Like José Luis Cordeiro Mataro, G. I share the misgivings he voiced in his New. 1 letter regarding the statistic. Associate Professor Jean Jackson cited in an Oct. 21 interview. My misgivins regarding her imputations, however, go ever further.

I am a photographer with the Associated Press, and was part of a three-person team that traveled to cover the pope in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras earlier this year. This was my first trip to the area, so I make no claims of being an expert, but I am, to some extent, a trained observer. My perceptions of the comparative situations in Nicaragua and El Salvador probably could not have differed more from Jackson's.

The day before the pope arrived in Nicaragua, there was a funeral for 19 martyrs in the main square in Managua. It turned out that these 19 fearless people were killed en masse. Some of them were not as young as 12, and my memory of newspaper accounts is accurate, had been given weapons and sent off to find the "Contras." They had all been killed in an ambush while walking down the middle of a road. The justica called them heroes of the revolution. Their parents cried on the collins. It seemed, to an outsider, more tragic and wasteful than heroic.

The same day a writer and I went north from Managua to Leon to see the church the pope would be visiting. There was little agricultural activity of any description visible during the long ride. There were no children visible at play in the villages we passed, or in Leon proper, where I was stopped and searched six times in twenty minutes by plainclothes men and women — read secret police — in front of the church.

Although you can buy postcards with a picture of the church, I was prevented from photographing it despite international press credentials, for which the Sandinistas had charged $50. I was told the painting was probably far for the course working in Central America, but when we returned the next day for the pope's visit, security reached new heights.

Traveling press on presidential or papal trips are always searched. The Nicaraguans have a method I was told they had learned from the Cubans. Six members of the press corps at a time were moved into a bare room, told to put down their gear, were body searched, and led from the room. Five to ten minutes later we were led back, recharged our guns, and the next group entered.

No professional feels comfort-able to take a camera bump-er through his equipment, but there were more serious prob-lems: Ten minutes after leaving the search, the writer I was work-ing with noticed his notebook was missing. The notebook con-tained an interview we had made long before a day with a church of-ficial in Leon, and the notes were in Spanish. Our government ex-ecutive assured us the notebook would be "found."

One month not an hour later with a comment about how care-ful we were to leave it in the search room. That room was as bare when we left as when we en-dered. It had been swept, and there was no sign of a machine next door during the night. I hope the priest who shared his thoughts with us is still in good health.

I am not Catholic, but I had covered the pope in the United States, and was surprised when papal parades through the pope's Mass in Leon people started leaving by the thousands. It is an unusual sight to see people walk out of the pope, especially in a country that is mainly Roman Catholic.

We returned to Managua for (Please turn to page 7)