

Ernesto Cardenal: The gentle revolutionary



Father Ernesto Cardenal in a pensive moment prior to his lecture "Nicaragua: The Spiritual Challenge and the Challenge of Justice"

An audience of 400 packed Siegfried Hall on October 18 to hear Father Ernesto Cardenal, priest, poet and Minister of Culture in the Government of National Reconstruction of Nicaragua give the 1983 Devlin Lecture at the St. Jerome's Centre for Catholic Experience. Fr. Cardenal's topic was "Nicaragua - The Spiritual Challenge and the Challenge of Justice". He spoke in Spanish and translation was provided by Mr. Pastor Valle-Gardy, the Nicaraguan Consul General in Canada. Tight security measures were in effect. Cardenal's bodyguards and plainclothes RCMP officers were present.

The 1979 revolution in predominantly Catholic Nicaragua, which saw the Sandinistas overthrow the military dictatorship of General Anastasio Somoza, was "an act of faith in the gospel," said Cardenal. "The revolution fulfills the commands of the gospel to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and teach the ignorant. We have created a new society - a society of fraternity and love for one another."

He spoke of the challenges faced by Nicaragua - the impending threat of a U.S. invasion, the economic problems faced by a third world country exacerbated by the vast external debt left by the Somoza regime, the destruction caused by war and the necessity to rebuild. "But the most difficult thing is to see the suffering of our people - we want happiness for them," he said.

To that end, and on a hopeful note, Cardenal cited the literacy campaign initiated by his government, the construction of schools and hospitals, free education, the agrarian reform which has distributed land among the peasantry and the drop in rental prices for homes. He spoke of the health crusade which has made medical services free to the Nicaraguan people, the availability of food to all segments of society and the efforts to promote the culture of their land through art, literature and music. "These are examples of the tenderness of the revolution," he said.

Of his visit to St. Jerome's Cardenal later commented, "I have very rarely found such demonstrations of warmth, care and concern



Cardenal at St. Jerome's "Demonstrations of warmth"



Nicaraguan Consul-General to Canada, Mr. Pastor Valle-Gardy (left), simultaneously translated Father Cardenal's lecture, which was given in Spanish.

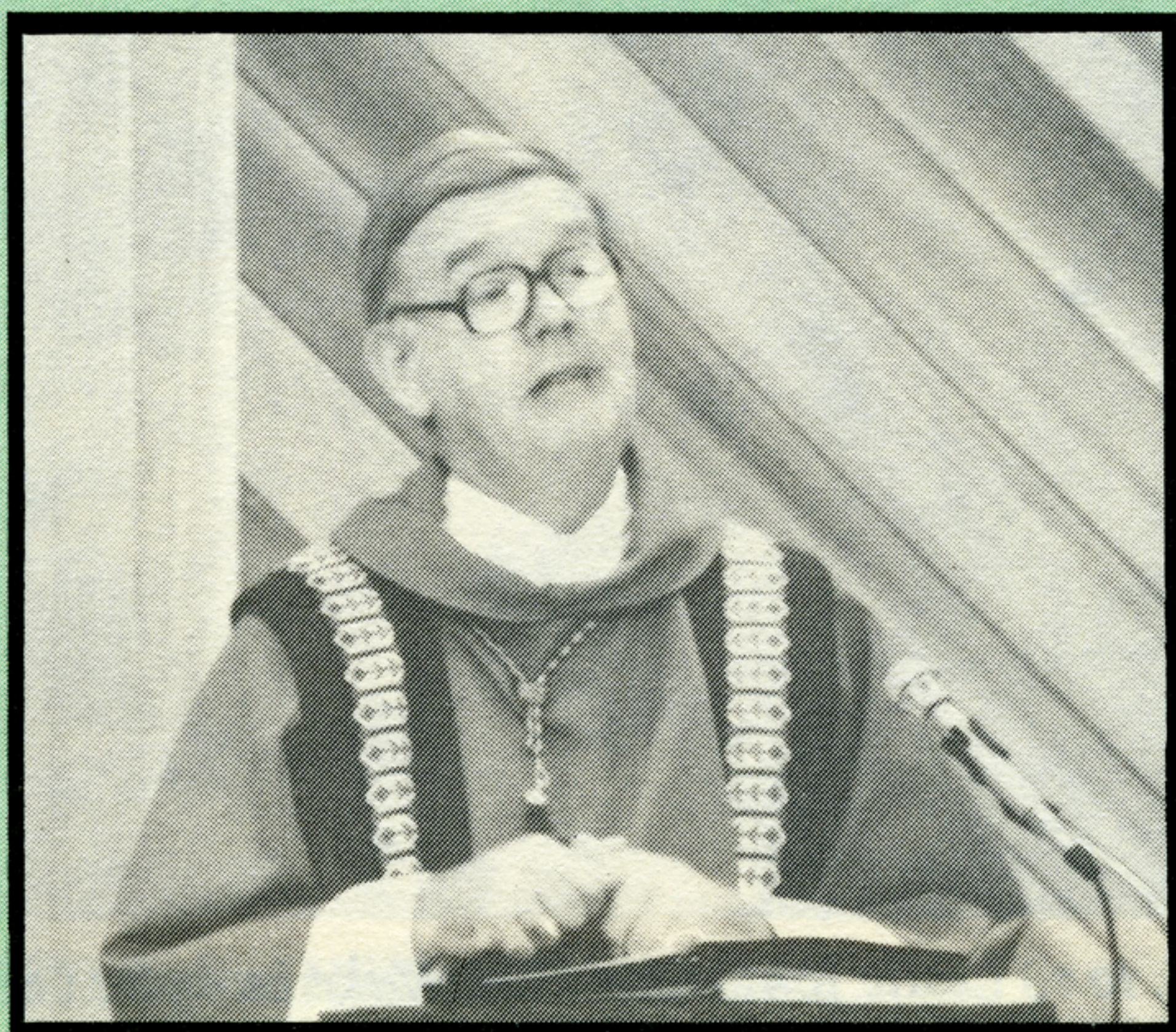
for the well-being and future of the people of Nicaragua."

Major news stories recounting this event have appeared in the Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, KW Record and on CTV News.

In his concluding remarks, Centre Director Dr. Michael Higgins thanked Fr. Cardenal and pointed out that the 1983 Devlin lecturer was once a novice under the late monk Thomas Merton. Merton, who had translated much of Cardenal's poetry, described his young novice as "a man of magnificent gentleness," Higgins said.

That quality was in abundant evidence throughout Fr. Cardenal's eloquent and passionate lecture. As in the case of the 1982 Devlin lecturer, Fr. Henri Nouwen, those in attendance were provided a rare glimpse of an extraordinary man.

In Memoriam



Bishop Paul Francis Reding

It was with great sadness that the college learned of Bishop Paul Reding's death in Hamilton on December 8. He has served the Diocese of Hamilton faithfully as a priest and bishop for over three decades, and has been our Chancellor since his consecration as Bishop in 1973.

Bishop Reding presided at a number of college functions, most notably the installation of Father Choate as president in 1979, the blessing and dedication of Siegfried Hall and at our liturgy marking the University of Waterloo's 25th anniversary in 1982.

Former president Father John Finn described Bishop Reding as "a very warm human being with a common touch. He had complete rapport with, and the respect of his fellow clergy."

Father Choate called him "a fair-minded, open and gentle man," and added, "I've never worked for a better bishop."

Chaplain Father Chris Grabiec recalled inviting him to the college for confirmations and, in spite of his busy schedule, the Bishop obliged and said, "I always want to be a part of what goes on in the St. Jerome's community."

Bishop Reding will be sadly missed.