

## TRAVELER'S ADVISORY:

**A DECALOG FOR GOOD-HEARTED, PRO-CHANGE AMERICANS** ----- Elliott #1897

What would you say if an Am. Christian, about to go to Nicaragua on a pro-change-oriented, church-institution-sponsored tour, were to ask you what questions to go with? Well, somebody did me, and I wrote: "ASK YOURSELF (1) what are my Christian eyes to look for, and (2) what are my Am. eyes to look for? ASK THEM: (1) What's my responsibility as an Am.? (2) What's my responsibility as a Christian? (3) What do you see as the fault of (a) Am. as one of the two major world-powers? (b) Nicaragua's present government and historic political style?"....This think-sheet, using the Decalog as model, expands my response:

**I. Thou shalt love...God, whom only thou shalt serve.** The Ten Commandments give you no freedom to pick and choose among deities: the first and control-precept boxes you into (1) loving-serving God EXCLUSIVELY and (2) hating-attacking idols CONSISTENTLY. Sandinista rhetoric is doubly astray from this in preaching "serving the needs of the people and of history." Reflect on the history of this rhetoric since Lenin: As it's worked out, the marxian "serving the needs of history" (i.e., the inevitable revolution-victory of the proletariat, i.e., "the Party") has been AT THE EXPENSE OF the people, beginning with the near-total loss of the people's liberties (at the moment, Oct/84, including the loss of freedom to run in an election--the case of Arturo Cruz). Note that the control-phrase for "the needs of the people" is "the needs of history," as always when Marxists come to power. Ask Nic. Christian leaders, in and out of the government, what they are doing about the dominance of marxian rhetoric in the official and unofficial utterances of the present government. Note: I'm not plumping for the substitution of biblical language for marxian language; if that were to happen, the Church would claim for itself in and through the government the privileged position Marxism now has--and freedom would be in peril from the other side: I'm as much against clericalism as I am against doctrinaire socialism, for both relativize to their "thing" the needs of the people. I'd be more hopeful if Sandinista rhetoric were neutral--e.g., speaking of "the needs of the people" without adding the ideological phrase "the needs of history." The fact that the rhetoric is not cleaned up to the neutral level shows either that the Christians have been overwhelmed in their preference for neutral language or (and the evidence seems this) that the Christians have let the marxian rhetoric overwhelm and pollute their own speech. Anyone who thinks this a small matter that can be attended to later is ignorant of the continuing power of government-forming speech (e.g., the language of our Declar. of Independence, our Const. with its Bill of Rights, and our Federalist Papers). Anyone who thinks I'm giving too much importance to language itself should reflect on the fact that some functionaries in society, including me, feel a special stewardship of language. Most of the troubles that've come upon me have because of my prophet cry "Be honest to language, and beware of its power, and honor God in truth and love with it!" "Bullets or ballots," we all say: bullets are related to technology as ballots are related to language (specifically, its persuasive use). Language is that serious. ...As with the Decalog, my remaining nine commandments are negative and so give more freedom than if they were, like the first commandment, positive:

**II. Thou shalt not imagine that "greed" and "profit" and "capitalism" are synonyms, as they are in marxian rhetoric.** I'm appalled at the gullibility of much current Christian rhetoric (including the Pope's) on this. Economic determinism is a comfortable notion for economists just as political determinism is for politicians and religious determinism is for theologians: the liver specialist starts with the assumption you have liver trouble, as does the dentist that you have a toothache. An additional distortion is the notion that a government can control, to the advantage of its people, economic realities--that, e.g., the USA could switch center from "profit" to "people"; or that governments make decisions primarily for economic reasons (which is certainly not true, e.g., of USSR agriculture). CASE: A good friend and co-Sunday-school teacher told me he'd accepted

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a professorship in phytology at Cornell over disgust and horror at what had happened to his work for a banana republic: on consultant fee to United Fruit, he'd quadrupled the production of a strain of bananas, and (he found two years later) the government had pushed the peasants out of their villages and into shantytowns out of greed for spectacular profits from the new banana. Who was to blame? United Fruit? what's wrong with entrepreneuring plant-improvements? Our Federal government? what intervention, and at what point, would you have proposed (e.g., the CIA subversion of that greedy government before it became bad news to its peasants?). That greedy banana-republic government which, in the interest of huge profits (direct and by taxation), sold its soul (if it did) to United Fruit? Case method is bad news for simplistic analyses and proposals--e.g., the Marxist claims that the above tragedy is the out-and-out fault of "America," driven by its "greed" for "profit." The USSR, and all human governments, are and always have been greed-and-profit-driven, a fact less visible in the early stages of a government (e.g., the Sandinistas). The biblical analysis is profounder: in "sin," all human beings are greed-and-lust-driven, so also are their institutions; and only self-righteousness, personal/societal, will try to deny it (and live with the consequent illusions and violences). (Instance the recent sentencing of the Vatican's chief banker for the mishandling of the creation-and-investment of profits; and what is any nation to do to achieve and maintain a fiscally sound balance of international payments as well as a healthy fiscal relationship with its own private sector?) The notion is nutty and pernicious that "people" and "profit" are antonyms; the truth is that where there is no profit (as well as prophet!), the people perish. (Parallel truth, again transcendent of government and ideology: Where profit is excessive, the people perish.)

**III. Thou shalt not accuse thy country of using military force and the threat thereof to maintain (if not also to create) markets.** Why not? Isn't the USA guilty? Of course; and so also have been, and are, all empires (now "superstates"). (Smaller states don't do it because they can't afford it, so they preach against it: the hypocrisy of the small in hope of the tyranny of the minority--which is one of my descriptions of the present situation in the UN). Church folks come up with unfeasible proposals for nonchurch organizations, political and economic, as though called to bring them to the born-again condition--which is easier than trying to help decision-makers improve the quality of the decisions they must make within the sphere of feasibility (Goethe: "The web of this world is woven of Necessity and Chance"; Buber: "Responsibility begins by responding to reality.") ....No room to expound the remaining commandments:

**IV. Thou shalt not forget that it's easier to turn deeds into words than to turn words into deeds.** Though they are powerful, words are cheap.

**V. Avoid being seduced by the rhetoric easiest to be seduced by, viz., your own.** Watch out if you "get it all figured out," if you "see it all at last"!

**VI. Don't commit switch-hubris by becoming unfair to the USA in the good-hearted interest of being fair to the rest of the world.** Of course we should pressure for a less stupid foreign policy, but within awareness of the fact that foreign policy (everywhere and at all times), because most of its factors are indeterminate, is iffy and (as irrational) largely stupid or at least blind. Is Contadora beginning to work in spite of, or because of, Reagan's Cent.Am. policy?

**VII. Don't become cynical when your sensitivities are not honored.** Swift: "I complain the cards are ill-shuffled except when I have a good hand."

**VIII. Thou shalt not let thy gut swamp thy head.**

**IX. Thou shalt not imagine that an opinion-confirming tour is a fact-finding mission.** We "see" what we (are persuaded to) look for, unless we watch out!

**X. Thou shalt not return to thy house (and thy country) as an instant expert.** Be humble: the trip may have more damaged than improved your perception.