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Religion and Religiosity in Cuba: Past, Present and Future

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For four decades, the Cuban people have lived under a political system that, until recently, openly discouraged religious belief. Although the relaxation of official policy towards religion was accelerated by the demise of the socialist bloc, greater flexibility towards religion was already evident in the mid-eighties. This paper examines factors that have contributed to this change and attempts to identify those most important to the future of religious life in Cuba, looking beyond the preservation or passing of a specific social or political model.

RELIGION IN CUBA BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Like the majority of his countrymen, Cuban president General Fulgencio Batista (1952-1959) was officially Catholic, although his association with *Santería* and his sympathy for Protestantism were well known in his inner circle, the latter bolstered by his time at the *Colegio Los Amigos de Banes*, a Quaker school established in Cuba by Americans. Batista's religious background was not at all unusual in Cuba. His family, like so many others in Cuba, combined Spanish Catholic traditions with elements of U.S. Protestantism as well as various Afro-Cuban religions.¹

In a survey published by the Catholic University Association (ACU-*Agrupación Católica Universitaria*) in 1957, 72.5 percent of the population identified itself as Catholic. In rural areas the number was a much lower 52 percent. Forty-one percent of Cuban *campesinos* had no religious affiliation whatsoever. Although few people openly identified themselves as holding Afro-Cuban or Spiritist beliefs, one fourth of all Catholics reported having consulted a Spiritist and a high percentage frequently participated in Afro-Cuban religious rituals. Many of the people professing Afro-Cuban or spiritist beliefs preferred to perform the related rituals in private, while publicly identifying themselves as Catholics or simply professing "a belief in God and the saints" or "a belief in God."

Among the elite, publicly associating oneself with Afro-Cuban religious practices and beliefs was not socially acceptable. According to the same ACU survey, 99 percent of the upper class and 88 percent of the middle class classified themselves strictly as Catholic, versus 68 percent of the lower class. Although 47 percent overall said that they had attended at least one religious ceremony in the past year, this figure would include baptisms, weddings, funerals, and religious processions. The figure for attendance at the weekly mass would therefore be significantly lower. While nearly a fourth of all Catholics said they practiced "regularly," only 4.3 percent of the population had

attended mass at least three times that year.

Six percent of Cubans were Protestant, which in Cuba has almost always meant Evangelical.² While many held the impression that Protestantism was much more widespread than the six percent indicated by the survey, that misimpression may have stemmed from the significant influence of Protestant schools in the provinces, whose students were not necessarily Protestants themselves.³ According to reports published by Protestant missionary societies, most Cuban Protestants attended church services regularly. But even counting Catholics and Protestants together, the number of people who attended church every week might have reached six or seven percent of the population at most.

[T]he 1940s and 50s saw a resurgence of Catholicism, . . .

Despite the general weakness of Cuban religious institutions and the growing influence of syncretic beliefs, the 1940s and 50s saw a resurgence of Catholicism, especially in Havana and other large cities, as well as increasing numbers of Protestants in provincial towns and certain Havana neighborhoods. Another religious movement, the Jehovah's Witnesses, attracted nearly one percent of the population and was rapidly penetrating the rural areas. A casual observer could easily misjudge the religious situation because of its regional nature, characterized by high attendance at mass in Havana and some other cities, Protestant chapels full of congregants in many of the provinces, and the incessant activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses in rural areas.⁴

The Catholic Church was organized into six dioceses with an average population of 1,132,000 each, and 210 parishes with an average population of 32,300. There were 723 priests, of whom 241 were diocesan, and 2,401 nuns.

According to Catholic journalist Juan Emilio Friguls, writing for the *Diario de la Marina*, there were 52 Catholic schools for boys and 110 for girls in Cuba in 1957, organized into the Cuban Confederation of Catholic Schools (*Confederación de Colegios Católicos Cubanos*), which enrolled about 40,000 students total.⁵ The 1960 Pontifical Annual reports a slightly larger number, recording the existence of 339 private and parish Catholic schools with an enrollment of 65,519 students. The majority of these schools belonged to the religious orders.

The Church also had three universities as well as

various hospitals, clinics, and homes for children and the elderly. For the training of clergy, the Church also maintained three diocesan or archdiocesan theological seminaries, various theological institutes affiliated with religious orders, and numerous convents and monasteries in different parts of the country.

The 1961 statistical report of the Evangelical Association of Foreign Missions provides comparable figures for the size of the Protestant community. At that time there were 1,055 established Protestant congregations and another 941 in the process of formation. Some 26 denominations issued reports, indicating a total of 278,244 members, not including a relatively high number of people affiliated with movements that had not provided their membership statistics to the Association. The numbers are impressive, considering that the Protestant movement had not yet experienced the rapid growth in Latin America that would come in subsequent decades.

The Association reported the presence of 212 ordained pastors, 681 religious workers either studying for ordination or working in a lay capacity, and 383 foreign missionaries, most from the United States. There were 101 Protestant schools, enrolling approximately 30,000 students. U.S. missions directly funded roughly half of these schools, while local churches maintained the others.

Four theological seminaries and nine bible schools trained pastors, missionaries, and religious teachers, and there were two post-secondary or university-level educational institutions, an old-age home, an orphanage, seven clinics, and two agricultural schools.⁶

THE CHURCHES DURING THE 1950s

Public opinion was divided by the military coup of 1952 and the establishment of a de facto government by Batista. This division was reflected in the churches, which counted among their membership both government officials and opposition leaders.

A significant number of youth leaders from Catholic Action (*Acción Católica*) and from the Protestant churches participated in the opposition movement. Two of the best-known were Frank País, a teacher in a Protestant school and son of a Baptist minister, and José Antonio Echeverría, a Catholic who helped lead the failed assault on the Presidential Palace in 1957. Among the other Catholic youth who died in the war were Juan Fernández Duque, Javier Calvo Formoso, and Pedro René Fraga. Among the Protestants were

Oscar Lucero, Marcelo Salado, and Esteban Hernández.⁷

Catholic Action and the Cuban Council of Evangelical Churches (*Concilio Cubano de Iglesias Evangélicas*) were affiliated with the United Civic Institutions of Cuba (*Conjunto de Instituciones Cívicas de Cuba*), which issued statements condemning government actions and seeking a solution to the national crisis.

On February 25, 1958, the Catholic bishops issued the declaration “In Favor of Peace” (*En favor de la paz*), which called for “a government of national unity, which would be able to pave the way for a return of our Homeland to a peaceful and normal political life.” The Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, Enrique Pérez Serantes, also issued several pastoral letters condemning violence and calling for peace, and successfully intervened on behalf of Fidel Castro after the latter’s failed 1953 attack on Moncada.

At the same time, a number of Catholic priests and Protestant pastors joined the rebel forces as chaplains, the most famous among them being Father Guillermo Sardiñas, who rose to the rank of *comandante* in the Rebel Army.⁸

THE CHURCHES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE REVOLUTION

The triumph of the Revolution had no immediate effect on the ability of religious organizations to carry out their work. For almost two years the churches were able to maintain their educational, social, and cultural programs and institutions.

President Manuel Urrutia and Commander-in-Chief of the Rebel Army Fidel Castro were professed Catholics, the latter having studied in the Jesuit *Colegio Belén*. Other active Catholics holding cabinet level posts included José Illán, Antonio Jorge, and Andrés Valdespino. Catholics also held leadership positions in the Ministries of Public Works, Commerce, State, and Social Welfare, and in the Cuban Workers Confederation (*CTC—Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba*), the Bank for Agricultural and Industrial Promotion (*BANFAIC—Banco de Fomento Agrícola e Industrial*), the Cuban Institute of Cinematography (*ICAIC—Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos*), and the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (*INRA—Instituito Nacional de Reforma Agraria*).⁹

Catholic influence was also strong in the labor movement. The Young Catholic Workers Organization (*JOC—Juventud Obrera Católica*) flourished, and various lay Catholics took leadership positions in the Confederation of Cuban Workers, including

Rodolfo Riesgo, José de Jesús Planas, and Reynol González.

Protestants were equally active in the new government. Faustino Pérez, Manuel Ray Rivero, Rev. Daniel Álvarez and José Naranjo held ministerial or vice-ministerial posts, while other clerics and laypeople were named to provincial and local offices. Rev. Raúl Fernández Ceballos and Rev. Agustín González played important roles in organizing the Revolution’s literacy campaigns.¹⁰

Although the Protestant churches had no immediate need to reorganize their internal structure with the fall of Batista, the Catholic Church did make some significant personnel changes. A replacement was named for Eduardo Martínez Dalman, Bishop of Cienfuegos, who left the post due to accusations of close ties to the Batista government. Eduardo Boza Masvidal assumed the newly created role of Auxiliary Bishop of Havana, and Evelio Díaz Cia, Bishop of Pinar del Río, was designated Coadjutor to the Archbishop of Havana in order to assist the aging church leader. While some criticized Cardinal Manuel Arteaga Betancourt of Havana for his alleged connections to the Batista government, even critics recognized the revolutionary ties of other Catholic priests and Protestant pastors.

[W]ith the fall of Batista, the Catholic Church did make some significant personnel changes.

A few clerics, among them the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, objected to the execution by firing squad of officials from the Batista regime, but they did so as individuals and not as representatives of their institutions. Only the Quakers, whose congregations and schools were concentrated primarily in the north of Oriente province, officially called upon the government to stop the executions.¹¹

The Catholic Church demand for religious instruction in public schools was perhaps the first controversial issue to arise under the new government. Important mass media organizations backed the Catholic proposal, which would have allowed all religions to offer public school instruction in the faith chosen by the students’ parents. Cuban Protestants, following a long tradition of support for secular education, generally opposed the proposal, and key Protestant leaders published their positions in a special report on the controversy in the magazine *Bohemia*. The government ultimately opted to maintain a strictly secular system of public education.¹²

MAJOR CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE CHURCHES, 1960-1961

In November 1959, the National Catholic Congress brought together hundreds of thousands from all over the island and generated some of the first tensions between Church and State. Church spokesmen began to express their concern about growing Marxist influence in the government. A clear goal of the Congress was to demonstrate Catholic strength and show opposition to any overtures towards communism.¹³

Tensions increased in 1960 as the Revolution moved further to the left. Members of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP-*Partido Socialista Popular*) and others with Marxist inclinations were rising to important positions in the government. Cuba also reestablished relations with the Soviet Union and other countries of the socialist bloc, a move harshly criticized in a public statement from the Cuban bishops.

By the end of 1960, all independent daily publications had been confiscated, including *Diario de la Marina*, which had promoted the theological and social positions of the Catholic Church. The only daily that regularly included religious news was *El Mundo* in Havana, which maintained Catholic and Protestant sections. A few small Catholic and Protestant publications continued to operate, but they were distributed only among parishioners and made no reference to political issues.

In the summer of 1960, several Catholic radio and television programs were also discontinued. By May 1961, all religious radio and television programming was phased out. Protestants were relatively more affected, due to the extensive local and national radio programming they had been broadcasting.

The Colón Cemetery of Havana, previously administered by the Catholic Church, was “municipalized” on August 4, 1960. Founded in 1862, it was the only large Catholic cemetery that had not been secularized during the U.S. intervention. The Baptist, Jewish, and Chinese cemeteries were also confiscated. The churches did retain some control over certain aspects of the cemeteries, primarily via funerals and other religious ceremonies, but overall control passed to the government.

In a speech on August 11, 1960, Fidel Castro openly criticized the Catholic hierarchy: “I would like to see a pastoral letter condemning the crimes of imperialism...the horrors of imperialism.... We will see that those who condemn a Revolution that stands by the poor and the humble,...who preach love for one’s neighbor and the fraternity of men...[but] who condemn a Revolution like this

one, they betray Christ and would even be capable of crucifying Him again.”

Around this time several protests took place in front of Catholic churches as government supporters expressed their opposition to the Church. The PSP daily, *Noticias de Hoy*, called for a purge of the clergy later that year, accusing Cardinal Arteaga and Papal Nuncio Luis Centoz of working for the enemies of the Revolution.

In light of this situation, the bishops published an “Open Letter to Prime Minister Dr. Fidel Castro” on December 4, 1960, expressing their distress at the arbitrary detention of a number of priests, threats of reprisals against others, personal attacks on the bishops, the cancellation of almost all Catholic radio and television programming, efforts to encourage the formation of pro-government Catholic organizations, statements by government officials and spokespeople linking anti-communism with the counter-revolutionary movement, and an anti-religion campaign in general.¹⁵

New Catholic groups, unauthorized by the Church but encouraged by the government, criticized the bishops’ position. The best-known of these organizations was “With the Cross and For the Homeland” (*Con la Cruz y Por la Patria*).

The tensions between the Revolution and Catholicism that began in 1960 spread to the Protestant community by 1961. The exodus of U.S. missionaries and church employees intensified when the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961. The departure of the missionaries and the confiscation of their educational infrastructure had a great impact. While hospitals, clinics, and social programs were not confiscated at this time, the religious schools had been the churches’ most important institutions.

The exodus of U.S. missionaries and church employees intensified when the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961.

Around this time hundreds of thousands of Cubans began to leave the country. The exodus included great numbers of Catholic and Protestant parishioners and leaders, greatly affecting the Church. The vast majority of Cuba’s Jews also left the country, making them the community proportionally most impacted. The departures would continue at an increasing pace until the missile crisis of October 1962.

The situation worsened after the landing of a Cuban exile expedition at the Bay of Pigs on April

17, 1961. The presence of three Catholic priests and a Protestant minister among the group was trumpeted in the press, in government statements, and in the trial of those captured.

On May 1, 1961, Castro announced the nationalization of private schools, the vast majority of which were operated by the churches. Education was defined as a public function in the Law on the Nationalization of Teaching (*Ley de Nacionalización de la Enseñanza*). Passed on June 6, 1961 it exempted only seminaries and theological schools. The Catholic Church had three: El Buen Pastor, San Basilio, and San Alberto Magno. The last institution, in Matanzas province, ceased to function for lack of professors. Most of the training institutes and novitiate programs of the Catholic religious orders were similarly affected by a lack of personnel.

Confrontation between the Catholic Church and the government reached a new peak on September 8, 1961, ...

The Baptist Church continued the operation of seminaries in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, and the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal denominations retained their jointly operated Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas. The Nazarene and *Los Pinos Nuevos* denominations also continued to operate seminaries. The Bible Institute of the Assemblies of God was closed in 1963, and its U.S. director expelled along with the few U.S. and Puerto Rican missionaries remaining in the country. With the departure of these missionaries, the Free Baptist and United World Mission bible schools also closed.¹⁶ The Seventh Day Adventists continued to offer secondary instruction under government supervision at the *Colegio Las Antillas* in Santa Clara, having been granted special consideration by Ché Guevara in return for life-saving medical attention he received from a group of Adventists while in the Sierra Maestra. After Guevara left Cuba, the school and a seminary on the same site were both confiscated.

Confrontation between the Catholic Church and the government reached a new peak on September 8, 1961, when some 4,000 faithful gathered in Havana to celebrate the festival of the Virgin of La Caridad del Cobre. The crowd began to move from the Church of La Caridad toward the Presidential Palace, chanting “Cuba Sí! Russia No!,” “Freedom!,” and “Long Live Christ the King!” About 200 youths arrived at the Palace and petitioned unsuccessfully to speak to the Prime Minister. A young

worker, Arnaldo Socorro, was killed in a confrontation with the police. Later the Cuban Workers Confederation (CTC) accused the Church of being responsible for Socorro’s death.¹⁷

Some months earlier, the government had threatened to deport foreign clerics, and the Socorro incident apparently convinced officials to take action. A number of parishes and convents were raided and some 131 priests and church workers were forced to board the Spanish steamship *Covadonga*, which was about to sail for Spain. Those expelled included not only foreigners but also many Cubans, among them the future Auxiliary Bishop of Miami, Agustín Román, and Monsignor Eduardo Boza Masvidal. In all, there were 33 Cubans, 86 Spaniards, and 12 others, mostly Canadian and French. The group consisted of 43 diocesan priests, 68 secular priests and 20 brothers from 14 different religious orders.

THE JEWISH EXODUS

The departure of thousands of members of Cuba’s well-established Jewish community accelerated in 1960. The Jewish population, which fluctuated between ten and twelve thousand, was largely middle or upper-middle class. About 4,800 left the country between 1960 and 1962, and by 1965, only 2,300 remained—1,900 in Havana and 400 in the rest of the country. On January 1, 1961, a group of Jewish Marxists took control of the Jewish Community Council.

Although private Jewish schools had originally been exempted from the nationalization decree, the Theodor Herzl School was nationalized in 1961 and renamed for Albert Einstein. Arrangements were made to offer evening classes in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Jewish History at the school, and the kosher dietary needs were taken into account.

The five synagogues were still functioning in 1961, although the drop in attendance following the exodus caused some of them to close. Due to the absence of clergy, rabbis and cantors from other countries began to organize occasional visits to minister to the religious needs of those who remained active in the faith. Most Jews who remained in Cuba, however, became completely secularized or integrated with the general population through marriage.¹⁹

CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE PROTESTANT CHURCHES (1961-1965)

The nationalization of religious schools, discontinuation of religious radio and television program-

ming, and expulsion of foreign missionaries damaged relations with the Protestants. The situation worsened in 1962. Shipments of bibles were frequently confiscated and their distribution by the Bible Society became much more difficult. The director, Joaquín González Molina, left Cuba for his native Spain in 1961 due to the political situation, and those who took over experienced serious difficulties from that time forward.

In a speech broadcast nationally in March 1963, Castro specifically criticized certain “sects,” including Gideon’s Band, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Pentecostal movement. In June 1963, Communist leader Blas Roca, in an article titled “The Ideological Struggle against Religious Sects,” echoed Castro’s criticism and outlined a program to combat the various groups under criticism.

Formal restrictions on Protestant churches began to be put in place. An old colonial law requiring non-Catholic groups to register with the government was still in the legal code, and the government began applying it strictly. Some congregations refused to provide the requested data, which included personal information about members as well as detailed reports on gatherings. In much of the country only a limited number of worship services and other activities were permitted without special applications filed well in advance.

Orphanages, hospitals, clinics, and medical dispensaries belonging to churches began to be seized. Catholic and Protestant churches alike only were permitted to operate facilities for the elderly. The activities of the Salvation Army, dedicated primarily to social welfare programs, were reduced to a minimum.

On July 26, 1963, obligatory military service was declared and a number of seminarians and Protestant pastors were called up despite church protests. Only a few exemptions were authorized for members of the Society of Friends, the Quakers, due to that church’s well-established doctrine of pacifism.²¹

In 1962, a longtime militant of the Popular Socialist party, Dr. José Felipe Carneado, was assigned to deal with religious matters as Communist Party Secretary for Science and Culture. Dr. Carneado worked directly with the Catholic hierarchy and with Protestant leaders, particularly with Rev. Fernández Ceballos, then General Secretary of the Cuban Council of Evangelical Churches. In practice, Carneado functioned as a kind of Minister of Religion for the government as well as the party. However, his influence over the actions of local authorities was limited.

The Military Units to Aid Production (*UMAP-*

Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción) were formed in 1965 to employ people considered insufficiently trustworthy to perform their obligatory military service. Thousands of believers, as well as a large number of ministers, priests, and seminarians, were sent to the camps along with prostitutes, homosexuals, and others whose lifestyles were considered “inappropriate.” Even the Cuban Council of Evangelical Churches, generally favorable toward the government, protested the action. After a few years, significant international protests convinced the government to discontinue the UMAP.

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In 1965 the Baptists experienced a major conflict with the State. Forty-eight Baptist pastors and some lay people were prosecuted for fomenting ideological deviation, counter-revolutionary activities, ties to the Central Intelligence Agency, and most importantly, trafficking in foreign currency. The latter charge appears to have stemmed from the use of church funds to exchange U.S. currency for Cuban pesos, in violation of the law. The accused were tried and some were sentenced to long prison terms. The resulting scarcity of clergy obliged the Western Baptists to scale down their work. Never before in the history of Cuba had so many clergy been imprisoned for long periods of time.²²

THE REORGANIZATION OF CUBAN PROTESTANTISM, 1961-1968

In the course of the 1960s, church activities were reduced to a minimum. While worship services were still tolerated, many Protestant church buildings closed, due either to low attendance or poor physical condition, aggravated by hard-to-obtain government permits for repair projects. The number of churchgoers also decreased, although not to the same extent as in the Catholic Church.

On the positive side, the decade saw the total “Cubanization” of Cuban Protestantism. At the time of the Revolution, only the Presbyterian Church and the Quaker Society were run completely by Cubans. Other churches had national leadership structures but remained dependent on foreign counterparts for both staff and funding. U.S. missionaries had played a decisive role, particularly in the Methodist Church and in the Episco-

pal (Anglican) Church. The Pentecostal Church, with high numbers of parishioners in rural areas, had briefly been directed by Ezequiel Alvarez, a Cuban, but in 1959 it was led by a Puerto Rican, Ramón Nieves, and the directors of its Bible Institute were theologians from the United States.

With the departure of hundreds of U.S. missionaries, the direct U.S. influence on Cuban Protestantism disappeared. Fraternal relations between churches continued, however, and there was still economic assistance for specific projects, subject to the laws of both countries. By 1965 there were only two U.S. missionary women left. A few Canadian Protestant missionaries also continued working, after a brief interruption, at the Salem Orphanage in Santa Clara. This Canadian property was not confiscated, and it became a bible school affiliated with the *Los Pinos Nuevos* Seminary in Placetas.

In 1961, Dr. Romualdo González Agüeros, a Cuban citizen born in Spain, was named Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and his successors have all been native Cubans. Until 1967, the Cuban Methodist Conference was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Florida, and Dr. Ángel Fuster was named his representative in Cuba. In 1967, the Methodist Church in Cuba gained full autonomy and Armando Rodríguez Borges was installed as its bishop. In the same year, the Presbyterian Church became completely independent of its mother church in the United States, and adopted the name Reformed Presbyterian Church. By 1960, U.S. supervisors had left the Baptist missions of eastern Cuba, while the missions in western Cuba gained full autonomy in 1965. All 54 Protestant denominations or movements working in Cuba were left in Cuban hands. At the same time, almost every U.S. denomination tried to maintain contact with its sister church in Cuba with visits and economic aid, which frequently was channeled through international Protestant institutions.

AFRO-CUBAN RELIGION, SPIRITISM, AND OFFICIAL CULTURE

Syncretic religiosity, particularly in its most deeply-rooted popular expression, i.e. *Santería* and other Afro-Cuban religions, has been a very important element of religion in Cuba, as have spiritist beliefs. At the end of the 1980s, 55 to 60 percent of the population believed and/or practiced at least some elements of this religious tradition.²³

For centuries Cuba has had an enormous population with African roots, a high degree of racial mixing, and strong African cultural influence, particularly since the nineteenth century. However,

at the time of the Castro revolution, most followers of Afro-Cuban religions did not publicly identify themselves as such. As the influence of the upper class disappeared and many affiliated with the traditional churches left the country, Afro-Cuban religions began to fill the vacuum.

Despite initial attempts to discourage beliefs and practices as mere superstitions, the Afro-Cuban religions have not encountered the same kind of problems as the Christian churches. Since the syncretic religions have never relied on a strict organizational structure and never had many international connections, their expression was always less politically threatening. The government ultimately embraced them as both an important element of the national culture and a means of ideologically penetrating that segment of the population.

Afro-Cuban religions have not encountered the same kind of problems as the Christian churches.

In the seventies Cuba established special relationships with African countries and encouraged visits from tribal kings and religious leaders, or “babalawos.” The leader of the Yorubas, Oba Okundadade Sijuwade Olubuse II, was received by Castro and other members of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party.

There has been intense speculation that many high officials of the government and the party may hold Afro-Cuban beliefs, and may even be active practitioners. There is some anecdotal evidence to that effect.

Spiritism has been present in Cuba since the 1850s, when the writings of French philosopher Allan Kardec began to circulate on the island. In Cuba there has been a certain interplay among spiritism, the Afro-Cuban religions, and Catholicism. Historically there have been three principal forms of spiritism. “Scientific,” or *mesa* spiritism is closest to the original European form. *Cordón* Spiritism includes Afro-Cuban elements, and *Cruzao* is a mixture of *Cordón* Spiritism and the *Regla de Conga* religion. Politically, Spiritism has never been viewed as a significant concern. In fact, in 1960 the Cuban delegates to the Fifth Pan-American Spiritist Congress declared their support for the Revolution in the name of the new Cuban National Spiritist Confederation (dissolved in 1963).

Twelve Spiritist centers inscribed in the National Register of Associations were functioning in the country in 1987. They had their greatest influence in Havana and the eastern provinces like Holguín

and Granma. Although these centers only registered 4,041 official members, it is believed that there are in fact tens of thousands of Spiritists, and that an even greater number of people are influenced by Spiritism to some degree.²⁴

TOWARDS A MODUS VIVENDI WITH CATHOLICISM, 1969-1978

Incremental changes hinting at an improvement of relations between the Catholic Church and the government began appearing in 1969. Ironically, that was the year that saw the cancellation of the Christmas holiday due to the failure to reach the much-heralded goal of a ten-million-ton sugar harvest.

The activities of the acting papal nuncio, Cessare Zacchi, contributed to a lessening of tensions between the Vatican and the government. Zacchi urged Cuban Catholics to participate in the revolutionary process and cultivated a cordial relationship with Fidel Castro. The Catholic bishops at the time also adopted a more patient and flexible policy than their predecessors.

The Second Conference of Latin American Bishops, held in Medellín, Colombia, signaled a new direction for Latin American Catholicism. The Cuban Church had felt the impact of the Second Vatican Council with changes in the liturgy and a new openness to ecumenism, but the Bishops in Medellín also expressed the desire to improve relations with movements for social change. On April 10, 1969, the Cuban Church issued a statement very different from the pastoral letters of 1960. This time it condemned not Cuban government policies, but “the unjust blockade that only increases unnecessary suffering and makes attempts at development more difficult.” With this, the Church began a process that some refer to as “the pastoral letters of peace,” in which it sought to establish a relationship with the new Cuban reality. Also at this time, Monsignor Evelio Díaz was replaced in the Archdiocese of Havana by Francisco Oves. This change ended a clearly defined period in the history of the Cuban hierarchy, and those subsequently appointed to high positions were not generally confrontational toward the government. It was clear by 1962 that the government was putting limitations on Catholic Action lay organizations intended to propagate the faith. Catholic Action itself was formally dissolved in 1967 and replaced by the Organized Secular Apostolate (OSA), which integrated lay representatives into the Episcopal Commissions and into parish and diocesan Councils and Commissions. While Catho-

lic Action had always tried to influence society as a whole, the OSA was limited to purely religious activities.

Starting in 1961, the work of *El Buen Pastor* Seminary of the Havana archdiocese, the main Catholic theology school in the country, encountered difficulties. In March 1966, the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces asked, through the Papal Nunciature, to purchase the seminary’s land and buildings for military use. A joint church-government commission set a price and the government committed itself to renovate any other church building chosen by the Church for education of the clergy. Theological instruction was eventually resumed in what had once been the palace of the cardinal in Havana, and which had most recently housed the historic Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio. The new archdiocesan seminary now took that name as well. The smaller Seminary of San Basilio also continued functioning in Santiago de Cuba.²⁷

THREE OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS ON RELIGION IN THE 1970s

The Cuban Government published three documents concerning religion in 1971 and 1976. The first, in 1971, was the *Report of the National Congress on Education and Culture*. The second was a resolution of the December 1975 First Communist Party Congress titled *On Policy Towards Religion, the Church, and Believers*. The third and most important was the Socialist Constitution approved in 1976.

The National Congress on Education and Culture set as policy the absolute separation of Church and State and the determination to neither promote nor assist religious groups in any way, nor to ask anything from them.

The resolution of the First Communist Party Congress established freedom of religious belief, but this differed greatly from religious freedom as understood in most countries. Religion was defined as an “ideology.” The 1976 Constitution institutionalized the indisputable leadership of the Communist Party, and in Article 54, official policy towards religion:

The Socialist State, which bases its activities on and educates the people within the materialist conception of the universe, recognizes and guarantees freedom of conscience, the right of each person to express any religious belief and to practice the religion of his or her choice, within the limits of the law. The law shall regulate the activities of religious institutions.

It is an illegal and punishable offense to oppose one's faith or religious belief to the Revolution, to education, to the fulfillment of one's duty to work, to defend the country with arms, to show reverence for its symbols and to fulfill one's other duties as established by the Constitution.

The three documents described above generally followed the lines set out in the regulations of other socialist parties and states. In one fundamental regard, they provided less protection than that provided by Poland and the German Democratic Republic. They do not establish, even symbolically as do some other socialist constitutions, the illegality of religious discrimination in the workplace.²⁸

TOWARDS RELAXATION: 1979-1992

Various authors have proposed different dates to mark the beginning of a kind of relaxation between Church and State. The greatest tensions arose between 1961 and 1965. Subsequently, though, many reluctantly came to accept the new socio-political reality. The diplomats at the papal nunciature—Cesare Zacchi, Mario Tagliaferri, Giuseppe Laigueglia, Giulio Einaudi, and Beniamino Stella—worked for the gradual normalization of relations with the government. The Cuban ambassadors to the Vatican—Luis Amado Blanco, a Catholic, and José Antonio Portuondo, a Marxist—did not contribute greatly to the process. Hopes for better relations were lifted by the 1974 visit to Cuba of Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, then the Church's Secretary of Public Affairs, but in fact the visit more accurately signaled closer ties between Rome and the Cuban bishops.

As the 1980s approached, objective conditions in the region were also changing. Liberation theology, which viewed revolutionary movements in Latin America approvingly, gained strength in the region. (This theological position did not, however, gain many adherents among Cuban Catholics outside of the seminaries and other intellectual circles.) Well-known priests associated with or joined revolutionary movements. Movements such as Christians for Socialism and Priests for Socialism were formed. In addition, the growing Latin American Protestant movement, while still predominantly conservative, now included an intellectual left which was well funded by the international Protestant left. Castro's 1971 visit to Catholic Chile and 1977 visit to Protestant Jamaica served to establish links with religious constituencies that also supported his revolutionary position.²⁹

Several visits to Cuba by foreign religious leaders

also contributed to the creation of a new environment. In 1978, *El Diálogo*, the first big meeting between the government and a segment of the exile community, attracted several exiled Protestant pastors and Catholic priests. The result was a considerable increase in visits of exiled believers and religious leaders.

The result was a considerable increase in visits of exiled believers and religious leaders.

Monsignor Jean Vilnet, the Archbishop of Lille, France, visited Cuba in 1984 as part of a French Church delegation delivering funds to the Cuban government to be used in social programs. Rev. Jesse Jackson, the U.S. Baptist minister, civil rights leader, and candidate for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, also visited in 1984. His visit had major repercussions, as Fidel Castro accompanied Jackson to an ecumenical service at the University Methodist Church. Castro's presence at the service, which was nationally broadcast, was a great surprise to a population accustomed to his policy of strict secularism. His participation in the religious ceremony and his use of the pulpit as a public platform gave believers in various cities and towns the courage to respectfully challenge local authorities to recognize their rights as a legitimate part of society.

Two years later, in 1986, Castro authorized the publication and distribution of a book, *Fidel and Religion*, comprising interviews granted to Frei Betto, a Brazilian Catholic liberation theologian. As a result of certain statements favorable to the participation of Christians in the revolutionary process, policies toward religion began becoming more flexible.

In the same year, Cuban Catholics held the National Cuban Church Meeting (*ENEC, Encuentro Nacional Eclesial Cubano*) in Havana, the culmination of a series of preparatory activities intended to prompt reflection on the situation of the Church. Among the topics discussed by the hundreds of delegates was the dialogue between the Church and the government. The meeting received light coverage in the Cuban media.

On April 2, 1990, Fidel Castro and several other officials, including José Carneado, the official in charge of religious affairs, met with 75 Cuban Protestant leaders. The five-hour meeting was broadcast nationally. Along with Rev. Jackson's visit, it was one of the only times that images of Fidel Castro participating in a religious activity had been so widely distributed, generating many com-

ments on a possible change in policy or strategy. At the meeting, Castro criticized “the atheism found in imported materials,” acknowledged serious problems in relations with the religious community, and promised government action to improve them.

The meeting was attended by members of the Cuban Ecumenical Council (formerly the Cuban Council of Evangelical Churches), in which various Protestant denominations participated. The Council had begun a dialogue with the government years before, but was viewed with suspicion by a number of Protestant denominations as overly compromising and acquiescent. The Council’s new leadership, particularly Baptist Rev. Raúl Suárez, introduced a more aggressive policy, cautiously demanding new government concessions concerning Church activities. Suárez directed the Council from 1983-1991, first as executive secretary, and later as president, sharing responsibilities with Presbyterian Rev. Orestes González.

Most Cuban Protestants, not necessarily government supporters, decided to try to improve their situation by pursuing rapprochement, and came away with concrete gains, including improved distribution of the Bible, which along with Betto’s *Fidel and Religion* became the nation’s best-selling title. Protestant pastors in Cuba were also permitted to travel abroad more frequently.

Despite the expectations of many Cubans at the time of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, reforms were very limited. Still, the ideological climate relaxed considerably, especially with the disappearance of the Socialist Bloc in 1989-1990.

Despite the expectations of many Cubans at the time of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, reforms were very limited.

The Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party was held October 10-14, 1991, and its resolutions reflected this relaxation. The “Resolution on the By-Laws” of the party included the following point: “To eliminate from the process of party growth any interpretation of the existing by-laws that would deny a vanguard revolutionary admission to the party because of his or her religious beliefs.” The process continued with changes to the 1976 Constitution by the National Peoples Power Assembly. For example, Article 8 was to say, “The State recognizes, respects, and guarantees religious freedom. In the Republic of Cuba religious institutions are separate from the State. All beliefs and religions enjoy equal treatment.” Articles 42 and 55 proscribed religious discrimination. In addition,

new legislation regulating State relations with religious institutions was announced. The state was again described as secular, as it had been from 1902-1959, and atheism was no longer official. Nonetheless, the so-called “scientific conception” of materialism continued to be taught in the schools, and religious freedoms, while now considered a part of the law, were not totally and unconditionally applied.

TOWARD THE VISIT OF POPE JOHN PAUL II, 1992-1998

On September 8, 1993, the Cuban Conference of Bishops published a long document analyzing the national situation, the dialogue with the exile community, the deterioration of morality, and other matters. *Love Hopes for All*, as it was titled, called for a national dialogue, again condemned the embargo, and supported an amnesty. Intense polemics ensued, in which government newspapers and officials rejected significant parts of the document.

The Church spoke up again in 1994 in response to the new exodus of *balseros*, regretting not only the emigration but also the conditions that provoked it. The Church also criticized the government’s sinking of the tugboat *Trece de Marzo*, in which many Cubans attempting to leave the island lost their lives, and the shutdown of two small planes flown by the group Brothers to the Rescue on February 24, 1996, resulting in the death of four Cuban-Americans.

Despite these problems, Jaime Ortega Alamino, appointed Archbishop of Havana in 1981 and elevated to Cardinal in November 1994, made a controversial visit to Miami. The Cuban government’s view of Ortega improved after he made some cautious statements in Miami which were not well received by many in the exile community. The Church also made a conciliatory gesture to the government in sending Father José Conrado Rodríguez, a Catholic priest in Palma Soriano who had been openly critical of the Cuban government, to study in Spain. The Catholic Church’s opposition to the embargo also contributed to a more favorable climate for church-state relations.

According to Catholic author Raúl Gomez Treto, when Pope John Paul II traveled to Mexico in 1979 for the third CELAM conference in Puebla, Fidel Castro visited the papal nuncio in Havana and offered “the hospitality of the Cuban government and people if His Holiness wished to visit, rest, or stop for refueling in our country.”³¹ A series of complications prevented that stop, but a papal visit

to Miami in the eighties improved the Pope's position in Castro's eyes when he did not lend any rhetorical support to the Cuban exile community and their cause.

On November 19, 1996, Fidel Castro visited the Holy See and met with John Paul II in the Vatican library. They apparently sealed an agreement for the Papal visit during that conversation. Soon a joint commission of Church and Communist Party representatives were working on detailed preparations.

The Catholic Church's opposition to the embargo also contributed to a more favorable climate for church-state relations.

On December 14, 1997, the Cuban government authorized the celebration of Christmas, which was temporarily restored to the status of an official holiday. In 1998, after the Pope's visit, the change was made permanent, as Catholics, Protestants, and practitioners of syncretic religions had requested for many years.

John Paul II arrived in Havana on January 21, 1998, was received by Fidel Castro, and was accorded the full honors due a head of state. In his welcoming speech, Castro criticized the Spanish Church and Crown for their colonization of the island and compared it to perceived current U.S. hostility toward the island.

The Pontiff's most important words were these: "May Cuba, with its magnificent potential, open itself to the world, and may the world open to Cuba, so that this people, which like every person and every nation seeks truth, works for progress, and yearns for peace and harmony, can look to the future with hope."

In the four days of the Pope's visit, the Cuban people poured out in multitudes to receive him. Castro himself had asked for this massive attendance in a speech just hours before the trip, and asked that respect be paid to the Pope's message, despite differences of opinion. He also identified John Paul II as a tactical ally on certain matters, such as the struggle against neoliberalism.

The appearances and speeches were transmitted to Cuba and the world on national and international television, and came off without incident. Hundreds of thousands attended the mass in Havana and at least a 100,000 in each of the other cities.

In each, the Pontiff was greeted with a brief address by the local bishop. The most dramatic of these was given by Archbishop Pedro Meurice Estiú

in Santiago de Cuba, before a crowd that included Raúl Castro. "A growing number of Cubans," he said, "have confused the fatherland with a party, the nation with the historical process we've experienced in the last few decades, and our culture with an ideology."

On January 25, 1998, in the Plaza of the Revolution, the Pontiff spoke to a crowd comparable to the multitudes that had gathered there in the early days of the Revolution. Fidel Castro was present, accompanied by leading figures of the government and the party. An enormous mural of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had been erected for the event. The pope didn't refer specifically to Marxism, but did criticize "capitalist neoliberalism."

During his time in the capital, he had a second meeting with Fidel Castro and was able to achieve the release of a number of prisoners. He also visited the University of Havana, where he spoke in honor of Father Félix Varela, an early Cuban patriot who helped advance the concept of a distinct Cuban nationality during the Spanish colonial era. In addition, the Pope also received a delegation of Protestant and Jewish leaders at the Nunciature. On Sunday, January 25, he was seen off by Castro, with various high-level government officials, and many members of the Cuban clergy, departing with a large number of bishops and cardinals, primarily from Latin America, who had traveled to Cuba for the occasion.

RELIGION IN CUBA TODAY

The four decades of the revolutionary process led by Fidel Castro have had a profound effect on the religious environment. Cuba is no longer a country with an absolute majority of Catholic believers. While none of the estimates are scientifically reliable, roughly 30 to 40 percent of Cubans consider themselves Catholic. Even this percentage is misleading, however, since it is based on the number of people who have been baptized, including members of the older generation who were almost universally baptized but have completely left the faith. The syncretic religions may have the most adherents, perhaps 55 to 60 percent of the population, though estimates are made difficult by the abundance of groups and traditions within this category, including *Abakúa*, *Yoruba*, *Regla Conga*, *Regla Ocha*, *Regla Arará*, *Regla Arada*, and *Yebbe*, and their decentralized structure. It should also be noted that this figure includes people who have taken specific beliefs, practices, and influences from these religions but are not particularly active believers. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of

Cubans consider themselves both *santeros* and Catholics simultaneously. Spiritism has also survived these forty years but without the impressive growth of other religions.

Most of the Protestant churches offer membership figures for congregations and parishes, but the total number of adherents is considerably greater than those figures indicate, since many individuals attend church while engaged in a long process leading to full membership. Perhaps 300,000 to 500,000 people, or less than five percent of the population, attend Protestant services with any regularity. Although fewer in number than nominal Catholics or *Santeros*, they are characterized as a group by more regular and dedicated religious observance. In many towns the total number of Protestants of all denominations who attend church on weekends is greater than the number of Catholics, although that is not the case in Havana or other large cities. The largest number of Cuban religious believers practice *Santería*, the second largest group practices Catholicism, and the third largest group practices Protestantism. However, Catholicism continues to define the national culture.

The Catholic Church has also grown institutionally, creating new dioceses such as Guantánamo-Baracoa, Bayamo-Manzanillo, Santa Clara, and Holguín, none of which existed in 1959. There are 14 bishops and auxiliary bishops, of whom one is a cardinal, only the second in Cuban history. There are 147 diocesan priests, 108 of them Cubans, and 134 other priests, of whom 37 are Cubans. Of the 281 total priests, 51 percent are Cuban. There are 52 female and 21 male religious orders. The female orders are particularly prominent, and have been widely praised for their admirable service to the aged and to the hospitals, even by Castro and even in the most difficult days for religion in Cuba. Small numbers of foreign Catholic missionaries are admitted to the country. Protestants and other religions do not enjoy this right. The Catholic Church owns 811 church buildings, 688 “active” and 123 occupied by the State. There are 253 functioning parishes. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, neither Catholic nor Protestant, have 85,000 active members. That figure does not include thousands of children or the many individuals who participate in home-based bible study but are not yet full members. After decades of illegality, the government has become relatively tolerant and has begun to allow them various kinds of home meetings. Surprisingly, groups inclined to Islam, to Buddhism, and to various kinds of “New Age” and esoteric beliefs have formed. It’s hard for many groups to

last long without the express legal authorization of the Registry of Associations, which for some is almost out of the question. Cuba is the only country in the Americas without Mormons.

The Office of Religious Affairs has been elevated to a body within the Central Committee, of which its current director, Caridad Diego Bello, is a member. Diego improved the Office’s administrative efficiency during the 1990s. She makes regular visits to the various ecclesiastical jurisdictions and maintains frequent contact with the regions, having convened many meetings and stimulated dialogue in the provinces. Subordinate officials attend to the affairs of the different religions, but matters of greater importance are always brought to the attention of Diego.

The Protestant community is faced with a space problem.

The Protestant community is faced with a space problem. Although for 40 years no permits have been given for the construction of new church buildings, their services attract many more parishioners than in 1959, forcing them to hold multiple services to accommodate all who wish to attend. There are between 850 and 1000 Protestant churches and chapels. The 54 denominations have more than 1,000 ordained pastors and a much greater number of full and part-time lay workers. The largest denomination is the Baptists, who are divided into four groups: Western, Eastern, Free, and “Brotherhood.” Next are the Pentecostals, whose largest group is the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, also known as the Assemblies of God. Then come the Seventh-day Adventists, the Methodists, who have seen a phenomenal resurgence in the last decade, and the *Los Pinos Nuevos* Evangelical Convention, a native Cuban denomination. The Reformed Presbyterian Church is smaller than these but is growing appreciably. The Episcopal Church is also growing but more slowly. Denominations that have been historically small in Cuba are also experiencing varying rates of growth, including the Evangelical League, the Apostolic Church, the Churches of God, the Churches of Christ, the Church of the Nazarene, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and others. Gideon’s Band, or the “Soldiers of the Cross” has had a resurgence after suffering from the harsh restrictions of the 60s and 70s. They have even been able to maintain an old-age home in Colón.

The Protestants have come up with a new system to manage their growth; they meet regularly in no

less than 3,000 homes, called *casas culto*, particularly in areas where there are no established churches. The Catholic Church has also established 560 of their own *casas de misión*, i.e. private homes used for group worship.

Figures provided by the Cuban Conference of Bishops for 1996 showed 75,005 Catholic baptisms, 9,139 first communions, 4,674 confirmations, and 1,513 religious weddings. Protestants reported comparable figures, though the number of Protestant baptisms is lower, since many denominations do not baptize small children for theological reasons. About 500 Jewish families follow their traditional religious practices, which is far fewer than the number of Catholics and Protestants but does represent a significant increase over past decades.

Official policy has had its ups and downs. The *casas culto* have frequently been closed down, although most believers ultimately find ways to gather in other neighborhoods or homes. In recent years, the number of Catholic publications has exceeded 30. The most widely distributed is the single-sheet *Vida Cristiana*, 85,000 copies of which are distributed at mass in parishes throughout the island. The diocese of Havana distributes 8,000 copies of *Palabra Nueva*. *Vitral* of Pinar del Río has won international recognition and is considered the most independent Catholic publication. A Catholic priest, Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, has published several books, albeit primarily outside Cuba. The Protestant churches also produce publications that are circulated among parishioners, for example *Heraldo Cristiano*, of the Presbyterians, and *La Voz Bautista* of the Baptists. Protestant theologians have been able to publish much of their work thanks to an ecumenical press in Matanzas as well as relationships with Protestant publishers abroad. It remains somewhat difficult to import quantities of religious literature, but much less so than before 1992.

The churches clearly want to increase their social space, particularly the Catholic Church, whose social programs like Caritas have the relative advantage of the Nunciature, which exerts a diplomatic influence that other faiths lack. Other churches, however, have been able to support small social welfare programs and like the Catholics, maintain old-age homes and social projects around the country. In addition to the assistance that comes through formal denominational channels, material contributions are facilitated by frequent trips abroad by members of the clergy and by contacts with churches in the exile community.

Every so often, Cardinal Ortega is permitted to present a brief sermon on radio or television, and

the Council of Churches does so monthly on the Havana music station CMBF. Nevertheless, access to the media remains very limited except to express support of some official measure, to denounce the embargo, to announce the attendance of a high official at a religious service, to report on a statement by the government, or to welcome a solidarity group, like the Pastors for Peace, a U.S.-based ecumenical movement that breaks the embargo to bring material and religious aid to Cuba.

The presence of three Protestant pastors and a few lay Catholics in the National Peoples Power Assembly has received an extraordinary amount of attention in the Cuban media. The Assembly is composed of about 600 representatives. The reality is that the only opening that the government has made until now has been in the area of religion. It is in this area that the government has found new and useful international friends after the collapse of the socialist bloc.

General academic publications such as *Temas* are distributed internationally and occasionally feature news of social science studies about religion in Cuba, and some believers can be found among university students and faculty. In 1983, the Department of Socio-Religious Studies (DESR) was established within the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS).

Until recently, university programs in Philosophy, History, Political Science, Journalism, and related fields were closed to believers, with the exception of proven revolutionary militants, and even they were not easily admitted. There has been some improvement in this situation, but not to the complete satisfaction of the religious community. A course in the history of religion is offered at the University of Havana and professorial positions have been created for the study of Afro-Cuban religions, but no school of theology has been established in any of the country's many universities. A Superior Institute of Biblical and Theological Studies was formed recently in Havana, independent of the official educational system. It receives no resources from the State and offers an ecumenical program to potential religious leaders.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Since official policy has changed on more than one occasion, we should examine some past events that could help us to see what the future may bring. The Papal visit in January 1998 was undeniably a historic event, but its principal impact may have been only to highlight the Catholic Church's position against the embargo and to give religion in

general greater visibility.

Between May 22 and June 20, 1999, a number of public gatherings were held with government authorization by the Protestant churches. This "Cuban Evangelical Celebration" was an official gesture of evenhandedness towards the Protestants in the wake of the opportunities granted to Catholics at the time of the 1998 Papal visit. That visit had broken with a policy of almost forty years duration that had kept all religious practices inside the church walls. Large Protestant events were held in many provincial capitals and other cities. The Cuban Council of Churches, largely composed of religious leaders committed to the Revolution, played a leading role in the Celebration, but other groups were allowed to participate as well. Some of the major denominations, particularly the Western Baptist Convention, stayed on the sidelines, at least on the national level, for fear that the government would politicize the worship services. Their members did, however, participate in some local gatherings. Tens of thousands of people gathered in cities as far removed as Baracoa, a stronghold of the Baptists. Hundreds of thousands of believers gathered in all, and worship services were broadcast live on national radio and television from Baracoa, Camagüey, and Santa Clara. A large part of the Protestant community withheld support from the final service in Havana, which attracted only roughly 100,000 people. Many left the scene when the Rev. Joan Campbell Brown of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and the Rev. Lucius Walker of Pastors for Peace addressed the crowd in support of the Revolution. The president of the Cuban Council of Churches and the vicar-general of the Episcopal Church of Cuba, Pablo Odén Marichal, also preached at the service.

WHAT LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNED?

We know now that the government can be flexible enough to permit large gatherings, albeit under a certain degree of control, but that such permission requires that the events at some point include explicit statements of unity with the revolutionary process or condemnations of the U.S. embargo.

Despite the well-known impediments, there is a clear tendency towards an increasing role for religion in Cuban life, although the change may be gradual and subject to the inevitably uneven course of history.

Political tensions are manifested in the Protestant community by the existence of groups which either

support or criticize the Council of Churches. Among Catholics one can contrast the dissident positions expressed in their modest publications with the generally more conciliatory approach of the hierarchy, among whom different shades of opinion may also be discerned. Tensions are similarly evident among the many believers in the Afro-Cuban religions.

What kind of religiosity will we find in Cuba in the first decades of the new century? Cuba will almost certainly continue to be a traditionally Catholic country, albeit with a syncretic majority and growing conservative Protestant influence, particularly outside the largest cities. All things considered, the salient phenomenon will be the persistence of religiosity in Cuba.

NOTES

1. General Batista was not the only Cuban president with a long-standing Protestant connection. Tomás Estrada Palma, the first Cuban president (1902-1906), was a school principal in the Quaker village of Central Valley, New York, during his exile. During his presidential term in office, he regularly attended Protestant churches in Havana, and he presided over the Cuban YMCA. The particulars concerning Batista are taken from *Mis relaciones con el Presidente Batista*, by Roberto Fernández Miranda, pre-publication manuscript, 1998: p 17
2. *Between God and the Party*, John M. Kirk, University of South Florida Press, Tampa: 1989, pp 45-46. This data is excerpted from the *Encuesta nacional sobre el sentimiento religioso del pueblo de Cuba*, conducted by the Agrupación Católica Universitaria in 1954.
3. *Panorama del Protestantismo en Cuba*, Marcos Antonio Ramos, Editorial Caribe, Miami-San José: 1986, pp 635-640
4. *Ibid.*
5. "La Iglesia Católica en la República," Juan Emilio Friguls, *Diario de la Marina*, Havana, September 15, 1957.
6. *Protestant Missions in Latin America: A Statistical Survey*, Clyde W. Taylor & Wade T. Coggins, editors, Evangelical Foreign Mission Association, Washington: 1961, pp 107-113
7. Marcos Antonio Ramos, op. cit., pp 487-507
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Religión y Revolución en Cuba*, Manuel Fernández, Saeta Ediciones, Miami-Caracas: 1984, pp 41-42
10. Marcos Antonio Ramos, op. cit., pp 517-523
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *La Iglesia Católica durante la construcción del socialismo en Cuba*, Raúl Gómez Treto, Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones, San José: 1987, pp 27-30
14. Raúl Gómez Treto, op. cit., p 46
15. A lot of material relevant to this situation is found in the works cited by Raúl Gómez Treto, Manuel Fernández, John M. Kirk, and Marcos Antonio Ramos, among others. Additional information is found in *Protestantism and Revolution in Cuba*, by Marcos Antonio Ramos, University of Miami, Coral Gables: 1989.
16. Marcos Antonio Ramos, op. cit., pp 526-572
17. John M. Kirk, op. cit., pp 102-105
18. *Ibid.* pp 110-112

19. *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, Robert M. Levine, University of Florida, Gainesville: 1993, pp 251-255

20. *La Lucha Ideológica contra las Sectas Religiosas*, in *Cuba Socialista*, Vol. III No. 22, June, 1963, Blas Roca, pp 28-41

21. *Friends in Cuba*, Hiram Hilty, Friends United press, Richmond: 1977, Chapter 12.

22. Marcos Antonio Ramos, op. cit., pp 532-533

23. This figure is based on studies by Jacobo Guiribitey, coordinator of CEHILA, Comisión de Historia de la Iglesia en Latinoamérica, and director of *Heraldo Cristiano* in Havana. A detailed description of current syncretic groups and practices can be found in the book *Cuba Santa*, Román Orozco and Natalia Bolívar, El País/Aguilar, Madrid: 1988.

24. *Los llamados cultos sincréticos*, Aníbal Argüelles, Editorial Academia, Havana: 1991, pp 184-192.

25. *Ibid.*, pp 74-75

26. *Ibid.*, pp 59-61

27. Manuel Fernández, op. cit., pp 139-151

28. Many sources describe the period of relaxation. Among them are the works of Manuel Fernández, Raúl Gómez Treto, John M. Kirk, and Marcos Antonio Ramos. More recent contributions are found in *Cuba Santa*, by Román Orozco and Natalia Bolívar and in *Y Dios entró en La Habana*, by Manuel

Vázquez Montalbán, El País/Aguilar, Madrid: 1998.

29. Raúl Gómez Treto, op. cit., pp 111-113

30. The events of recent years in Cuba have been described in the works cited above, among others. They have also been the subject of a number of articles and other works published by Dr. María Cristina Herrera, journalist Pablo Alfonso, and Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, as well as by the author of this paper, Marcos Antonio Ramos, and by others. Of course the contribution of the international press must be acknowledged, especially concerning matters such as the papal visit, the religious opening, and the repression. The Cuban religious publications I have mentioned are very informative, as is the new theological publication *Caminos*, from the Martin Luther King Center in Havana. As regards religion and human rights in Cuba, it's important to recognize the contributions of Dr. Juan Clark, author of *Religious Repression in Cuba*, Institute of Interamerican Studies, Miami: 1985. This book documents in great detail the ideological discrimination which has been imposed upon believers and particularly upon activists of the various churches. *Historia Eclesiástica de Cuba*, by Monsignor Ismael Teste, Imprenta el Monte Carmelo, Burgos: 1969-1975, is indispensable. It was published in Spain in several volumes.

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