dofia Sonia, a CEB member, "religion is nice, very nice, because it is Christian, it is

" This is reflected, for instance, in the language used by each. While at the level of the Coordinating Committee terms such as "liberation theology" and "gender consciousness" were used, among the CEB members generally, terms such as "the Church of the Poor" and "the struggles of women" were used.

Catholic" (Interview, 25.06.1992). Vilma also commented that, for many people, participating in some form of religious organization is important because people fear that, if they do not, they will be condemned.⁴¹ This point can be seen in a discussion with Doña Maritza. I asked what the Reign of God meant to her, and she said:

Well, the Reign of God will be built by us here on earth. Praying, asking God to give us wisdom, intelligence, encouragement, to visit our friend (compañero) and say to him: "Look, don't be involved in bad things - drinking, smoking ... but let's meet together in prayer, let us ask God, all together, so that when he comes he finds us ready ... he won't say ... that he doesn't know us. Why? Because we are lost, because we did wrong here on earth" (Interview, 20.06.1992).

The conflicts between the hierarchy and the CEBs, in fact, sometimes lead to confusion for CEB members who do not clearly understand the difference between the two. One of the women who was involved in the 1993 participatory research group, for instance, also participated in the CEBs organized by the Cathedral which are part of the New Evangelization. She was not entirely clear about what the differences between the two were, but was preoccupied because she had been told (in the New Evangelization groups) that she should not participate in the "other communities" because they were too political. She continues, however, because she feels a sense of community in them and likes the fact that issues of everyday life are explored, which is not the case in the New Evangelization CEBs (Informal discussion, October 13, 1993).

⁴¹ She felt this was related to the rise of Protestant Churches and Evangelical "sects," many of which "threaten" people by telling them they will be condemned (i.e. they will not be saved) if they do not participate.

Thus, the role of individuals (the bishop, priests, CEB leaders and CEB members) will be important in determining the future direction of the CEBs. Individual agency, in turn exists in the context of both the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church and the social, political and economic changes within Nicaraguan society.

4.3 Women's Movement in Nicaragua

In Chapter 2, women's issues were explored in the context of various theories related to women's participation in the development process as well as the specific development of women's movement in Latin America. Analytical concepts useful to this analysis such as production, reproduction and community managing as well as the distinction between the public and private spheres were discussed. Finally, the connection between feminist and grass-roots women's praxis was explored. The following discussion of women's movement in Nicaragua will be developed with reference to both this framework and the specific Nicaraguan context as it has been outlined in the first section of this chapter.

The discussion of the changes within women's movement in Nicaragua begins with a brief overview of women's participation in the overthrow of Somoza. The 1980's will be discussed with reference to both achievements and problems in

the revolutionary approach to women under the Sandinistas. Finally, changes within women's movement since the electoral defeat of the FSLN will be examined in terms of the development of autonomous women's movement which is no longer subordinated to the FSLN and AMNLAE, the organization which represented the national women's movement throughout the 1980's.

Women in the Struggle Against Somoza

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, many forms of women's movement in Latin America have developed in the context of repressive military dictatorships. Such was the case in Nicaragua, where women joined the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship. In 1961, women began joining the armed struggle and, by 1979, approximately 30 percent of FSLN guerrilla fighters were women (Collinson et al., 1990:140). Women also participated by providing food and shelter to guerrillas, running messages, making bombs and demonstrating in the streets. Many women were jailed, tortured, raped and exiled and had their houses searched and looted by the National Guard (AMPRONAC, 1983:11).

In 1977, AMPRONAC (The Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the National Problem), was formed with the objective of drawing more women "into the struggle against Somoza" and "denouncing human rights abuses of the regime" (Collinson et al., 1990:139). AMPRONAC was not initially

linked to the FSLN but represented a cross-class alliance which included women who felt "reform could take place without the revolutionary overthrow of the government" (Smith, 1993:201). By mid-1978, the organization had included in its platform demands specifically related to women, such as equal pay for equal work and the elimination of the commercialization of women's bodies (Chuchryk, 1991:144). In 1978, with a membership of 3,000, AMPRONAC also decided to become a Sandinista organization and join the United People's Movement (Smith, 1993:201). AMPRONAC marked the emergence, for the first time in Nicaragua, of organized women with a political identity.

While women supported the struggle against Somoza, the FSLN in turn gave its full support to the emancipation of women, which it saw as part of the revolutionary project. In its 1969 Historic Programme, the FSLN outlined its first official statement on women in which it declared that:

The Sandinista Popular Revolution will abolish the discrimination that women have suffered with respect to men; it will establish economic, political, and cultural equality between women and men (National Directorate, 1987:12).

As Millie Thayer points out, the Sandinistas were influenced by the "slow process of dialogue and rapprochement between Marxists and feminism in Latin American in the 1970's and 1980's" (1994:4).

Women in the Revolution

Once in power, the Sandinista government expressed an

active commitment to the elimination of discrimination against women. The position put forth in the 1969 FSLN Programme was reiterated in the September 1979 Statute of Rights and Guarantees of Nicaraguans. The Statute "proclaimed the full equality of men and women with respect to citizens' rights and duties, juridical personality, work, wages, and family relations" and also "pledged to 'remove all obstacles' to achieving that equality" (Molyneux, 1985:146). The FSLN relied to a large extent on AMNLAE (The Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women), one of the mass organizations with direct links to the FSLN, to implement many of its programmes. AMNLAE had been formed in August, 1979, replacing AMRONAC as the organization representing the national women's movement in Nicaragua. In a 1981 Assembly, AMNLAE defined its role as "giving women an organic instrument which would permit them to integrate themselves as a decisive force in the program of the revolution; and, moreover, express in an organized manner, both their concerns and their social, economic and cultural aspirations" (p.147).

In the first few years following the triumph, AMNLAE focused its energies in two principal areas. One was the presentation of new legislation guaranteeing greater equality between women and men. The other was organizing women to be involved in specific campaigns related to social issues (basic needs). In the area of legislation, a number of laws were passed during this time which addressed the discrimination of

women. The first one, passed in 1979, prohibited the portraying of women's bodies "in an insulting manner or for the purpose of advertising" (Smith, 1993:204). Specific legislation related to work was also introduced, including the following: equal pay for equal work, allowance for nursing mothers to have one hour off to breast-feed, legislation making it illegal for employers to dismiss a woman because she is pregnant and the replacing of the "Family Wage Law" (in which male heads of families collected wages for all working members) with legislation that allowed women to collect their pay directly (Collinson et al., 1990:29,112; Smith, 1993:204).

In addition, two pieces of legislation were introduced to the Council of State by AMNLAE which related to patriarchal relations in the family. In September, 1981, the "Law of Relations Between Mothers, Fathers and Children" abolished the *Patria Potestad* Law which had given men unlimited rights over children. The new law called for the shared responsibility of parents for children (Smith, 1993:203-4). In November of 1992, the "Law of Maintenance" was introduced which legislated paternal responsibility, including financial responsibility, for children, inside or outside of marriage (p.203-4). While these pieces of legislation were significant advances, many proved difficult to enforce in practice. Paternal irresponsibility "continued to account for a high rate of female-headed households" (Chuchryk, 1991:152). In 1986, for

instance 48 percent of Nicaraguan families were headed by women (p.152). In addition, the Sandinistas' commitment to changes within the family was not constant and, in fact, was often contradicted by other policies. Finally, the legislation related to work applied only to women in the formal labour force.

During this period, AMNLAE focused on a number of "basic needs" felt by women. These included the setting up of child-care centres for working mothers and establishing small production cooperatives (Collinson et al., 1990:141). The number of child-care centres increased from eight prior to the revolution to 248 by 1982 (Chuchryk, 1991:148). This was a significant achievement, but unfortunately still fell far short of demand. In addition, the government relied upon AMNLAE to coordinate (through local AMNLAE groups which had been set up) many of the programmes related to health and education. Women participated disproportionately to men in these programmes. 95 percent of the educators in the Popular Education Collectives which were set up following the Literacy Crusade, for instance, and 75 percent of the health brigadistas were women (Collinson et al., 1991). Women brigadistas acquired valuable knowledge and skills through their participation in these processes. In addition, women also benefited from grass-roots education and health campaigns. For instance, 196,000 women became literate as a result of the Literacy Crusade (Molyneux, 1985:152). The

implementation of these strategies, however relied on women's traditional roles in social reproduction and community managing:

Attempts to improve the health of the Nicaraguan population have hinged on women as the implementors of new programmes and policies. In the process, thousands of women have had the chance to receive training and gain confidence in community organising and leadership. Nevertheless, the idea that women are society's "carers" may have been reinforced along the way (1990:107).

In contrast, 31.4 percent of government leadership positions were held by women⁴ (a remarkably high figure relative to the pre-revolutionary period, but still inversely proportional to women's participation at the community level) and none of the nine FSLN Comandantes in the government were women (Smith, 1993:202). Following the argument laid out in Chapter 3, women's participation in the meeting of basic needs represented an increase in women's active participation in the public sphere. The fact that women participated disproportionately to men in these activities, however, and the fact that women were seen as "society's carers" indicate that these activities did not represent a substantial shift in relations of social reproduction between women and men.

This point was highlighted during the second phase of the Sandinista period. By 1983, AMNLAE was called upon by the government to direct its efforts towards the "defence and consolidation" of the revolution. During this time, as is often the case in a war economy, the government relied upon

⁴ Of note among these were Dora Maria Téllez, Minister of Health, and Doris Tijerino, chief of police.

women to assume productive tasks. By 1985, for instance, 70 percent of textile workers and cotton workers were women (Collinson et al., 1990:31). By the late 1980's, women comprised 37 percent of the industrial labour force, 80 percent of health workers and 74 percent of teachers (Chuchryk, 1991:148). In addition, 64 percent of workers in the informal sector were women (p.148). Although the focus on incorporating women into production led to tangible benefits, including material benefits (income) and political benefits (women's increased presence in the public sphere), women continued to have primary responsibility for reproductive tasks within the household, not to mention their role as community managers.⁴³ Another problem was that the unions were dominated by men. By 1987, for instance, 40 percent of ATC members were women whereas only 15 percent of leadership positions within the union here held by women (Smith, 1993:219). Women's low participation in union leadership was due to time constraints placed upon women because of their responsibilities in the domestic sphere as well as traditional stereotypes regarding their participation

⁴³ A 1987 study on women agricultural workers carried out by the Nicaraguan Institute for Women, for instance, found that the Nicaraguan workforce was becoming "feminized," but in terms that were still disadvantageous to women (Smith, 1993:206-7). This disadvantage resulted from the unresolved contradiction "between socialisation of the productive sphere and the privatisation of the reproductive sphere (p.211). In other words, women still had primary responsibility in the private, domestic sphere. The study also found that many women wanted more information on family planning and greater access to birth control (over one third of the women who had been pregnant had had one or more abortions) (p.211).

in unions, including pressure from husbands not to be involved. Women's low participation made it difficult for their voices and specific demands to be heard.

The government also relied on women to mobilize men for the war. With the introduction of the military draft, AMNLAE focused its efforts on "sophisticated and nearly fulltime [sic] political work with mothers of potential and actual draftees" (IHCA, 1991:34).⁴⁶ This focus provided much-needed support for women with sons who had been drafted into the Patriotic Military Service. The emphasis was, however, exclusively on women's roles as mothers and relied on popularly held religious beliefs which associated Nicaraguan mothers with the sacrificing Virgin Mary:

This ideological work [of the Frente] dovetailed with the very potent role played in Nicaraguan religious and popular culture by the Virgin Mary. Mothers were exalted first and foremost as mothers, and praised for giving their greatest gift - their sons - to the cause (IHCA, 1991:34).

During the war, thus, the FSLN and AMNLAE focused on women's roles as either mothers or workers. The fact that women, as the primary caretakers of the household, bore the heavy burden of the economic problems created by the war was not addressed by either AMNLAE or the FSLN. Nor were many other problems that women faced. While the war clearly imposed severe limitations on the ability of the government to act, "overt public recognition" of women's roles and the "huge burden they were suddenly forced to assume" may have helped

⁴⁶ This was done in part through the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs of the Revolution.

alleviate the fact that women's concerns were not being addressed (IHCA, 1991:35). This public recognition, however, did not happen. Another aspect of this problem was that no real process of consultation had been undertaken to ask women what their concerns were. AMNLAE's work became subordinated to national priorities and AMNLAE was never given the "time or space to develop an analysis of women's oppression" (Collinson et al., 1990:142).

By the mid-1980's, AMNLAE's subordination to national priorities and the FSLN was leading to a decline in its popular membership. In response to this problem, AMNLAE organized a much overdue public consultation. Six hundred meetings were held throughout the country. There, women identified issues they felt AMNLAE should be addressing.⁴⁷ These included the following: (1) the need for greater information on and access to birth control; (2) domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment in the workplace; and (3) the failure of men to share in the burden of child-care and housework (p.143).

Many women active in the Sandinista-affiliated unions also began to express concern over AMNLAE's narrow focus. The ATC (Rural Workers' Association), attempted unsuccessfully to

⁴⁷ A specific objective in the holding of the open forums was to gain input from women on the Constitution, which was introduced in 1987. While many suggestions (such as the Constitutional right to abortion) were not included in the new Constitution, others were. The Constitution uses gender-free language, establishes equality before the law and defends the equality of "rights and responsibilities" between women and men" (Chuchryk, 1991:155).

raise issues they found to be of concern to women members, such as family planning. This led to a break with AMNLAE and the forming of a women's secretariat within the ATC. Other Sandinista mass organizations subsequently formed women's secretariats as well.

The rifts which had begun to appear within women's movements led the FSLN to take an official position on women through its 1987 Proclamation on "Women and the Sandinista Revolution." The Proclamation, in addition to promoting women's incorporation into production, also raised issues of *machismo*, paternal irresponsibility and domestic violence (Chuchryk, 1991:156). Overall, however, this document reinforced the FSLN's position that "women's interests are promoted principally through the defense and consolidation of the Revolution" (National Directorate, 1987:33). Gender needs were thus to be met only insofar as they contributed to the meeting of broader goals of the revolution. This document also makes specific reference to women's roles in the family:

The family is the basic unit of society and guarantees its social reproduction, not only in a biological sense, but also by passing on the principles and values held by society. Women have been the fundamental pillar of the Nicaraguan family, defending and supporting their families in the most difficult circumstances, for which they deserve the highest respect and admiration (1987:35).

While this document acknowledges women's important contribution to Nicaraguan society, it does not question women's disproportionate representation in tasks of social reproduction, or call for the increased participation of men in these activities. For instance, this document also states

that the FSLN will "struggle so that women can fulfil their maternal function and their family responsibilities under ever-improving conditions and in a way that these responsibilities do not become insurmountable obstacles to their own personal growth and development" (Chuchryk, 1991:155). This statement highlights a fundamental contradiction in FSLN policy towards women. On the one hand, they declared a commitment to remove obstacles to women's personal growth and development. On the other hand, obstacles identified by women themselves to their fuller and more equal participation in society (i.e the lack of access to birth control to reduce family size and the lack of financial and domestic support from fathers) would not be removed. The FSLN's position, in fact was a pro-natalist one in that women were "exhorted to produce for the revolution" (p.153).⁴⁸

By 1988, in recognition of the fact that it had fallen short of meeting specific gender interests faced by women, AMNLAE revised its strategic objectives. In addition to the defence and consolidation of the revolution, it also adopted as objectives the following: (1) to transform women's position of subordination and create just social and personal relations between men and women and (2) to "work for equality and dignity for women," including women's rights to "acquire scientific knowledge about her reproductive capacity in order

⁴⁸ President Daniel Ortega, for instance stated in 1987 that: "One way of depleting our youth is to promote the sterilization of women in Nicaragua ... or to promote a policy of abortion (in Chuchryk, 1991:153).

that she could make more informed decisions" (Smith, 1993:221). AMNLAE also agreed to democratize its structure by electing representatives to a National Assembly of 1,200 members (which would act as the national decision-making body for the "movement") through local meetings in every region (Collinson et al., 1990:147)."

This was a substantial departure in that AMNLAE was transforming its top-down structure which subordinated the concerns of women to national FSLN priorities into a democratized structure which allowed for the addressing of issues women themselves had identified as important. Unfortunately, however, AMNLAE was thwarted in its ability to act significantly upon these new strategic objectives by the FSLN's campaign for the 1990 elections. AMNLAE, along with the other mass organizations, was to refocus all its energies towards the campaign: "AMNLAE's elections were frozen, new leaders were appointed by the party and all efforts were directed toward delivering the women's vote for the FSLN" (Thayer, 1994:6).

In addition to the repercussions this had on AMNLAE's ability to present itself as a movement which represented women's interests, this was also not a strategic move on the part of the FSLN. Rather than securing the "women's vote" for the FSLN, the further distancing of AMNLAE from concerns faced

" As a reflection of this democratization process, AMNLAE also changed its name from The Luisa Amanda Espinosa Association of Nicaraguan Women to the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Movement of Nicaraguan Women.

by women in their day-to-day lives may have had an adverse effect on the FSLN campaign. For instance, a key factor in the defeat of the FSLN was its loss of support within the informal sector (including domestic workers and other women) and among housewives.³⁰ Many women were also critical of the style of the election campaign, which relied on "traditional ideological elements" in terms of masculine and feminine roles (IHCA, 1991:39). For example, Daniel Ortega, the FSLN's presidential candidate, was presented as a "fighting cock," the Sandinista youth organization sponsored beauty contests to attract sympathetic youth and "restrictions on sexist advertising were relaxed" to allow "scantily clad women" to appear on TV and billboards (Thayer, 1994:6).

The FSLN, as a revolutionary government committed to the emancipation of women, was able to achieve many advances in the position of women in Nicaraguan society. This was to a large extent done through AMNLAE as a Sandinista mass organization. It was, in a sense, these very achievements, and perhaps in particular the increased involvement of women in the public sphere of community managing, the formal work force and political organizing that created conditions which revealed even further the contradictions in women's social, economic and political roles (Thayer, 1994:6). These

³⁰ A 1989 internal study carried out by AMNLAE had identified housewives as an area of concern in that "the revolution had simply not attended to this group (IHCA, 1991:35). This study further concluded that housewives constituted "a possible social base for right-wing parties" (p.35).

achievements also contributed to an emerging consensus among women that women's movement could not be represented by one organization alone, and in particular one with limited resources and ties to a political party. Thus, while acknowledging their debt to AMNLAE, many women began to move away from the organization in order to create a broad-based and autonomous women's movement within Nicaragua.

Women's Organizing Since 1990

In contrast to the FSLN's portrayal of Daniel Ortega as a macho figure fighting to defend all Nicaraguans, the UNO coalition relied upon the "all-forgiving mother" image of leader Violeta Chamorro who "promised to put Nicaragua's shattered family back together" (IHCA, 1991:39). This image appealed to many people - and women in particular - whose vote for the UNO was a vote against further confrontation and aggression. The new government, however, has been less than successful in its attempts to reunite the Nicaragua family. As was mentioned in the first section of this chapter, popular unrest - including sometimes violent labour strikes and the formation of armed groups - have been due in no small measure to popular dissatisfaction over government policies.

With respect to women's issues, the new government also has come under criticism. The economic policy has adversely affected women in that cut-backs in state spending have relied on the "elasticity of women's time" to meet basic needs. In

addition, women have either been pushed into the informal sector or the ranks of the unemployed. For instance, of the ten women I interviewed in 1992 who are CEB members in Esteli, only one was employed in the formal work force, as an elementary school teacher earning approximately \$US 100 a month. Others relied on extended family and/or selling goods such as firewood, tortillas and milk from their homes, taking in sewing or doing laundry and ironing (both in their homes and in other people's homes). Among the women who had husbands or partners, only one had permanent employment.

In addition to the negative impact of economic policy on women's lives, the current administration, with the support of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, has taken specific actions which work against women's interests through its programme for "the recuperation of the moral and social function of the Nicaraguan family (Thayer, 1994:7). This programme includes the launching of anti-abortion campaigns and the replacing of the school-systems sex education curriculum with Church-influenced "moral and civic" education which teaches traditional gender roles (p.7). As Millie Thayer notes:

The Chamorro government's economic and social policies produced an intensification of the private and public crisis that women were already facing, while its political discourse reasserted the dominance of traditional gender hierarchies. Women's organizations no longer had legitimacy or access to the state, even the limited access that AMNLAE had enjoyed (p.7).

Somewhat paradoxically, it has been within the context of a state which is un-supportive of many of the demands voiced

by women over the previous decade that women's movement in Nicaragua has been able to grow and establish an autonomous identity. As has been the case with other mass organizations, this is partly accounted for by the fact that the state is a clearer target to organize against. Much of the growth in women's movement, however, can be attributed to achievements in the area of women's rights under the Sandinistas which both exposed the need to address women's issues and provided the political space within which to organize around these issues.

Several streams have emerged within women's movement in Nicaragua since 1990. One stream is identified with AMNLAE, which continues to be affiliated, albeit less directly, to the FSLN. In 1990, AMNLAE attempted to pick up where it had left off before the elections by inviting women from various organizations (including women's secretariats of the unions and independent organizations which had been formed in the mid-to-late 1980's) to a consultation to reactivate the women's movement. Many women's organizations, however, declined the invitation because they questioned "the very nature of the movement" and in particular AMNLAE's dependent position vis-à-vis the FSLN (Thayer, 1994:7).

In 1991, two separate events were held on March 8, International Women's Day, which concretized the ruptures within women's movement. AMNLAE held its national assembly which was attended by 600 women while the emerging autonomous feminist movement organized the "Festival of the 52 Percent."

The festival represented the first time "activities to commemorate international women's day ... were planned by groups outside the Sandinista women's organizations" (Barricada International, 1993:24)."

The initiative to plan a national women's conference grew out of the Festival of the 52 percent. This conference, "The *Encuentro* of Nicaraguan Women United in Diversity," was held in January of 1992 and approximately 800 women attended. One of the basic premises of the *encuentro* was "the recognition of ideological and organizational autonomy" of women's movement (Barricada International, 1993:23). There was disagreement, however, on organizational strategies. Some participants felt that structure was "necessary to build a feminist movement" which could "make the state and the rest of society listen to them" (p.20). Others felt that developing too rigid a structure could compromise movement autonomy. In the end, it was decided that, rather than create another vertical structure to represent the movement, activities would be organized and coordinated through a series of networks, including the following: communication, organizational participation, economy and environment, education, health, sexuality and the network against violence (*Puntos de Encuentro*, 1992:16-21). Several months later, however, the

" Although division within the movement has continued, there has also been an attempt to work together on specific issues. A permanent campaign against Maternal Mortality was launched in May, 1992, for instance, in which all sectors of the women's movement have participated.

National Feminist Committee (CNF) was formed by 17 women's groups. Other feminist groups have since formed the committee, which feels that "they should not reject organizing" because of frustrating experiences in the past (Barricade International, 1993:21).

Women's movement is currently made up of several groups. Included in these are AMNLAE, the CNF and groups associated with the Unity in Diversity Conference which prefer looser coordination through the networks. In addition, two other groups can be identified. The women's secretariats of the union, while disenchanted with AMNLAE, have also been critical of the urban and middle class bias within the emerging movement, arguing that class interests of members are not being addressed and they must continue to work through the unions (although male-dominated) to address women's economic concerns (Thayer, 1994:10). Finally, there are groups of women with specific interests who may or may not define themselves as feminist and who have only recently "come to identify with the women's movement" (p.8). Following the overview of women's organizing in the previous chapter, these can be seen as grass-roots groups which are organizing around basic needs (income-generation, soya projects, etc.) but which have not, until recently, incorporated a gender analysis into their work. The CEBs of Esteli are included in this final category.

It is within this context of the changes within women's

movement that the potential for CEBs to engage in gender consciousness is being examined. A related question in the research process is whether, as a result of engaging in gender consciousness, women from the CEBs will come to see themselves as an organized group of women who "identify with women's movement." This will be explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been to situate the research question within Nicaraguan reality. An overview of the political and economic context during different phases of Nicaragua's recent history from the late 1970's to the present revealed changing relationships between popular organizations and movements and the state (from confrontation to collaboration to a search for autonomy). This review provided a context within which both conflicting movements within the Catholic Church and women's movement could be examined.

The second section of this chapter reviewed the formation and development of the CEBs of Esteli within the context of internal division in the Catholic Church. Although the major axis of contention between the hierarchy and the Church has been an internal one (Church unity versus a preferential option for the poor) this has been, in turn, influenced by differing perceptions within each about what their role, as religious organizations, should be in society. Both the hierarchy and the grass-roots church have attempted to

legitimize these perspectives through their religious world views. The need for Church unity and obedience to the bishops was counter-posed to carrying out the (Church's) preferential option for the poor by people who "experienced the presence of Christian motivation in the revolutionary process."²

The CEBs in Esteli met with the disapproval of the hierarchy because their living out in concrete terms the preferential option for the poor led to their involvement in the revolutionary process. This involvement in government programmes, in turn, led to a loss of autonomy for the CEBs because their conscientization work was not sufficiently integrated with social projects. This was perhaps inevitable in that many, if not most, CEB members were also active in mass organizations and things were "in the air" as one CEB members put it. The FSLN's approach to the popular sectors, which was characterized by top-down decision-making, also contributed to this problem.

Despite the problems faced by the CEBs, they have been an active and critical presence in Nicaraguan society as the Church of the Poor. Their existence also presents a challenge to the Catholic Church to engage in new modes of religious production based on decentralized models of authority. Since the late 1980's, however, the CEBs have been in a process of decline. They are now in a situation where they feel their only option is to "re-integrate" with the Church hierarchy.

² Quote from theological reflection group (in Crahan, 1989:54).

Although still generally conservative, and critical of the grass-roots Church, the hierarchy is not as monolithic as it appears. Hopefully, from the perspective of the CEBs, there is enough room for reconciliation to enable their becoming once again part of the institutional Church while not compromising, in the process, over a decade of conscientization work and active and critical lay participation (Interview 03.11.1993).

The final section of this chapter reviewed the development of women's movement in Nicaragua. Numerous gains were made with respect to women's rights throughout the 1980's. During the first half of the 1980's, however, women were not for the most part consulted as to the issues that were most important to them. The shift from basic needs to defence and production - all of which relied specifically on women - as society's care-givers, as mothers sacrificing their sons and as workers providing a surplus labour pool to maintain production levels during the war - did not take into consideration the "complex matrix" of women's everyday lives, including women's role in the domestic, or private, sphere in social reproduction. As a result, women assumed these new responsibilities without being substantially relieved of the ones they already had. Furthermore, specific issues such as reproductive choice (in particular, access to contraceptives) and domestic violence were not addressed. By the time AMNLAE did begin to address these issues, it was once again

overridden by FSLN priorities - in this case, the organizing of the campaign for the 1990 elections.

Women's movement during the 1980's was thus ideologically and organizationally subordinated to the FSLN as the vanguard and governing party which, generally speaking, saw women's emancipation within a Marxist, or "women and development" framework. This led to internal contradictions within women's movement and, by the late 1980's, to a broadening of women's movement. With the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, women's movement has been given new life as it is no longer defined as a Sandinista women's movement but represents a broad-based coalition which includes organizations, unions, collectives and networks. Within this broad grouping, women have been able to define for themselves the issues which are priorities for the movement. This is somewhat paradoxical because this has occurred within the context of a state which is less sympathetic to women's issues than the previous one, and indeed has attempted to restore traditional family values with the backing of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

It was also pointed out that women's groups, including Christian women, who have not specifically addressed gender issues in the past are now beginning to identify themselves with women's movement. The participatory research project: "Woman: Who Am I?" which was carried out in the CEBs of Estelí in 1993 is one example of the development of gender identities within religious groups. The following chapter examines this

project as a confluence of gender consciousness and the preferential option for the poor in CEBs. The limitations and opportunities for engaging in gender consciousness will be examined with reference to the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church and the current characteristics of women's movement in Nicaragua.

CHAPTER 5

GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE CEBs OF ESTELI

Introduction

The first section of this chapter reviews the research undertaken in and with the CEBs in Esteli, including preliminary research in 1992 and the participatory research project (Woman: Who am I?) carried out in 1993. The second section analyzes the results of the research process in terms of the research question: What is the potential for CEBs, as religious organizations, to engage in gender consciousness and contribute towards women's movement for social change? This analysis will be discussed with reference to the conceptual framework established chapter 3, the particular circumstances of Nicaraguan society outlined in chapter 4 and the overview of the participatory research project in the present chapter.

5.1 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH IN THE CEBs

1992 - Preliminary Research

The objective of the research carried out in 1992 was to determine: first, whether the work of the CEBs already

included a systematic analysis of gender; and second, if it did not, whether they were interested in incorporating this into their conscientization work. The research included participant observation at various meetings and gatherings of the CEBs, as well as interviews and informal conversations with both leaders and members of the CEBs. The extent to which gender consciousness was included in the work of the CEBs will be examined with reference to four areas of CEB work: (1) weekly meetings/neighbourhood groups, (2) educational workshops (*talleres de formación*), (3) celebrations (*convivencias*) and (4) networking with other organizations.

(1) Weekly Meetings/Neighbourhood Groups

"Practical" problems faced by women related to health and housing are often addressed in the meetings and through the neighbourhood groups.¹ As we saw in the last chapter, the CEBs are involved in projects related to women's basic needs such as fixing roads and putting in sewerage. These activities, however, have not incorporated a specific gender focus. For instance, by engaging in an analysis as to why it is women who are most involved in these projects.

Gender issues often come up in reflections and

¹ Visiting people who are sick seems to happen in all the neighbourhoods. In one case, a collection was undertaken to help buy medicine for a woman who was sick. In another meeting I attended, a group member had a hole in her roof and CEB members strategized around how to procure funds to fix it.

discussions in the weekly neighbourhood meetings. As one current CEB leader noted, the meetings are not focused specifically on women, but most CEB members are women, so issues would emerge from the reflections, for example related to being single women, housewives or workers (Interview, 11.06.92). One of the CEB members I interviewed also expressed this opinion. When I asked her if they reflected upon problems faced by women she said:

Yes ... we reflect upon this [For example] ... that sometimes there are women that are alone [single] and have problems with their children ... or with the husband because he is with another woman (Interview, 19.06.1992).

Sometimes, issues related to women are brought up in a more structured way. For instance, I attended a weekly meeting in one of the barrios which coincided with Father's Day. The spouses of women in the group had been invited to attend, and the reflection was based on a biblical passage (Ephesians 5:22-33) which states that men are the head of women just as Christ is the head of the Church, but that men should love their wives just as Christ loves the Church. An excerpt from the document on the Family in Latin America which emerged from the 1968 Medellin Bishops' conference was also read. One of the themes which emerged from the discussion was that the Bible is in many ways a sexist (*machista*) document and should be understood in its historical context.

(2) Educational Workshops

Educational workshops are held approximately every other

month in the CEBs on topics such as the meaning of prayer or the reforms of the second Vatican Council. In 1992, I attended a two-day workshop on "The New Evangelization." This workshop (which was organized and facilitated by the popular education group "Teyocoyani") began with an overview of the the social, economic and political problems faced by people in the *barrios* as well as the religious situation (of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the growth of Protestant Churches). This was followed by an analysis on neo-liberalism in the Americas. As one of the Teyocoyani members stated: "Some people with a traditional religious conception would say that what we are doing is not necessary, but for a committed Christian, the cause, the origin of the situation we are passing through must be understood" (27.06.92).

While the CEBs frequently hold workshops which follow a methodology similar to the one just described, no workshops had yet been organized in the CEBs which included an analysis of gender as part of the social, economic, political and religious configuration of the "situation" being passed through by CEB members.

(3) Celebrations

Celebrations are held every two to three months in the CEBs. For the most part, the themes vary although the Mother's Day celebration in May and the Christmas celebration are two which are held every year and seem to have the highest

attendance.¹ La Purisima, the celebration of the Immaculate Conception of Mary is celebrated every year, beginning in November. The fact that two of the most important events in the calendar of the CEBs are Mother's Day and the celebration of the virgin are both indications of the centrality of Mary and Motherhood in the CEBs. While the emphasis on Mary provides a positive role model as well as a female image of the divine, the devotion to Mary is often expressed in terms which reinforce gender stereotypes. The same could be said for the Mother's Day celebration. The perspective on Mary within the CEBs seems to be in keeping with the general perspective within liberation theology which was outlined in Chapter 3. That is, on the one hand women identify with Mary as a poor woman who lost her son and who is committed to the cause of liberation of the poor. On the other hand, Mary reinforces the identification of women with motherhood and sacrifice.

(4) Networking with other Organizations

The only women's organization the CEBs had direct ties with in 1992 was the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs. This seemed to stem from the fact that many women belong to both.

¹ The commemoration of the death of Monseñor Oscar Romero is also celebrated in March. All CEB members are invited to celebrations and a mass is sometimes held at the end of it if a priest is available. If not, a biblical reflection is often held which is led by one of the Coordinators. Although not a sermon, these reflections do involve women publicly reflecting upon the "word of God." Celebrations are also planned specifically for youth groups.

Also, the weekly *Via Crucis* which was organized in the late 1980's was organized in conjunction with the *Madres*.³ In a conversation with one of the CEB leaders, she mentioned that there were organizations in Esteli which offered services to women but that they did not go to the communities, so many people did not feel comfortable going to them (16.06.1993). Thus, except for the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs, the CEBs had no formal links with other groups of organized women.

The question of gender consciousness was also raised with members of the Coordinating Committee. All the Coordinators interviewed were in agreement that women face many obstacles and that *machismo* is rooted in society generally and also in the Church. One of the CEB leaders I interviewed separately agreed that women's disproportionate participation in the Church can be seen as an extension of women's domestic and family responsibilities. The members of the Coordinating Committee said that issues faced by women often come up in meetings.⁴ They stated, however, that gender issues were not being addressed directly in that their "line of work" has never focused specifically on women (Interview, 01.07.1992).

³ The procession was always led by the Mothers, who carried wooden crosses and covered their heads with white shawls as a symbol of their identification with the Virgin Mary.

⁴ The issues they discussed included physical abuse, husbands discouraging women's participation in the CEBs and other community groups, men drinking in excess (which was both an economic and an emotional/social problem), men dominating discussions when they did participate in CEB meetings, women's unwillingness to confront men on having other women because of (real or perceived) economic dependence on men and the burden on women of being single parents.

Rather, women issues were seen as part of the bigger picture of engaging in conscientization work and Christian education. There was some apprehension about doing work "exclusively with women and exclusively with men" because work with women in other parts of the world had become very polarized: women who "work with women are too feminist and they have forgotten about the masculine sex" (01.07.1992). Despite this, they did feel that it would be a good idea to engage more specifically in gender consciousness work and that this would be an opportunity for the CEBs to move in new directions.¹ It was thus decided that I would attempt to return to Nicaragua to become directly involved in a "gender consciousness" project with the CEBs. While the exact nature of this project was not defined, some discussion was undertaken, indicating that the project would adopt a methodology similar to the Teyocoyani workshop and other CEB conscientization work in which people's experiences formed the starting point from which to examine issues in a broader context.

The general conclusions from the preliminary research carried out in 1992, thus, were as follows: (1) the CEBs do address issues that directly affect women's lives, but have not undertaken a systematic analysis of gender and structures

¹ The question of moving in new directions is a critical one for the CEBs right now. As was outlined in the previous chapter, they are currently in a "survival" phase and are attempting to re-establish their identity as the "Church of the Poor" which has autonomy from the FSLN on the one hand, and a clear, but not subordinate, position within the mainstream Catholic Church on the other hand.

of gender subordination and (2) they were interested in undertaking a project with women CEB members which focused on gender consciousness.

1993 - Participatory Research Project "Woman: Who Am I?"

The participatory research project lasted from mid-June, 1993 to mid-January, 1994.⁶ Fifteen meetings (including one all-day session) were held during this time.⁷ In addition to the four project coordinators, 18 to 24 CEB members participated in the project, ranging in age from 25 to 63 years and representing 13 neighbourhoods in Esteli.⁸ The project was divided into four phases: Organization, Life, Bible/Church and Action, with selected themes explored in each phase.⁹

⁶ It was originally scheduled to end in December but was extended in order to cover all the principal topics which had been suggested by the group.

⁷ In July, a 24-hour take-over of the city of Esteli by the FROC (Revolutionary Front of Worker's and Peasants) in which 45 people died led to a CBIE (Canadian Bureau for International Education) evaluation of my status in Nicaragua and the request that I return to Canada in November (as opposed to the originally programmed return in December). As such, I did not attend the last four meeting of the PR group, and the analysis of these meetings is based on information which has been sent to me by the other three project coordinators.

⁸ This number fluctuated for two reasons. First, some of the women who participated in the project in the beginning dropped out (two because of opposition for partners, one due to illness and one because she began working in another city). Second, a few group members invited women from their neighbourhood to attend, which increased the size of the group again. One woman also missed about two months in the middle because her son was killed in the July 21 take-over of Esteli.

⁹ The first two meetings were designed to establish the objectives for the project and introduce the theme. The next two explored a specific theme, violence against women. The fifth meeting included a review and evaluation of the project thus far, as well as the choosing of themes for the rest of the project. The four phases were thus established partially

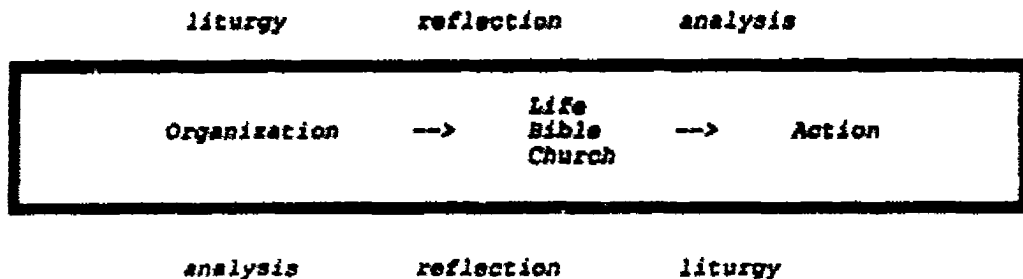
Methodology

The project was referred to as a "course-experience" because the starting point was the sharing of lived experiences and this was combined with new information which was also reflected upon in the context of the experiences of the women in the group. In this sense, the course-experience adopted a dialectical methodology of combining inductive and deductive knowledge. The new information was introduced in three ways: (1) through visits to the various women's centres in Estelí, (2) by providing an introduction to the theme being explored (ex: women in history, women in the Bible) and (3) through presentations (ex: women's internal and external reproductive organs). In the case of the last two, one of the four coordinators was responsible for organizing and presenting this information. Different activities were used to reflect upon themes in the context of lived experience. These included biblical reflection as an illumination on everyday life, games (*dinámicas*), small and large group discussions (with questions), dramatizations (*socio-dramas*), and structured exercises (ex: the time-budget exercise "A Day in My Life"). Liturgy was seen as being present in each meeting. For instance, meetings would usually begin and end with a song and a prayer. Reflection and analysis were also

in retrospect as a result of the planning undertaken during the fifth meeting.

seen as being present in each meeting. The methodology of the project is summarized in the following diagram:

Figure 2: Methodology of Participatory Research Project



The following section provides an overview of the project with respect to each of the four phases and the themes which were explored in each phase. Since it is not possible to review each meeting in detail, this overview will focus on two aspects of project meetings: (1) the methods used to explore each theme and (2) some examples of reflections and conclusions which arose from the exploration of different themes.

Phase 1: Organization and Introduction

During the first meeting, logistical considerations were established as a group. These included the length, frequency and location of meetings. During the second session, it was also decided that two women from the group (rotating for each meeting) would plan the next meeting along with the four

coordinators. Finally, (although this did not take place until the fifth meeting), the themes to be looked at were discussed and determined as a group. This was done through small group discussions based on the following questions: (1) What have we learned up to now? (2) Which themes do we want to look at in more detail and which new themes do we want to look at? (3) Which organizations do we want to visit? All of the comments and suggestions were then brought to the large group and the issues and organizations to visit were decided upon.

During the first meeting, the following questions were also addressed: (1) Why are we participating in this project, (2) What do we want to achieve and (3) How are we going to achieve it? The question "why are we participating in this project" had been partially addressed at the beginning of the meeting through a biblical reflection (Luke 10, 38-42) on Jesus' visit to the two sisters, Mary and Martha. One of the themes which emerged from this reflection was that women must choose between the "spiritual" (represented by Mary who sat at Jesus' feet to listen to him speak) and the "material" (represented by Martha who was busy in the kitchen). One woman said, for instance, that: "Sometimes, because we are doing something in the house, we ignore God, but we shouldn't be like Martha." Another woman later commented that women live in a difficult situation in which they must choose, but: "Mary and Martha complement each other; we cannot dedicate ourselves to only one thing; it is not possible to choose

between the material and the spiritual, what is needed is solidarity between the two, doing things together" (30.06.1993). This discussion highlighted the conflicting roles women have, the fact that there are differences between women and men in society and the fact that women are discriminated against. All of these were seen as reasons for participating in the project. In addition, group members said that they wanted, as women, to "learn" and "teach" one another and to "discover" together.

The responses given to the question "What do we want to achieve?" were the following: to know ourselves, to get to know each other (in the group), to be able to relate better with people, to defend ourselves as women, to have strength and to support each other as women (30.06.1993). For the third question, "How are we going to achieve this?" the following answers were given: having faith and hope; coming together as a community; with the help of God and the Virgin Mary who will give us strength and health; leaving aside our egoism; being an example, making a commitment; having confidence in ourselves; reflecting on our experiences; sharing our experiences and learning new things, which makes our experience grow, and visiting different organizations which work with women (30.06.1993).

The second meeting also used an open biblical reflection (Genesis 1, 26-31) as a means to promote discussion on the theme "Woman: Who Am I?" Many insights into women's lived

experience arose from this discussion. For instance, it was noted that God created women and men as equals (tasks were not divided by gender in the Creation story, except for pain in child-bearing, which one woman felt God "should have left to men") but somewhere along the way, society has changed and the tasks have become divided:

If the woman is sick, the man doesn't help... If she has a sick child, the woman takes care of it and he just sits there... When a man is without work, he still isn't capable of helping the woman in the house, even to wash his own clothes - it's rare... (11.07.1993).

It was noted that society has taught that the man is the "master." Little boys learn this and, if a young boy tries to help in the house, "his friends will laugh at him ... and say he is a 'fag.'" Women also reinforce this stereotype: "If I say to the boy: 'Don't touch that because it's a woman's,' then we have the same problem." The education and socialization of children free from gender stereotypes was a theme which emerged throughout the project. Women's exclusive responsibility in the rearing of children and domestic tasks was also a recurring theme in discussions.

The activities carried out by women in their day-to-day lives was the focus of several discussions during the first two meetings. In the first meeting, one woman had commented that "men say women don't do anything, they just spend the whole day making tortillas." So, in the second meeting, a time budget exercise was carried out to see what the women in the group do in the course of a day. This exercise ("A Day

in My Life"), involved writing down or drawing on a sheet of paper the activities carried out throughout the course of a typical day. These activities were then "socialized" by putting them all together on one large sheet of paper (see Appendix A).¹⁵ Most of the activities which arose from this exercise were domestic activities (going to mill the corn, cooking, washing dishes, washing clothes, ironing, storing water, accompanying children to and from school, etc.) Other activities included praying, bathing, watching soap operas, visiting (friends, sick people in the neighbourhood and CEB members), sewing, reading the Bible and studying. As a large group, we then explored more specifically how women participate in the community. Some of the activities mentioned were volunteering as health *brigadistas*, collecting money if someone dies, fixing the streets and putting in sewerage systems, attending meetings (The Communal Movement, the CEBs and the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs) and working (washing and ironing clothes).

Some of the comments which arose from this reflection were:

Even though women have so much to do in the home, we also participate in the tasks of the neighbourhood ... Now are we capable of doing all of this?... What I see is that women are not weak, and we have great courage ... Yes, even in the war, knowing one could die, hiding food and crossing the streets full of armed people ... We are also to blame because of the

¹⁵ The process of sharing individual reflections as a group was referred to as "socialization" since it involved placing individual experiences in the broader setting of collective experience. This, in turn, contributed to the formation of collective identity among group members.

way we bring up our children ... It is nice to know what we all do - to know that we are useful and important in society (11.07.1993).

Phase 2: Life

Four general themes relating to women's everyday lives were explored in this phase: violence against women, women's bodies/women's health, women and work and women in history. Three women's centres in Esteli were visited as part of this exploration. They were the following: Acción Ya (violence against women), Flor de Pino (a gynaecological clinic) and the Casa Nora Astorga (an unemployed women's centre).

(1) Violence Against Women

A biblical reflection with guided questions and dramatizations were the two methods used to explore the theme of violence against women. The biblical text chosen (2 Samuel 13, 1-22) describes the story of Tamar. Tamar is raped by her brother and the incident is covered up by the father (King David). After reading the text and discussing its content, the question: "What is the connection between the text and the reality we are currently living?" was explored. Everyone agreed that violence and rape continue to be problems. Although most women did not speak directly of experiences of abuse, all had stories of people they knew or cases they had heard about:

Wives are also raped. A woman is not respected even by her own husband. There are men who do not understand when a woman is ill. This also is a violation... This is seen a lot now...

There was the case of a man who raped and killed his own mother because she wouldn't give him money for booze... Sometimes because of ignorance or shame, a woman doesn't say anything... Sometimes they don't say because they are not believed... I heard of a case of a girl who was raped by her stepfather and he said she provoked it, but children are innocent... boys also are in danger... boys, girls, women, it doesn't matter what age... Here there are men who have a lot of women... they scorn and sometimes deny children of their lovers... Men see women as an object they can use... Just as Tamar was sad, we see many people who are sad and we don't know why... There is a saying: "Tie up the hens because the roosters are roaming." This means that male children are given the liberty to do everything and the woman has to be locked up (01.08.1993).

The different forms abuse takes were also explored.

These included:

Hitting a woman so she will be calm... Being insulting when they come home drunk... Psychological abuse ("If you kick me out, how will you take care of the kids?")... When the woman can't give her opinion in the home ... When the man thinks he is superior ... When the man is jealous and she can't go out because he says she will be with another man, or when he can't tolerate that she has friends ... When he is jealous and even makes her go get a blood test to ensure the children are his, or when he abandons her and she (tries to get him to give child support) he says the children are not his... When she is shut in her house... Spending money on booze instead of food for the family... Saying a woman is lazy when she is sick... Abuse in the workplace - women are the first to be laid off and they are asked for pregnancy tests before being hired (01.08.1993).

This discussion was followed by dramatizations of different experiences of abuse. One focused on the life of a group member with a physically and psychologically abusive husband. Another contrasted the behaviour of children brought up in a household with positive role models with children in a household in which the husband devalued the wife. The third involved paternal irresponsibility - a father who would not go visit his sick daughter in the hospital.¹¹ The concept of

¹¹ A woman in the group had a niece in the hospital in Matagalpa, a town three hours away from Esteli (she had been injured in the PROC takeover of Esteli). The father had not gone to visit the girl and her mother

violence was understood in broad terms by the women in the group. The dramatizations, for instance, included themes of parental irresponsibility and the socialization of children into gender roles as well as physical and emotional abuse.

Another meeting was held to explore this issue which consisted of a visit to the women's centre "Acción Ya," a crisis intervention centre for women who have experienced violence. The purpose of this meeting was three-fold: to get to know the centre and the services it offers, to develop a deeper understanding of violence against women and to learn more about the legal aspects of violence against women.

The centre provides medical, psychological and legal services to women who have experienced violence. This includes support groups for women, support groups for women and men together and relaxation workshops. It is also involved in community actions to raise the issue of violence against women. The director of the centre discussed the "cycle of violence" many women face, noting that some women have lived in a violent situation their entire lives and that most women are abused by someone they know.¹² The effects of violence on women's physical and emotional health were also

in the hospital because he was with other women. This preoccupied the girl's aunt because she did not know how her niece was. A group of women from the neighbourhood confronted the man, but he lied and said he had just been busy. The women then took up a collection in the neighbourhood for bus fare so the woman could go visit her niece.

¹² Of the almost 1,000 women who have attended the centre since it opened, 68 percent were abused by a relative (father, step-father, brother-in-law, grandfather, cousin, etc.) and 38 percent were adolescent girls.

discussed. The centre's lawyer reviewed several laws relating to women (some of which were reviewed in the previous chapter).¹³

(2) Women's Health

Two meetings were held to explore this issue. The first focused on "getting to know our bodies." This included a slide presentation on the biological differences between women and men and women's internal and external reproductive organs. Many women commented that they had never had this explained to them before (in particular, older women who had had several children). One woman commented on sex-change operations, which led to a discussion of homosexuality. Many women (including one of the project coordinators who had organized the slide presentation) felt that homosexuality was "unnatural" because God had created women and men as complements to each other.

The second part of the meeting involved a discussion of the different biological stages in a women's life (childhood, adolescence, maturity and menopause). It was noted that certain beliefs about women were not true, such as the belief that women cannot bathe or eat certain foods while menstruating. It was also noted that child birth can be "the

¹³ Recent laws were also reviewed. For instance, the Law 150 states that a rapist has civil responsibilities towards the child 'if the woman becomes pregnant as a result of the aggression, (thus linking a woman to the aggressor beyond the actual rape).

best or worst phase" in that some women give away or abort their children because they cannot afford to keep them. Finally, it was pointed out that, because women's identity is so tied to motherhood, menopausal women are devalued but, "a woman has worth, even when she can no longer have children" (05.09.1993).

This meeting also included a discussion of the difference between biological and social understandings of virginity. It was generally agreed that too much social emphasis was placed on something that was only a minor part of women's reproductive systems and that this emphasis was used as a way to devalue women. It was also acknowledged that the Church contributed to this social devaluing through its emphasis on virginity and marriage:

Men say a woman isn't worth anything if she isn't a virgin, but this isn't so... If [the hymen] is broken, it's not important, even though it has been made out to be the most important thing ... In marriage, the dress also is given value. In Church, the priest says that a woman, when she marries, must be a virgin. But we have seen that there are other things of value... There are many young women who get pregnant and get married, but it is for many other reasons, for example fear of the parents... So, what we are living is a double morality... Also, men are taught to have irresponsible sexual relations... As a little child, he is taught to be boss, to be in the street, to be macho, and the woman is kept in the house (05.09.1993).

The second meeting on women's health entailed a visit to the women's clinic *Flor de Pino*. The clinic was established in 1990 as an initiative of the Women's Secretariat of the ATC to provide gynecological health services to women tobacco workers but it is also open to the public and is involved in public health education. This meeting focused on deepening

our understanding of women's health issues, in particular the distinction between "organic" and "social" health problems. It was concluded that many of the health issues faced by women have social causes, including the following: (1) structural poverty and the marginalization of women, including the lack of support for women in the domestic sphere and government policies which "abandon us" because services are not provided; (2) social violence, including kidnappings, the war and domestic violence; and (3) a lack of knowledge about women's bodies and insufficient access to information, for example on pre-natal care and pap smears.

The meeting also included a discussion on different forms of birth control and on tubal ligation operations. Women felt that it was not healthy to have too many children: "One has children as if it were a task; it isn't good to have so many children close together because it affects the health of the woman" (12.09.1993).

(3) Women and Work

Two meetings were planned to explore this theme. The first meeting included reflection on a biblical text as an introduction to the theme and engaging in an exercise designed to acquire a greater understanding of the different types of work women are engaged in. The biblical reflection on the book of Ruth (who moves away with her mother-in-law to find work after her husband dies) brought out several parallels to

the current situation in Nicaragua:

We are living the same situation now, many people go to other countries to find work... it is no longer possible to plant [crops] and people don't have anything to eat... The woman gave a good example, people heard good things about her because she was good with her mother-in-law... This doesn't happen now, the mother and daughter-in-law don't care for each other... Naomi was widowed but she didn't stay with her arms crossed but, with determination, went to work... They say we don't know how to do anything but we do a lot and we also can learn other things, like working in the fields, like Ruth learned... [the text] refers to everyone, that we should be good with our neighbours... "Your God will be also my God" [Ruth said to Naomi]... They were very united. We also have to be united so that God will be with us (26.09.1993).

This reflection was followed by a review of the time-budget exercise ("A Day in My Life"). Another exercise was then carried out with the objective of building upon the initial conceptualizations of women's work. By filling out horizontal bands in a fan drawn on a piece of paper, the women distinguished between unpaid work within the home, paid work within the home, unpaid work outside the home (community work) and paid work outside the home (see Appendix A). The information was then socialized in the large group. It was found that all women carry out unpaid (domestic) work within the home; some women also carried out work which brought in money within the home (having a small stand for instance, selling candies, soap, etc.); all of the women participated in community organizations (in addition to the ones already mentioned, the School Parents' Association and New Evangelization were listed); many women had worked previously outside the home (washing clothes, ironing, in the tobacco factories) but few did currently (one woman worked as a cook, one as a domestic, another doing laundry, another ran a small

convenience store and a few others had casual employment such as selling bread from house to house or occasionally doing laundry or ironing); and finally, many identified themselves as members of the FSLN.

The section on work also included a visit to the Nora Astorga House for unemployed women. This house developed from the initiative of the Unemployed Women's Movement, which in turn emerged from an AMNLAE initiative.¹⁴ The house offers services to unemployed women, including training courses such as hair-cutting, cake-decorating, *pifata*-making, domestic electricity and driving (the latter two had not yet been initiated at the time of our visit). The purpose of this visit was both to be introduced to the centre, and to network with women who were affiliated with it.

(4) Women in History

One meeting was held in which the theme of women in history was explored. This included a general introduction to the theme using 24 cards which were placed (one by one by each woman in the group) on a large spiral of history. These cards covered selected events in history which revolved around three

¹⁴ A survey of 32 *barrios* was carried out by AMNLAE in which the three main problems faced by women were identified as spousal alcoholism and abuse, housing and unemployment. Based on this survey, it was decided to focus on the struggle for dignified employment for women because employment was seen as being connected to other problems faced by women: "If a woman can be independent economically, she can free herself from the yoke of the man. Gender consciousness must happen at the same time as the creation of alternatives" (25.09.1993). Although the movement emerged from AMNLAE, the director of the house says they are independent of AMNLAE and of the FSLN.

themes: "material" history, "spiritual" history and social struggles.¹³ This was followed by a brief overview of the three themes. The theme of material history outlined that human societies have passed through many different phases, including the shift from nomadic hunting and foraging to sedentary agricultural societies, the rise of industrialization and capitalism and the technological age we are currently living in. The changing position of women throughout history was also noted. The second theme of spiritual history focused on the shift from a belief in a Mother Goddess who had created the world to the belief in several goddesses (of fertility, of the home, of love, of war, etc.) and the belief in a male God with the rise of patriarchy. The final theme highlighted the struggles of women throughout history, with a particular focus on Latin America.

The final section of this meeting involved the presentation of dramatizations of three periods in history: the discovery of agriculture by women, the beginning of slavery and private property and the current situation of

¹³ For instance, the first card represented a time in history when societies were nomadic (foragers and hunters) and fairly egalitarian; the second represented a time when the "Great Mother" was a religious symbol; Cards 9 and 10 represented the time of Jesus and Mary and Martha; card 13, the Spanish Inquisition; card 15, the Industrial Revolution; card 18, the 1927 Manifesto of Colombian Indigenous Women; card 20, dates in which women acquired the vote in several Latin American countries; card 22, the first time (1980) International Women's Day was celebrated in Nicaragua; card 23, the founding of the Flor de Pino clinic and card 24, the "Course-experience Woman: Who Am I of the CEAs of Esteli: 25 women... learning, teaching and discovering together who we are as women. We are present in history!"

women tobacco workers in Nicaragua. The final part of the meeting entailed a discussion which included the following comments:

I liked the tobacco one because I used to work in that and it's true - we were not allowed to talk to one another... There is a difference between the children - the inheritance was given to the man and the woman was left out in the street... It is still like that sometimes... [the] women's vote - part of that was that women didn't count, it's part of the same system... Originally, women were free but now they say that a woman without a house is a wanderer (vagabond)... And about the legitimate and illegitimate children - a woman can only have one man but a man has various women... [Men] say: "From here [the door of the house] out, I am free." But not the woman, even outside the house she is watched over... If there is a meeting, the last one to stay taking care of the house and the children is the woman - we continue to be prisoners in the home... It is a great thing to remember history. This way we know how things were and how this history continues ahead. If we are not careful, we can retreat and be slaves of those masters. As organized women, let us not go backwards... In the spiral, there was an empty line, so with what we are learning, we will build this line (09.10.1993).

Phase 3: Bible and Church

Four meetings were held in this phase, including one all day meeting. The all-day meeting included an exploration of women in the Old Testament in the morning and women in the New Testament (Gospels only) in the afternoon. Subsequent meetings dealt with women and Saint Paul, the Virgin Mary and women in the Catholic Church.

Each of the meetings on the Bible followed the same general format. During the planning meeting to choose topics to be explored, some women had said, in addition to getting to know specific women in the Bible, that they wanted to learn how to study women in the Bible. Thus, each meeting began with a brief overview which situated the texts being examined.

The introduction was followed by small group discussion on selected biblical texts with questions and the presentation to the large group of issues discussed, by presenting answers to questions and/or dramatizations, poems and songs.

(1) Women in the Old and New Testaments

For this (all-day) meeting, each session was introduced with a brief presentation on the historical and social context within which the women lived. For the Old Testament, it was pointed out that the Bible is not a neutral document, for two reasons: (1) It was written in the context of a patriarchal society, by men and from men's point of view and (2) The Bible reveals a consciousness that God is on the side of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized and that among these women are present. For the New Testament, it was pointed out that it was written during the time of the Roman Empire and also in the context of a patriarchal society, which was reflected in the household as well as society generally. Some of the themes which emerged in discussions on the Old Testament and New Testament were as follows:¹⁶

¹⁶ The texts explored in this meeting included: the Mother of the Maccabees (2 Maccabees, 7:1-42), Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16 & 21:8-20), Shiphrah and Pusha (Exodus 1:15-22), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:2-10), the laws of Leviticus (Leviticus 12:1-8), Mary (Luke 1:39-56), the women who accompanied Jesus (Luke 8:1-3 & Mark 16:1-8), the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11), the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-30) and the woman who bled for 12 years (Mark 5:25-34). Themes were brought out using the following questions as the basis for discussion: (1) What is happening in the time of the text? (2) Who is in the text? What is she doing? (3) How is God manifested in her life or through her? (4) What significance does this have for us now?

* God was manifest in the mother of the Maccabees through her strength and giving of her sons. This can be seen in our times as well. For example, the children who die in the struggle to make this situation better and the mothers who also have supported them with great courage.

* God gave Siphrah and Push astuteness because they knew how to trick the King and save their people and because they were not afraid and had faith in God.

* Hannah was ridiculed by Peninnah, the other wife of Elkanah, because she could not have children, but Elkanah comforted her and was good to her even though she could not have children. Now, it is not like that, women who have children are valued more.

* Women were rejected as being impure after childbirth in Leviticus. This exists now as well. Boy children are also valued more than girl children now, for instance a mid-wife is paid more for a boy child than a girl child.

* Jesus forgave the adulterous woman because no one is free of sin. The same is true now, that no one is free of sin.

* The Samaritan woman was marginalized in Jewish society, for being a woman and a Samaritan. And yet, Jesus spoke to her and announced to her that he was the Messiah.

(2) Saint Paul and Women

In the meeting on Saint Paul and women it was noted that Paul wrote most of the letters in the New Testament, that the ministry of women is recognized in Paul's letters but that some passages also reflect the sexism of the time and that the texts should be analyzed critically. Following are some of the reflections which emerged:¹⁷

* In the times of Paul, there was active participation of women in the Church, even though society was patriarchal.

* Paul speaks to both women and men, but more to men. He asks them to love their wives and he asks women to submit to their husbands. If all husbands were like Jesus, submission would be worth it.

¹⁷ The following texts were read: Sister Phoebe and other Roman Saints (Romans 16:1-16), Head coverings (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), Marriage, Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5, 22-33) and Galatians 3:23-29. Reflections were based on the questions: (1) What image does Paul present of women and men? (2) Is there a difference? (3) What opinion do we have on the text?

* We are all children of God through baptism and faith in Jesus.

* There should not be any difference between men and women. If a man is the head of the family, he must be responsible, be an example. In reality the opposite is often true. This text [Ephesians 5:22-33] is often used to marginalize women, without giving any importance to the demands it makes on men. It opens a path for women to demand that men be responsible.

It was concluded at the end of the meeting that "we are all one in baptism and faith" but it is within the Church where there is "difference between men and women." Furthermore, that today "the Church continues to base itself in the past and does not accept the new situation in which in many instances women maintain the house. Maybe this could give another face to the Church."

(3) Mary

In the meeting on Mary, the following introduction was given:

Mary is [a] woman. "Blessed is she among women." She is an ideal of Christian life for all believers. To be a Christian is to imitate her in her personal and communitarian devotion. She is the woman who is committed to the cause of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized. She renewed her commitment and her consciousness. She did not allow herself to give in to passivity, she was always active and creative in the face of the events of everyday life. She was in solidarity, serving, devoted, loving and full of faith. Because of this she is the model person for all of us.

Reflection on the texts included the following:¹⁸

* We have to try to imitate Mary a bit - her good attitude - be obedient and have faith in the word of God.

* Mary does not abandon Jesus at the hour of his death. His father is not there, it is women who accompany Jesus. There are many children who are currently dying of illness, hunger

¹⁸ The following text were reflected upon: Christ's birth announced to Mary (Luke 1:26-38), the flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-18), Jesus beholds his mother (John 19:25-27), Christ born of Mary (Luke 2:46-51) and the woman, the child and the dragon (Revelation 12).

and malnutrition. Just as Mary's son was killed, Nicaraguan mothers had their sons killed for defending people. A mother does not abandon her children. In the hour of suffering, women have courage.

* We have to awaken our consciousness day by day. Faith gives us strength.

* Just as the first Christians were persecuted, we also are persecuted now: those that fight for land, housing, are persecuted.

* It is women who carry responsibility in the neighbourhoods: to find food for poor children, acquiring urban lots or land titles. Women are strong.

In the conclusion of the meeting, it was noted that "the theme was good because Mary is our guide and we have to imitate her" and "we learned that the Virgin was courageous and accompanied her son in every moment of his mission." This meeting ended with a celebration of *La Purisima*.

(4) The Participation of Women in the Church

The meeting began with an exploration of the question: How do women and men participate in the parish and in our communities? It was noted that both women and men participated in the following: the choir (men play the instruments), as catechists, as Delegates of the Word (although women only sometimes and in certain places), reading passages from the Bible and arranging the altar (although men only sometimes). Men also rang the Church bells and boys participated as altar boys. Women also cleaned the "temple," collected alms, washed and ironed the altar cloth and "other things." It was concluded that "the situation in the Church is like the situation in the family because it does not

function well without the participation and responsibility of women" (09.01.1994). It was also noted that women do the heaviest work.

This meeting also reviewed and analyzed Church documents which make reference to women from the second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992) CELAM conferences. It was mentioned that these documents are elaborated by bishops, priests and theologians. It was noted that the second Vatican Council made reference to and placed great importance on the participation of women in different areas of life. In addition, Vatican II recognized that "women helped the Apostle Paul in the work of evangelization."¹⁹

The section of the 1979 Puebla document which deals with women as lay agents in the evangelization of Latin America was reviewed.²⁰ The Puebla document acknowledges the marginalization of women in Latin America (in terms of education, unequal salaries, etc.). It also acknowledges that, within the Church, women have not been valued enough and women's participation in pastoral initiatives has been low. The section on the mission of women in the Church recalls women in the Bible who "had relevant roles in the People of God" (1991:194). It was noted in the meeting that this section "opens up the possibility for women to participate in

¹⁹ Numbers 9 and 10 on the Decree of the Apostolate.

²⁰ Chapter II, "Agents of Communion and Participation," # 834-840 and 842-846.

non-ordained ministries, which allows for greater participation in the mission of the Church" (09.01.1993).

References to women in the 1992 Santo Domingo document were also discussed. In Chapter 1, "The New Evangelization," women are mentioned along with the pope, bishops, priests and men as "active subjects" in the new evangelization.¹¹ A specific section on women in this chapter acknowledges the growing consciousness in society and the Church on the "equal dignity between women and men." The document notes, however, the difference between this "theoretical" acknowledgement and the practice of the Church. This section also acknowledges that John Paul II's assertion on women as "the custodian angels of the Christian soul in the continent" clashes with the reality of marginalization of women.¹² Finally, it was also noted in the meeting that the Santo Domingo document proposes specific pastoral commitments such as the denouncing of abuses against women, the promotion of integral education (*formación*), the prophetic announcement of the dignity of women, the development of consciousness among priests and lay people and the creation of new languages and symbols to announce the gospels.

It was concluded from the reflection upon these documents that "the Church is called to contribute to the human and Christian promotion of women, helping her to overcome

¹¹ #25, p.35.

¹² #105 and 106, p.50.

situations of marginalization she may find herself in and enabling her for her mission in the ecclesial community and in the world" (09.01.1994).

Phase 4: Action

This phase involved reviewing ideas which had come up throughout the project and determining which ones were feasible to undertake. The ideas included organizing another project for women and men together, organizing another project with youth, having a continuation of the project to explore certain themes in more detail, establishing an organizational agreement with the Flor de Pino clinic to provide services at a lower cost for CEB members (as organized women) and working with women from the Unemployed Women's Centre (for example on soya or sewing workshops). In addition, the elaboration of a training manual for gender-awareness education which documents the methodology used and phases and themes explored was one specific action.²¹

As of March, 1994 four specific actions can be identified which resulted from the project:

- (1) The elaboration of the training manual for gender-awareness education (*Manual de formación*).

²¹ The elaboration of this training manual had been listed as an objective of the PR project in the proposal I submitted to CBIE. This suggestion was brought to the group, which accepted the idea. I and the other three coordinators began work on the manual while I was in Nicaragua. During the last meeting I attended, the work done thus far on the manual was presented to the group. This included the introduction, objectives and methodology. Group members decided collectively the dedication and also drew pictures for the cover of the manual.

(2) A second course-experience is being organized for women CEB members to deepen the analysis initiated in the introductory project. This course-experience is scheduled to begin in July, 1994.

(3) An agreement between the Flor de Pino Clinic and the CEBs has been established. A Belgian women's group has agreed to finance this project pending receipt of a formal proposal, which the (PR) project coordinators are currently working on.

(4) Two of the project coordinators attended a March 8, 1994 Municipal Women's Conference (*Encuentro Municipal de Mujeres*). In this meeting, they were able to share experiences with women from different organizations "which placed at our service documentation and information" (Letter, 13.03.1994). Two concrete proposals emerged from this meeting: (i) That a commission be formed which includes women from the groups attending the conference to analyze the economic and social problems affecting women and to seek solutions together, involving also municipal institutions and (ii) That a space be created exclusively by women and for women from the different organizations as a way of reaching women in their homes and of raising the consciousness of society in general.

5.2 Analysis

The central research question which has been posed in this thesis has two components. The first asks if the potential exists in CEBs to engage in gender consciousness and

the second asks what the potential is, through engaging in gender consciousness, to contribute towards women's movement for social change.

The objective of undertaking a participatory research project was to attempt to answer the first question directly. That is, the potential exists simply because it was possible to carry out this project within the CEBs as a religious organization. The impact of the project on the lives of the individual women who participated, as well as the networking with other women's organizations in Estelí, are indications that the potential also exists to contribute towards women's movement for social change.

There are, however, several factors which have contributed to the possibility of carrying out the project. There are also factors which will either limit or enable the CEBs to continue to develop this work and be part of women's movement in Nicaragua. The analysis which has been laid out in previous chapters calls for a contextually specific understanding of the relationship between religion, women and social change. In keeping with that perspective, these factors must be examined in order to be able to respond more completely to the research question. This will be done by framing questions regarding the social context, the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church and the role of individual agency within the four-fold formulation outlined by Otto Maduro.

(1) The Shaping Influence of the Social Context on Religion:

The CEBs in Esteli were formed in 1981 by clergy sympathetic to liberation theology and in the context of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Their emergence as part of socio-religious movement in Latin America has been influenced by the emphasis within both social movements and left-wing political parties on class identity as the major axis of struggle. This context shaped to a significant extent the way in which the preferential option for the poor was lived out in the work of the CEBs and formed the starting point for an examination of gender consciousness within the CEBs.

In the past two decades, social movements in Latin America have been influenced by the development of feminist and women's movements. In Nicaragua, women's movement during the 1980's was closely connected to the revolutionary process. This meant that, despite many achievements, women's movement was not able to develop the autonomy necessary to engage in the production of meaning with respect to gender identity. Since the late 1980's a confluence of factors (including the gains made by women during the revolution, the ending of the contra war and the change in government) have led to changes within women's movement and the emergence of groups, organizations and networks which have been able to articulate and act upon women's issues from a more integrated perspective. During the 1990's, women's movement in Nicaragua has been dealing with the following issues: (1) production

(the feminization of the labour force in terms disadvantageous to women); (2) social reproduction (the disproportionate burden of child-rearing and household tasks on women and the need for greater access to family planning and contraception); (3) the private/public sphere dichotomy (patriarchal relations within relationships and within the household - abuse, double morality between women and men, women being confined to the home); and (4) sexuality (the emergence of lesbianism as a voice within the women's movement). The new pluralism and ability to develop an integral perspective on women's subordination has been a decisive factor in the ability to carry out this project. Political and organizational space now exists which allows for networking, sharing of resources and the deepening of an analysis of gender among groups of organized women. For instance, none of the three women's organizations visited during the participatory research project existed prior to 1990. These visits were an important aspect of the PR project in that participants interacted with other women in Esteli as organized women within the CEBs for the first time.

CEB members have been influenced by the need to develop survival strategies as a response to the crisis brought on by an intensification of neo-liberal reforms under the Chamorro government and the loss of state (albeit paternalistic) support for community development. This situation has also had an impact on the ability to engage in gender

consciousness. In the second phase of the PR project (Life) many women recognized that relationships between women and men and within families were socially constructed and that women assume greater responsibility within both the domestic sphere and the community. For instance, in the meeting on work one of the conclusions was that women should try to get more men involved in community work (in health brigades or in the Communal Movement). As was pointed out in Chapter 1, however, the development of consciousness does not necessarily or automatically lead to a change in action. For instance, in the visit to the Centre for Unemployed Women, the importance of women learning non-traditional occupations was discussed. Yet, the action ideas which emerged involved setting up soya and sewing workshops as a way to help meet family and community needs and generate income. The development of consciousness with respect to gender is thus only one "moment" in the process of change. The economic context is one of extreme crisis and women will likely continue to be disproportionately involved in meeting family and community needs, even if they recognize this is unjust and does not challenge entrenched gender roles.

(2) The Internal Conflicting Dynamics of Religious Institutions:

There are several internal dynamics within the Catholic Church in Nicaragua which are factors in the ability of the

CEBs to engage in gender consciousness. The internal dynamics can be seen as posing both opportunities and limitations.

Opportunities

(a) New Mode of Religious Production

The fact that the CEBs have been engaged in a new mode of religious production for over a decade has had a significant impact on the project. This can be seen in two areas: (1) who is engaged in religious production and (2) what this religious production entails. With respect to the first, the decentralization of authority has enabled the project to be a process of collective learning. Women participated actively in all the meetings, voicing opinions regarding the topics being explored, preparing dramatizations, writing songs and so on. Women were also involved in choosing themes and planning meetings. In other words, the responsibility for the production of meaning through a religious worldview in the project was assumed to a large extent by group members themselves rather than an authority figure, such as a priest.²⁴ The potential to engage in gender consciousness in terms of the content of the religious production itself can be seen in three areas: (1) the experientially-based methodology,

²⁴ The project was not an entirely collective process in that the four coordinators were more involved in planning and the presentation of themes than other group members. As was pointed out in Chapter 4, the CEB coordinators see their work as involving a gradual process of formation in which people take on more responsibility for leadership. This, also, could be seen throughout the project as women took on greater leadership roles.

(2) biblical exegesis and hermeneutics and (3) liturgy.

The methodology of the project was in keeping with the methodology of liberation theology which is experientially-based. The exploration of "life" themes was a significant part of the project, involving directly 7 of the 15 meetings. Throughout the 1980's the involvement of CEBs in concrete problems people faced was a source of contention with the Church hierarchy. Different perspectives on what is considered properly religious within the hierarchy and the CEBs continue to apply. For instance, the group member who also participated in the New Evangelization groups noted that issues from everyday life were not explored in meetings. The ability to include phase 2 in the project is thus directly related to the mode of religious production in liberation theology which begins with people's concrete reality.

The "everyday life" themes which were explored indicate that many of the concerns felt by CEB members are those which have been identified by other groups of organized women in Nicaragua. These include: (1) Responsibility in the domestic sphere (the man not helping in the house, "not even to wash his own clothes"); (2) responsibility in the community (women's strength and participation in "tasks of the neighbourhood" on top of work in the home); (3) violence against women, (4) health issues (women's lack of knowledge - especially older women - of their bodies and organic and social health problems faced by women; (5) the social

construction of sexual stereotypes (the socialization of children, men having multiple partners, paternal irresponsibility - "what we are living is a double morality"); (6) inheritance and electoral laws which did not acknowledge women as citizens (the "women's vote - part of that was that women didn't count"); and (7) the private/public dichotomy ("we continue to be prisoners in the home").

Phase 3 of the project (Bible/Church) involved engaging in theological reflection from the standpoint of women in terms of the reading of biblical texts. This methodology involved a "gender-aware" exegesis and hermeneutics. In the case of the former, texts were examined in the context of the position of women, and the poor, in the time they were written. This standpoint included an acknowledgement of the patriarchal bias of the Bible as well as its preferential option for the poor. The hermeneutical bias with respect to gender meant that texts were interpreted according to the reality of the women in the group. The overall context, of a woman-only project in which specific themes related to women's lives were being explored, meant that reflections on biblical texts emerged which would not necessarily have emerged in other contexts, such as weekly meetings. Also, texts were chosen which specifically dealt with women. In this sense, part of the new mode of religious production involved discovering texts which are seldom read and rediscovering from a new perspective ones that are more commonly known. The

reflection on Ephesians (5:22-33) is a case of the latter in which, as was pointed out, the text is often used to marginalize women and reading it from a different lens "opens a path for women to demand that men be responsible."

The ability to engage in theological reflection from the standpoint of women has been a key aspect of the project because of the religious worldview of the women in the group. Many of the comments which came up throughout the project demonstrated that women's "lived experience of faith" is both strong and important to them. When asked how we are going to achieve our goals in the first meeting, for instance, one of the comments was: "with the help of God and the Virgin Mary who will give us strength and health." Comments also emerged from biblical reflections which reflect a deeply felt religious identity: "We are all children of God through baptism and faith in Jesus ... Faith gives us strength." In Chapter 3, it was argued that a gender and development approach to women's empowerment which focuses on women's experience as the starting point must include women's religious worldviews if this is a fundamental aspect of their lives. Thus, while it was significant that Phase 2 of the project (Life) was able to be incorporated into the exploration of gender consciousness within a religious organization, it is equally significant, from the perspective of women's movement, that the project incorporated women's religious worldview and attempted to address this by engaging

in a non-patriarchal mode of religious production.

The CEBs have also been engaged in a new mode of religious production with respect to liturgy. For instance, while traditional Catholic prayers, such as the Our Father and the Hail Mary were frequently said, new prayers were also introduced. These included, for instance, a poem on menstruation which was read as a prayer:

Our ancestors celebrated the beginning of menstruation in young women because this signified health, life and prosperity for them and their community... In that time, we were valued for all our capabilities ... In that time, the first goddess was woman ... powerful and respected goddess of the land, fertility, life ... her name was Ixche (ATC, 1990:16).

The liturgy also included the reading of the "Psalm to the Latin American Woman:"

It is necessary to finish with this accursed patriarchy
which oppresses and kills the true face of God, of God Father
and Mother.

Women suffer in all the continent of Latin America ...
(*La voz del campesino*, n.d:15).

In addition, songs (from the *Misa Campesina* and other sources) were re-written from the standpoint of women:

When you, woman, believe in me,
We will be able to sing freedom.
When you, woman, believe in me,
We will build fraternity.

Farewell my sisters, the course is over now,
We have heard what God has spoken.
Now we are clear, now we must be on our way,
We must begin the task.

We all made a commitment in the service of the Lord,
To build love in this world.
When in struggling for our sisters, community is built,
Christ lives in solidarity.

When we all search and organisation is born
Is when our liberation begins.
When we all announce the hope that God gave us,
Then the Reign is already among us.

(Adapted from: "When the Poor Believe in the Poor,"
Misa Campesina).

(b) Relationship with the Church Hierarchy

At the time the participatory research project was carried out, the CEBs had no contact with the hierarchy of the Church. Their autonomy facilitated the development of the project in that there were no limitations imposed upon the themes which were explored. Some of the themes, for instance, contradicted the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic Church. While the Church supports the current government's removal of sex education from school curricula, the meeting "getting to know our bodies" openly dealt with this topic. Virginity was also discussed in this meeting and was seen as a being both socially constructed and a means to devalue women and not, as the Church hierarchy maintains, a virtue and requirement of unmarried women. Also, in the visit to the *Flor de Pino* clinic, birth control and sterilization were openly discussed without any sense that this was inappropriate because it went against Church teachings. In the meeting on history, female representations of the divine were discussed and the notion of God as a monotheistic deity in the image of "man" was associated with the historical emergence of patriarchy. Following this meeting, God was sometimes referred to as "Mother and Father," or just Mother, which entails the production of religious meaning regarding the divine contrary to the teachings of the Church.

Limitations

The Catholic Church, through its patriarchal religious worldview and authoritarian, male-dominated structure, possesses specific limitations for women. As was mentioned above, some of these limitations were not present in the project because of the current distance between the CEBs and the hierarchy. CEB members continue to be influenced, albeit less directly, by Church teachings, however. For instance, one meeting of the PR groups dealt specifically with women in the Church, which included both the women in the group identifying how they participate in the Church and a review of the position on women in selected Church documents. In addition, the teachings and doctrines of the Church may become more relevant as obstacles on the ability of the CEBs to continue their work in the area of gender consciousness if the CEBs re-integrate with the institutional Church. The limitations placed on the CEBs with respect to the Church can be seen in two inter-related areas: (a) Church teachings and (b) Church structure.

(a) Church Teachings

In the meeting on the Church, the focus was on reclaiming liberatory aspects of Church documents for women. These documents, however, also reinforce the patriarchal worldview of the Catholic Church outlined in Chapter 3. For instance, the section of the 1979 Puebla document on women states that:

"We underline the fundamental role of women as mother, defender of life and educator in the home" (#846, p.195). This statement is quoted again in the 1992 Santo Domingo document, which also calls for the need to discern, "in the light of the Gospel of Jesus the movements which struggle for women from different perspectives in order to harness its values, illuminate what is valuable and denounce what is contrary to human dignity" (#108, p.50). The document also specifically denounces abortion, sterilization and anti-natalist policies (#110, p.51). Thus, the Church sees itself as defining what is "properly religious" (in the light of the Gospels) with respect to involvement of its members in women's movement.

The influence of Church teachings can be seen more directly in the perspective of CFB members on the Virgin Mary. While Mary is seen as being "committed to the cause of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized," she is also seen as "serving, devoted, loving and full of faith" and a "model person" for all women (thus combining the essentialist and class-based perspectives outlined in Chapter 3). In the meeting on Mary, this idea that to be a Christian is to imitate Mary "in her personal and communitarian devotion" was reinforced.

The critical perspective on women's roles in social reproduction which began to emerge in the first phase of the project was not present in the meeting on Mary. In this

sense, the development of gender consciousness with reference to women's roles in social reproduction and community managing is at odds with the religious production of the Church with respect to women. Given the importance of the Virgin Mary in Latin American Catholicism, this represents a significant obstacle to the ability to reformulate a religious worldview from a gender perspective. On the other hand, as was also pointed out previously, women see Mary as a source of inspiration and strength, as someone who gives them faith and with whom they can identify as women and as mothers. The question of Mary is in many ways at the confluence of gender and religious identity. That is, from a feminist perspective, it can be argued that Mary reinforces traditional gender roles. Yet, from a faith perspective, she is an important symbol for women. Completely rejecting her on the one hand, or completely accepting her as she has been created through traditional theology on the other hand, does not address the complexity of the problem. Leonor Aida Concha, a Mexican religious, believes that it is possible, from the perspective of women's struggles, to show a new side of Mary which does not associate her exclusively with motherhood (in Tamez, 1989:92-3). This "hermeneutics of recovery," through changes in Marian discourse, imagery and symbolism, is possible, but in the interim Mary will continue to present contradictory messages for women.

Thus, from the perspective of an analysis of women's

roles in social reproduction, the internal dynamics of the Church in its perspective on women as seen, for example, through Church documents and through the Virgin Mary, does represent obstacles for engaging in gender consciousness.

(b) The Structure of the Catholic Church

While the current distance from the Church hierarchy has had a positive influence on the ability to engage in gender consciousness, this distance is seen as temporary. The CEBs do not see themselves as creating a parallel Church, but are committed to working with the Church even though this has been a conflictual process. It is difficult, however, to say what the effect will be on the continued ability of the CEBs to engage in gender consciousness if they re-establish ties with the hierarchy. The patriarchal religious worldview of the Church hierarchy could lead to conflicts with CEB members engaged in gender consciousness. As was pointed out in Chapter 3, this occurred in the Brazilian CEBs studied by Sonia Alvarez. That is, when the women's group began to explore issues which contradicted Church doctrine, problems emerged between the group organizers and the parish priest.

The fact that the process of engaging in gender consciousness has already been initiated within the CEBs may make it more difficult for the hierarchy to oppose this work than it would be to put limits on work which emerged within the context of a parish-supported project, as was the case in

Brazil. On the other hand, because the CEBs are currently in a difficult position in terms of their relationship to the hierarchy, they may be willing to compromise on this issue in order to re-establish ties.

In the meeting on the Church, it was noted that the Puebla document opens up the possibility for women to participate in non-ordained ministry within the Church. The ordained ministry for women was not mentioned in this meeting, nor is it an issue generally within the CEBs. If the CEBs re-integrate with the hierarchy, however, the patriarchal structure of the Church, in terms of the authority of the priests and the bishop, may be seen as a contradiction to the full liberation of women. This obstacle has been identified by other women working within the Catholic Church in Latin America. Pilar Aquino, when interviewed by Elsa Támez, for instance, commented that the "theme of the ordination of women" is at the centre of the "woman-church" problem in that it touches directly the structures of power of the Church. She also stated that she was "not so sure the CEBs were not preoccupied with this issue" (1989:16). While it cannot be taken as a given that issues identified as obstacles by other women in the Catholic Church in Latin America will be felt by the CEBs in Esteli, this is possible. The participatory research project represented the first time the CEBs of Esteli had engaged in a systematic examination of gender. This included (in the meeting on the Church) making connections

between the patriarchal structure of the Church and the family. While they do not currently see the prohibition on women's ordination to be an obstacle, it is possible that their further engaging in gender consciousness will highlight this, as well as other, contradictions between Catholic teachings and gender consciousness which have been identified by other Catholic women.

(3) The Impact of Religion on Societal Change and Stabilization:

Gender issues were explored in the participatory research project in the context of women's religious worldview. This may, in turn, lead to women in the group taking specific actions aimed at challenging structures of gender subordination in society as a whole. The CEBs have the potential to contribute to women's movement a gender perspective which involves a reformulation, rather than a negation, of religious identity. In a country which continues to be very Christian, this contribution could be very valuable. It is also possible that the participation of the CEBs in women's movement, along with other Christian organizations, will bring about change in the institutional Church itself.²¹

²¹ There does appear to be a growing consciousness among religious groups in Nicaragua with respect to gender. For instance, the popular education group, Teyocoyani, which was mentioned in Chapter 5, offered a one week course for CEB and parish members (women and men) from across the country on this issue ("Towards a New Valuing of Christian Women"). This

The networking with other women's organizations, including participation in the March, 1994 Municipal conference which brought women from various organizations together, indicates that the CEBs, as religious organizations, do have the potential to become involved in women's movement and, through this, contribute towards structural change related to gender, as well as class, issues. This can be seen as an attempt to counter the dominant (patriarchal) hegemony with an alternate hegemony based on the empowerment of women from the "bottom-up."

(4) The Influence of Individuals on Religion and Society:

(a) Group Members

Women who took part in the participatory research project have developed an increased understanding of the impact of structures of gender subordination on their lives. The impact of this understanding could be seen through the course of the project in the way in which women commented on things they had learned and how this influenced their lives. One group member, for instance, told us during a break that when her husband asked her for dinner the previous night, she told him

course was offered twice (in August and October, 1993) and approximately half the women in the PR group attended one or the other of these two courses. The organization of the course was very similar to the PR project and involved three phases: (1) Recovery of Women's Reality, (2) Biblical Illumination and (3) The Church Magisterium. An Ecumenical Women's Network has also been formed since 1990 (La Religiosa, 1991:15).

to "cook his own eggs." In the visit to the *Flor de Pino* clinic, specific health problems faced by women were addressed, such as side effects from tubal ligations. In the visit to *Acción Ya*, similarly, specific legal problems faced by women in the group were addressed. Although the focus of the project was an educational one, the group also provided support for individual women and a space to address personal issues and share experiences. While this project has had an impact on the individual women who have participated, they in turn will have an impact on the work of the CEBs. The project coordinators, for instance, commented in a letter I received from them that the women's group is "like the leaven of the bread of the CEBs, since they are the most committed, with a consciousness of gender and a spirit of struggle" (13.03.1994).

(b) CEB Coordinators and Clergy

As was mentioned above, the future ability for the CEBs to engage in gender consciousness will likely depend, at least in part, on their connections with the Church hierarchy. Their connectedness, in turn, will depend upon the individual agency of clergy within the institutional structures of the Church and the role of CEB leaders as mediators between the hierarchy and CEB members. The active commitment of CEB leaders to engaging in gender consciousness could lead to conflict with priests who disagree with this "line of work."

Even if the CEBs work with progressive priests, it is highly likely, given the internal patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church, that at some point there will be active opposition to at least certain aspects of the work, such as family planning or the female re-imagining of God.²⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has directly addressed the research question formulated in the beginning of the thesis by outlining the research carried out in the CEB's of Esteli on gender consciousness. The findings of the research process were then analyzed with respect to the theoretical framework established in previous chapters. It was concluded that the successful carrying out of the participatory research project "Woman: Who Am I?" in the CEBs and the links which have been established with other women's organizations indicate that the potential does exist within CEBs, as religious organizations, to engage in developing gender consciousness and to contribute towards women's movement for social change.

It was also concluded that this potential is dependent upon both the social context and the internal dynamics of the Catholic Church. The potential to engage in gender

²⁶ The ideas of CEB members on certain issues continue to coincide with those of the hierarchy. Although there is general agreement on the need for family planning and access to sterilization, most women in the group appeared to be opposed to abortion. This belief may be either challenged (through participation in women's movement) or reinforced (through ties to the Church).

consciousness exists as a result of the pluralism in women's movement in Nicaragua which has created a political climate conducive to women's organizing around a wide variety of issues. Furthermore, this potential also exists because of the work which has been carried out within the CEBs of Estell, as the Church of the Poor, in terms of engaging in a new mode of religious production which emphasizes lay leadership, dialogical learning, theological reflection from everyday life and new forms of liturgy which, also, stem from people's experiences and realities.

The potential to engage in gender consciousness, however, is also limited, in turn, by both the social context and the internal dynamics of the Church. In the case of the former, the context of neo-liberalism places greater pressure on women to organize to meet community needs even though this may reinforce rather than challenge their roles in social reproduction. In addition, the religious production and religious worldview of the Catholic Church limits the potential to engage in gender consciousness in that it reinforces traditional notions of women's roles and women's identity. The extent to which this poses an obstacle depends upon the nature of the relationship between the CEBs and the hierarchy of the Church.

Finally, engaging in gender consciousness has had an impact on the lives of the women who participated in the project, who, in turn, will influence the future direction of

the CEBs in this area. This future direction will also be determined (limited or enabled) by individual lay leaders and, assuming the CEBs reintegrate formally with the hierarchy of the Church, individual clergy working within institutional structures of the Church.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on the potential for Ecclesial Base Communities, CEBs, to incorporate gender consciousness into their educational work and contribute towards women's movement for social change. It was pointed out in Chapter 2 (Methodology) that the knowledge being generated in the attempt to address this question is not neutral, but rather aims to improve the condition and position of women. It was also noted that the thesis aims to do this in two ways. First, by having an impact on both the lives of the women who took part in the participatory research process and on the work of the CEBs in Esteli in the area of gender consciousness. Second, by contributing to the literature in the area of religion, women and social change. This concluding chapter of the thesis thus addresses each of these two areas as well as pointing to potential areas for future research.

The CEBs of Esteli

Approximately 25 women participated in the research

project "Woman: Who Am I?" carried out in the CEBs in 1993-4.

Through the four phases of the project (Organization, Life, Bible/Church and Action) various themes identified by project participants as being of interest to them were explored. These included violence, work, health, women in history, women in the Bible and women in the Church. The project provided a space within which women could share and reflect upon their experiences and gain insights into the way in which social forces, including the Church, impact on their lives. This process contributed towards women's ability to enact change in their own lives.

Although most of the people who participate in the CEBs are women, the project represented the first time gender issues were systematically explored in the work of the CEBs. The growth of women's movement in Nicaragua has provided a broader context within which to carry out this project. Similarly, the CEBs have begun to identify themselves with women's movement, for instance through the networking with other women's groups which has arisen from this project and through the incorporation of an analysis of gender into their conscientization and *formación* work. The ability of CEB member to act upon some of the issues addressed will be, however, limited by the current economic crisis in Nicaragua.

It was also pointed out in Chapter 2 that there are two standpoints in the research process - my own and that of the CEBs. For the CEBs, this project has been part of the process

of building the Reign of God and addressing the "oppression-liberation dialectic" in women's lives with respect to gender. The issue of gender consciousness is thus being explored within the CEBs in the context of the religious worldview of its members. This involves a commitment to working within the Catholic Church with the recognition that the Church itself represents specific obstacles for women.

My own standpoint is one of exploring this question from a sociological rather than theological perspective. In keeping with the CEBs, I also see religion as posing both limitations and opportunities for women. The CEBs, through their conscientization work, are involved in the production of meaning in the context of community with the aim of accompanying people in their daily struggles. This allows the CEBs to provide a space within which women can reflect upon and organize around gender-specific concerns.

The internal dynamics of the Catholic Church, however, clearly pose limitations for women. My perspective regarding these limitations is not necessarily shared in its entirety by CEB members and leaders. For instance, within the project it was recognized that Church documents are written by men and that the Church parallels the family in its patriarchal structure. The need to change the "religious production" of the Church was addressed, but the ordination of women was not seen as a key aspect of this process. Rather, basing themselves on Church documents, the ability for women to

participate fully in non-ordained ministry within the Church was seen as a significant step. While I agree that, given the patriarchal and authoritarian structure of the Church, this is an important step, I also concur with Pilar Aquino's assertion (Chapter 5) that the question of women's ordination is at the centre of the woman-Church problem. While the potential to engage in gender consciousness clearly exists within the CEBs, as Catholics, they will sooner or later have to reconcile the contradiction of empowering women in the context of a power structure completely dominated by men.

Within women's movement generally in Nicaragua, the achievement of certain gains for women in the context of the revolution further exposed the contradictions in society regarding their subordinate position. Similarly, the CEBs' preferential option for the poor exposed contradictions between the CEBs and the hierarchy of the Church. It is possible that a similar process will occur in the CEBs regarding the contradictions in the Church with respect to gender. This conclusion, however, is based on my own standpoint in the research process, and not that of the CEBs which have not articulated this contradiction in the same way.

The different standpoints in the research process can also be seen with respect to the issues of abortion and homosexuality. Both of these came up tangentially in the project, in the context of other discussions. While women agreed on the need for birth control and the negative effect

on women's health of multiple births, they also generally did not agree with abortion. In addition, while it came up many times throughout the project that children must be socialized free of gender stereotypes, one of the ways in which these stereotypes are enforced is through compulsory heterosexuality (the fear that boys will "turn out gay" if they engage in "feminine" tasks). Yet, homosexuality was seen by group members as being "unnatural." I see both of these issues as being central to an understanding of women's subordination. On the one hand, women's lack of reproductive choice is related to both the association of "womanhood" with "motherhood" and women's over-representation in social reproduction and community managing. On the other hand, the construction of heterosexual identity is part of the social construction of gender identities. Both reproductive choice and sexual preference are issues which are currently being addressed within women's movement in Nicaragua. Thus, these are issues which the CEBs will likely have to deal with as they become more involved in gender consciousness. Further research into both of these areas in terms of the position of CEB members is necessary. For instance, will the identification of the CEBs with women's movement lead to a re-evaluation of these issues, or will it lead to conflicts between the CEBs and women's organizations who are acting upon these issues? Similarly, what would be the impact on CEB relations with the hierarchy if engaging in gender

consciousness leads CEBs members to take a different position on these issues?

Women, Religion and Social Change

Through the exploration of gender consciousness in the CEBs of Esteli, an attempt was made to contribute to the literature in the area of women, religion and social change. The conceptual framework used in this investigation focused on two bodies of literature which have had little overlap: the sociology of religion and gender and development. These bodies of literature were selected in an attempt to begin to bring them together through the research process.

In examining the relationship between religion and society, the framework adopted was that which has been formulated by Otto Maduro in order to provide an understanding of religion in Latin America. Maduro's framework involves the understanding of religion as a situated reality which must be examined in its specific context. He thus negates earlier sociological approaches to religion, such as functionalism and Marxism, which assume religion will always play the same role in society. It was pointed out that, while critical, this framework lacks an analysis of gender. Maduro focuses, for instance, on the way in which religion is a situated reality in terms of the mode of production of a given society, but does not make the connections between class-stratification and patriarchy. This has clear limitations for an exploration of

gender in that the way in which a society is structured around relations of social reproduction has a significant impact on women's daily lives (and on power relations in society generally). Societies characterized by hierarchically structured male dominance pose specific, and often severe, limitations for women in both the public and private sphere - family and personal relationships, household and community responsibilities, the formal and informal work force and so on. The reflections which emerged throughout the participatory research project indicate that these issues are felt by women who are CEB members.

The absence of a gender-based analysis follows through to the other aspects of Maduro's formulation. In his outline of the relative autonomy of religion, for instance, he asserts that in class-stratified societies a body of religious functionaries is responsible for religious production. He does not point out, however, that in patriarchal societies it is men who most often are responsible for that same religious production. While this has begun to change within many Christian Churches, the Catholic Church, with its rigid male hierarchy, has yet to respond to the "signs of the times" in this regard. The patriarchal nature of the Church determines, at least partially, what is likely or not likely in terms of challenging structures of gender subordination. While liberation theology has represented a significant change within the Catholic Church in that it has articulated an

alternative mode of religious production which involves greater horizontal rather than vertical linkages, and the conscientization of the poor in order to be active subjects within the Church and society, liberation theology has not posed a significant challenge to the patriarchal structure of the Church and has only recently begun to examine its methodology with respect to the potential it has to be liberatory for women. In other words, for women to be active subjects within the Church and society.

An analysis of the impact of religion on society must also include an examination of the gender dimension of the religious worldview of both dominant hegemonic forces and the forces which attempt to counter this dominance in society. The Catholic Church has been responsible for the entrenchment of patriarchal values which influence, not only Church members, but also society as a whole. The influence of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in government education policies in Nicaragua is one example. Thus, it is in the interests of all women, not just Catholic women, to develop a critique of the Church from the standpoint of women.

The participation of Christians in the struggle to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship was mentioned in Chapter 4. The CEBs played a vital role in attempting to develop a popular hegemony through the Sandinista Revolution. The confluence of social circumstances in Nicaragua calls for different strategies for change than those adopted in the

1970's. It seems safe to conclude, however, that the CEBs are not playing as critical a role in women's movement now as they did in the struggle to overthrow the dictatorship in the 1970's. Nonetheless, the participatory research project demonstrated that CEBs do have the potential to be part of an autonomous and pluralist women's movement. The extent to which this will be the case as well as the form this involvement will take are areas for future research. For instance, in addition to networking with secular women's groups, the question of organizing within ecumenical Christian coalitions around gender/women's issues could be explored.

The second body of literature which was reviewed in this thesis related to the relationship between women and society. Both modernization and Marxist frameworks for understanding women were reviewed. While each of these has had positive contributions to make, they nonetheless have shortcomings in that they focus on only one aspect of women's lives. The "women in development" framework, for instance, assumes that women's condition and position will be improved through the modernization process. The "women and development" framework assumes women will be emancipated by changing capitalist relations of production and incorporating women into the formal workforce. Neither of these approaches begins from women's standpoint and an analysis of the different and overlapping roles women have in society. The "gender and

development" approach analyses women's roles in terms of production, social reproduction and community managing in the context of both the public and private sphere. This represents a significant advancement in that women's lives are viewed from a more integrated perspective. Furthermore, a gender and development approach calls for a bottom-up strategy for women's empowerment. This approach, however, also has shortcomings in that it has not addressed the religious dimension of women's lives. By incorporating a sociology of religion perspective which views religion as a situated reality into this framework, it is possible to develop a critical perspective on the relationship between women and religion which sees the potential for religion to possess both opportunities and limitations for women. The fact that women in the CEBs, and millions of women in Latin America and throughout the Third World, have a worldview which is oriented by a religious worldview makes it imperative that development theory incorporate an understanding of the religious dimension of women's lives.

The thesis has thus attempted to combine an understanding of the relationship between religion and society with an understanding of the relationship between women and society and to examine these relationships from the standpoint of women. For women who are members of CEBs, their reality as poor women, as mothers and grandmothers, as workers, as community organizers, as CEB members and leaders, and so on,

cannot be comprehended solely through the sociology of religion (in which men's standpoint is expressed as universally significant) or gender and development (in which women's religious standpoint, or worldview, is not adequately addressed). Thus, these frameworks must be reformulated as they are informed by the reality of people's lives. Conversely, the elaboration of theory is valuable in that it helps to understand the way in which people's experiences and identities are shaped by broader social forces. The emphasis on lived experience as the starting point in both liberation theology and a bottom-up approach to women's empowerment facilitates the intersection of these two perspectives as well as the intersection of theory and practice in the construction of "concrete utopias."

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APPENDIX A

Sample Exercises from Participatory Research Project "Woman: Who Am I?"

1. "A Day in My Life"
2. "Valuing Women's Work"



" A DAY IN MY LIFE "



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MORNING

get up
bathe
light the fire
go to the mill
make the coffee
serve breakfast
eat breakfast
give thanks to God
clean the house
wash the corn
make rice and beans,
tortillas
make sure the children
bathe and eat
take children to school
wash clothes

LUNCH

bring kids from school
make lunch - rice, stew
serve lunch
wash the dishes
sweep
take a *siesta*
clean the kitchen
watch soap operas
help children with
their homework

AFTERNOON

visit friends
visit the sick
collect water
iron
prepare the corn
go to meetings in
the *barrio*
visit CEB members

EVENING

study
read the Bible
sew
make the bed
store water
wash the corn
pray
prepare dinner
iron
clean the kitchen
again
give milk to the
children
watch soap operas
leave beans
soaking
pray to God for
a new day
go to bed
be aware of the
children
take child to
hospital if
he/she
gets sick

VALUING WOMEN'S WORK: What Work Do We Do and Where?

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