

# Comment

## A Review Reviewed

*The following comment, from Mrs Elizabeth Richman, of Aalsea, Oregon, concerns the review by Bill Broad of Humberto Belli's Breaking Faith: The Sandinista Revolution and its Impact on Freedom and Christian Faith in Nicaragua (RCL Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 106-108).*

Allow me to review a review . . . The book reviewed was *Breaking Faith* by Humberto Belli; the review that by Bill Broad.

"All this would be fine," says Mr Broad, referring to the summary in Mr Belli's introduction, "if it were based on a balanced assessment of the evidence. But Belli starts from the assumption that any evidence put forward by the Sandinistas or the revolutionary church is nothing more than clever propaganda." Belli makes no such assumption, but on the contrary states: "I am convinced that the ideological statements of the revolutionary FSLN need to be taken seriously as a real expression of what the Sandinistas think and intend." (Introduction p. xv.) True, Belli's assessment of the evidence does not lead him to the conclusions Broad would like, but misrepresentation does not take the place of rebuttal.

In criticising Belli for inadequate treatment of foreign assistance, Broad completely ignores the chapter entitled "Lining Up with the Soviets and Cubans", where the subject is dealt with. He complains that ". . . indirect mention of US support for the Contras is specifically repeated only once." How many times does it need to be repeated? Are the statements, "The Contras have been financed in part by the US government through the CIA . . ." and "The Contras have been trained and advised by the CIA" indirect?

Broad avers that "the fact that two out of 14 soldiers in a crashed Nicaraguan air-force plane were Cuban is taken as proof that there is

a similar proportion of Cubans in the armed forces as a whole” (referring to Belli’s p. 77). No, Belli does not take this incident as proof. Just read page 77, and also the section “The Foreign Presence” on page 76.

When Belli quotes a Pentecostal pastor speaking of torture inflicted by Sandinista soldiers, Broad chastises him for not referring to “many documented accusations of atrocities committed by the Contras”. Belli does tell about one case where Daniel Ortega announced that Catholic Bishop Schlaefter had been killed by the Contras only to have the bishop turn up very much alive stating that he and others had left the Contra camp “freely and without coercion”. We might also remember that the book is not primarily about the Contras, but about the Sandinista Revolution and its impact on freedom and Christian faith in Nicaragua.

Instead of reviewing the book, Mr Broad takes Mr Belli to task for not writing the book he, Bill Broad, would have written. In so doing, he descends to argument *ad hominem*, referring to Mr Belli as a “disillusioned expatriate, influenced by a hostile American administration”. I have a sneaking suspicion that Mr Belli considers himself, and not the US government, the expert in this case.

I have no criticism of *RCL*’s editor wanting to print “two reviews, written from different standpoints”, but would have thought that he would have seen the inadequacy of Mr Broad’s review.

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