Ordinarily, we do not review memoirs or biographies of teachers, focusing instead on texts that center more explicitly on theory and practices of teaching English. *Faith and Joy*, however, is the story of a leader with a national reach in literacy education during a complex and fascinating recent historical period in Central America. Professor Bender- Slack’s review convinced us it would be appropriate to make an exception in this case.—KL

*Faith and Joy: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest*  
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In *Faith and Joy: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest*, Father Fernando Cardenal shares his struggles and disillusioned. But Cardenal speaks from his heart and will likely convince most readers that his role in the revolution was just. “The regime, in addition to bloody repression, also used economic exploitation, impoverishment, malnutrition, and death” (46). Additionally, illiteracy was used as a tool of oppression by the Samo-cistas, who considered literacy to be subversive and Communist.

**Teaching for Social Justice**

Perhaps the most important part of the book for literacy professionals is the motivation behind, and the implementation of, the National Literacy Crusade. With an understanding of the Sandinista revolution, the literacy campaign can be understood as teaching for social justice that began as a grassroots effort. When guerrilla commanders in the field asked the peasants what their vision of the future was, they said they wanted to learn to read and write. This is what they were promised if the Sandinistas came to power.

Cardenal then provides the political background necessary for readers to understand his involvement, as a priest and an educator, in a revolution. His descriptions of the role of the United States in both the government oppression of the Samoza 30-year dictatorship and subsequent Contra attacks may make some readers uncomfortable and, perhaps,
Faith and Joy concludes with a hope informed by Cardenal’s personal experiences. “I have seen the energy and profound internal force of human beings building a new society by giving of themselves in love and in solidarity” (247). He recognizes that hope leads to commitment, and so we must keep hope alive. After decades of working with and leading young people through a revolution, a national literacy campaign, and political groups, it is heartening to see how much faith he has in youth. “Young people need two conditions to become agents of change. First, they need a noble and significant cause that inspires them, and second, they need credible people with moral authority leading the cause” (247). The literacy crusade provided both.

Complex and Hopeful

Those interested in reading about a literacy program that made a difference in a nation should read Faith and Joy. It leaves the reader with a recognition of the complexities of our political and social situations—and also with hope. Additionally, the book shines a light on the historical context of Nicaragua and how, following the revolution, the country was politically and socially ripe for a literacy crusade that changed their world.

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