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Nicaraguan President Ortega: Accusations Of Sandinista Persecution Of Religious Are Absurd

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At a Nov. 15 meeting in Managua of the Evangelical Committee for Promoting and Assisting Development, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega said that religion has been a "favorable element" in the liberation of the Nicaraguan people. As a case in point, the president stated that Nicaraguan Christians are defending the Sandinista revolution on the battlefield. According to Ortega, attempts by "enemies of the revolution" to convince international public opinion that the Sandinistas persecute religious people are absurd. If this was the case, he said, we would all be persecuting ourselves. The president then emphasized that Christianity is an integral part of the Nicaraguan revolutionary process. In the 1960s, he asserted, religion was the "opium of the people," seen in the fact that Catholic Church leaders were open and avowed Somocistas. Since the 1979 revolution, the "situation changed, as believers saw the association between Christian principles and the revolution's pursuit of justice and freedom." Ortega's statements occurred before the National Eucharistic Congress which commenced the following day. The week-long congress will be attended by 50 religious and lay delegates from throughout the country, and the Vatican's special envoy, Cardinal Opilio Rossi. (Basic data from PRENSA LATINA, 11/16/86)

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