

MIXING OIL WITH WATER

Cuba, the Cuban Persecuted Church, and Cuban Liberation Theology

A White Paper

By

Evangelical Christian Humanitarian Outreach for Cuba, Inc.

“We will find our greatest success to the extent that we inculcate Marxism as a kind of religion. Religious men and women are easy to convert and win, and so will easily accept our thinking if we wrap it up in a kind of religious terminology.” –Lenin



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Why don't water and oil mix together? The interactions between the oil and water molecules are not strong, the oil can't hydrogen bond as it is non-polar and water can't form strong London forces to the oil; it has a different polarizability. Water molecules have strong bonds with one another, called "hydrogen bonds." This consists of an extraordinarily strong attraction that the hydrogens of one H₂O have for oxygens of nearby H₂O molecules. Oil molecules also have very strong bonds with one another, but not hydrogen bonds. Oil molecules are bonded to one another by what are called "London forces," or sometimes "dispersion forces." Basically the large oil molecules tend to clump together because of these forces. They just can't mix together.

Likewise, Cuban Liberation Theology does not mix with our traditional Christian beliefs. The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus, as the Messiah, was anointed by God as savior of humanity, and hold that Jesus' coming was the fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The core Christian belief is that through belief in and acceptance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, sinful humans can be reconciled to God and thereby are offered salvation and the promise of eternal life. Christians generally believe that Jesus is God incarnate and "true God and true man" (or both fully divine and fully human). Jesus, having become fully human, suffered the pains and temptations of a mortal man, but did not sin. As fully God, he rose to life again. According to the Bible, "God raised him from the dead," he ascended to heaven, is "seated at the right hand of the Father" and will ultimately return^[Acts 1:9-11] to fulfill the rest of Messianic prophecy such as the Resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment and final establishment of the Kingdom of God. Cuban Liberation Theology disputes the traditional Christian belief regarding the nature of Jesus.

Liberation Theologians claim to be "Christians", but their theological differences are not easy to detect. For example, it emphasizes the Christian mission to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, particularly through political activism. Its theologians consider sin the root source of poverty, recognizing sin as capitalism, and capitalism as class war by the rich against the poor. Liberation Theologians use political theory, primarily Marxism, to help understand how to combat poverty. It is often cited as a form of Christian socialism, and it has enjoyed widespread influence in Latin America. Liberation theologians base their social action upon the Bible scriptures describing the mission of Jesus, the Christ, as but bringing a sword (social unrest), e.g. Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 10:34, Luke 22:35-38 Matthew 26:51-52 — and *not* as bringing peace (social order). This Biblical interpretation is a call to *action* against poverty, and the sin engendering it, and as a call to arms, to effect Jesus Christ's mission of justice in this world. In practice, the Theology includes the Marxist concept of perpetual class struggle, thus emphasizing the person's individual self-actualization as part of God's divine purpose for mankind.

This White Paper has been written primarily to alert Christians to the subtle but dangerous differences between our beliefs vs. those of the Cuban Council of Churches and its members.

Cuban Council of Churches

The Cuban Council of Churches (CCC, and also known as the Cuban Ecumenical Council) is a private, officially sanctioned umbrella organization that works closely with the Government and includes 25 religious organizations as full members, 9 associate members, and 3 with observer status. Recently the Greek Orthodox Church and the Pentecostal Church of Sovereign Grace in Cuba became new full members. Three new communities were accepted as fraternal associate members: the Assembly of Christian Churches, the Quadrangular Pentecostal Church, and the Reflection and Solidarity Group Msgr.

Oscar Arnulfo Romero. The Christian New Life Church became an observer member. The CCC is structured into 5 "zones" across the island and, according to the CCC's leadership, represents approximately 100,000 Christians. Most CCC members are officially recognized by the State, although several, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church, lack legal status and are recognized through their membership in the CCC. Other officially recognized groups, including the Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the small Jewish and Muslim communities, do not belong to the CCC.

The Cuban Council of Churches emphasizes that revolutionaries need basic humanist values, and that sometimes people can get these values from their religion. In his book, Fidel says "In our culture, as part of the so-called western world, there are undoubtedly components of Christian values. I think that among those values there are ethical and humane principles that are applicable to any epoch." He added that, "If instead of being born and elaborating his ideas when he did, Christ had been born in these times, you can be sure - or at least I am - that his preaching would not have differed much from the ideas or the preaching that we revolutionaries of today try to bring the world."

The Cuban Council of Churches sees the teachings of Christ in the same spirit as those of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Fidel is quoted¹ in Frei Betto's book as saying: "We have even spoken here of some of the eminent theoreticians of this century who have played a role and whose ideas may have certain validity; but we must bring together the ethical and humane sense of many ideas, some of which emerged in very remote times of man's history: Christ's ideas with the scientifically founded socialist ideas, so just and profoundly humane, of Karl Marx, the ideas of Engels, the ideas of Lenin, the ideas of Martí, the ideas of the European Encyclopedists who preceded the French Revolution and those of the forefathers of the independence of this hemisphere, whose most outstanding symbol was Simón Bolívar, who was capable, two centuries ago, to even dream of a united Latin America..."

In the 1970s leaders of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal denominations played a substantial role in the creation of the new² Cuban Ecumenical Council (now called the Cuban Council of Churches-*Consejo de Iglesias*).

The protestant denominations which make-up the Cuban Council of Churches were the first to accept the regime, and generally support the Revolution. Church leaders share the social goals of many of the Cuban Revolution's programs and generally downplayed the limitations placed on believers as individuals. The Cuban Council of Churches also operates a Protestant Theological Seminary, which eventually adopted a new theology in support of the revolution (the Cuban Liberation Theology). The seminary is located in Matanzas. The Cuban Council of Churches must be categorized as a "quasi-government NGO.

¹ Fidel Castro and Cuban Liberation Theology

Of particular note is Fidel Castro's embrace of religion, which was the subject of a 23 hour dialog he had with Brazilian liberation theologian Frei Betto that was published in 1987 by Ocean Press as "Fidel and Religion". At one point, Castro states that there are "ten thousand more coincidences between Christianity and communism than between Christianity and capitalism." However, theologian Harvey Cox can't help but wondering in the book's introduction whether this is only "a clever gambit by a wily and resourceful politician who knows that he needs to have Christians on his side."

Fidel's dialogue with religion is the result of practical experience in Latin America where a major movement in religion, Liberation Theology, has supported a revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism.

² In 1941, the Cuban Protestant Christian churches formed an ecumenical council to work together on joint initiatives, such as providing aid to the poor and supporting an interfaith seminary at Matanzas. The Protestant Council remained independent until it was taken over by the Castro regime in the early 1960s and then started to use it as a means to control the Protestant churches then operating on the island. Since then, the Cuban Council of Churches has fully identified with the regime and is controlled by Castro supporters, including Christian Marxists and liberationists, several head of the Council are or were members of Castro's rubber-stamp communist national assembly. The Cuban Council of Churches is now the only legal religious body other than the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cuba.

Experts believe that the Cuban Council of Churches represent about 30% of all of Cuba's practicing Protestants. But the largest Protestant denominations in Cuba, such as the eastern and the western Baptists and the Assembly of God conventions, are not part of the Cuban Council of Churches, and remain removed from all political direction, although they are thankful for any government-church improvements. They are however mostly concerned with purely religious matters.

Many of the smaller evangelical and charismatic churches, while often working through the Cuban Council of Churches, generally attempted to remain apolitical, focusing on a primarily spiritual rather than social or political mission. Although these churches cooperated with the government in order to survive, they are better described as neutral than as pro-regime.

In addition to promoting its new theology and supporting the Communist Regime, the Cuban Council of Churches, *Consejo de Iglesias de Cuba*, is authorized to broadcast a weekly radio program, authorizes the importing of all religious literature for all denominations, and has virtual veto power on all religious activities.

The Cuban Council of Churches has been known to effectively "blackball" foreign organizations from shipping humanitarian aid, and in some cases, it has prohibited organizations from working with U.S.-based religious organizations that they deem unacceptable.

It should be noted that due to their "theological bent", many of the churches that make-up the Cuban Council of Churches of Cuba are actually groups of churches (temples) that were formed by pastors who were actually expelled³ from the traditional conventions. These renegade pastors then formed new "conventions". In many cases these conventions use well-known Protestant denominational titles, such as "Baptist", "Presbyterian", etc. This deceptive practice has created much confusion outside of Cuba for organizations that are mostly ignorant of it.

Likewise historical churches such as the Presbyterian and Episcopal denominations lost most of their members following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Those who took over those conventions kept the denominational name and then adopted the new Liberation Theology. This deception has also led to the confusion of U.S. and European religious organizations.

At the same time, it should be noted that most of the grassroots clergy and laity of the denominations that belong to the Cuban Council of Churches are sincere Christians who have been caught in an impossible situation.⁴ Like the Roman Catholics and others who have had to deal with the regime, the overwhelming majorities of these mainline and evangelical Christians are not sympathizers with Castro and the communists, and therefore should not be denied assistance or a role in Cuban religious affairs due to "guilt by association."

Cuban Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is a school of theology within Christianity. It emphasizes the Christian mission to bring justice to the poor and oppressed⁵, particularly through political activism. Its theologians consider

³ Various pastors from well-known historical conventions such as the Cuban Western Baptist Convention (affiliated with the U.S. Southern Baptist Convention), and the Cuban eastern Baptist Convention (affiliated with the U.S. American Baptist Convention) were expelled for their support of a new theology which supported the Cuban Revolution and went on to form the "Fraternity of Baptist Churches", and other similar conventions.

⁴(No member church has been able to leave the Cuban Council of Churches since several Baptist groups did so in the early 1960s.

⁵ Black Liberation Theology: Liberation Theology has moved from the poor peasants in South America to the poor blacks in North America. We now have Black Liberation Theology being preached in the black community. It is the same Marxist,

sin the root source of poverty, recognizing sin as capitalism, and capitalism as class war by the rich against the poor.

Simply put, Liberation Theology is an attempt to interpret Scripture through the plight of the poor. It is largely a humanistic doctrine. It started in South America in the turbulent 1950s when Marxism was making great gains among the poor because of its emphasis on the redistribution of wealth, allowing poor peasants to share in the wealth of the colonial elite and thus upgrade their economic status in life.

Liberation Theology was bolstered in 1968 at the Second Latin American Bishops Conference which met in Medellin, Colombia. The idea was to study the Bible and to fight for social justice in Christian (Catholic) communities. Since the only governmental model for the redistribution of the wealth in a South American country was a Marxist model, the redistribution of wealth to raise the economic standards of the poor in South America took on a definite Marxist flavor. Since those who had money were very reluctant to part with it in any wealth redistribution model, the use of a populist (read poor) revolt was encouraged by those who worked most closely with the poor. As a result, the Liberation Theology model was mired in Marxist dogma and revolutionary causes.

Liberation theologians base their social action upon the Bible scriptures describing the mission of Jesus, the Christ, as but bringing a sword (social unrest), e.g. Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 10:34, Luke 22:35-38 Matthew 26:51-52 — and *not* as bringing peace (social order). This Biblical interpretation is a call to *action* against poverty, and the sin engendering it, and as a call to arms, to effect Jesus Christ's mission of justice in this world. In practice, the Theology includes the Marxist concept of perpetual class struggle, thus emphasizing the person's individual self-actualization as part of God's divine purpose for mankind.

Cuba Liberation Theology in Bullet Points

- Here in part, is why the church in Cuba suffers. Not only has the Marxist religion served to oppress the church, but it gnaws away at the church from the inside like a cancer. A generation of new pastors now praise Marx, Lenin, and Castro as Messiahs.
- Many former church schools now serve as Communist training centers for atheism. Located in Matanzas, the main Protestant seminary in Cuba is supported by the Ecumenical Council. The students come mainly from the Reformed Presbyterian, and Anglican (Episcopalian) churches.
- As quoted from the published “Confession of Faith” of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba, a member of the Ecumenical Council: the church teaches that, when our people chose the Marxist-Leninist way of development through a social-political revolution, a more human relationship with nature has been brought about...Jesus Christ took the side of the oppressedthat “social-political option” took Him, objectively speaking, to the cross. ...The human being is “political” being. ...(We) fulfill ourselves as human beings through concrete historical projects of Redemption...The Revolution has concretely and historically inaugurated a series of values in human relations...The atheist-communists serve as an inspiration to us because of their readiness and willingness to live sacrificial, solidarity and effective love. The church lives in the responsible participation of its members in the Committees of Defense of the Revolution, in the Labor Unions, in the federation of Cuban Women... These Liberation Theology concepts reflect the state approved stand of many church leaders and the kind of indoctrination they receive. The powerful principles of God’s eternal redemption, the miracle of Christ cleansing the inner man, and the inheritance of a heavenly Kingdom are ignored or distorted to form a poor picture of class

revolutionary, humanistic philosophy found in South American Liberation Theology and has no more claim for a scriptural basis than the South American model has. False doctrine is still false, no matter how it is dressed up or what fancy name is attached to it. In the same way that revolutionary fervor was stirred up in South America, Liberation Theology is now trying to stir up revolutionary fervor among blacks in America. If the church in America recognizes the falseness of Black Liberation Theology as the Catholic Church did in the South American model, Black Liberation Theology will suffer the same fate that the South America Liberation Theology did; namely, it will be seen as a false, humanist doctrine dressed up in theological terms.

warfare, political struggle and liberation of the oppressed. The Confession of Faith never mentions eternity, hell, death and Christ as the Way and the Truth. The weight of this absolutism and finality would overshadow their humanistic philosophy. These ultimate truths do not fit into the temporal class-war scheme they try to present.

- “Castro never had an anti-Christian viewpoint.” Promoting Liberation Theology to form a perverted social gospel, he ignores the illustration of Mary and Martha recorded in Luke 10:40-42. Here Jesus emphasizes that spiritual food has priority over physical provision.
- The subtle religious poisoning of Liberation Theology permeates every area of Cuban life. As minister of Religion, Carneado said in Cuba *International*, “The differences of opinion about the existence of heaven and paradise are less important than the immediate and concrete task of socialist construction.” He continually calls for “normalization between believers and unbelievers” and demands that Christians become more “socially responsible.”
- How can atheistic communists and ecumenical pastors work together? The apostle Paul wrote, “When someone becomes a Christian he becomes a brand new person (new man) inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!”⁶ In Liberation Theology these leaders have redefined the “new man.” God’s Word teaches that the “new man” is liberated from sin by the atonement of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. This spiritual cleaning answers the freed and corruption which plagues mankind, both rich and poor. Cuban liberationists shift the focus of this spiritual cleansing. Their “new man” redeems himself through the acts of liberation. Using violence if necessary, these acts stem from Marxist economic theory to bring about an earthly political kingdom of God.
- The Cuban government eagerly embraces this theology. Optimistic observers call this “Cuba’s new attitude toward the church.” In 1984 Fidel Castro boasted, “Liberation Theology is doing more to promote revolutionary change in Latin America than all the millions of books on Marxism.” World Council Secretary Emilio Castro says, “God works through Marxist revolution in order to bring all men together.”
- The apostle Paul saw this coming two thousand years before. “The time will come,” he wrote, “when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”⁷

The Cuban Government & the Cuban Revolution

Cuba remains a hard-line communist state with a poor record on human rights. What drives the Cuban system is total control. The power of the system is in their arbitrariness which influences the people’s behavior at their will. The regime has made repression into a science, knowing how to signal to Cubans that they can be arrested and abused at any time.

Fidel Castro stepped down from power temporarily in July 2006 because of health reasons, and his brother Raúl Castro assumed provisional control of the government until February 2008, when he officially became President. After Raúl Castro officially assumed the presidency, his government announced a series of economic changes that included lifting restrictions on the sale of some electronic consumer products and cell phones. A major reform effort has focused on the agriculture sector in an effort to boost food production. While additional economic changes are likely, there has been disappointment that further reforms have not been forthcoming.

It's not real change. In fact, it has backfired on the regime leaving the Cuban people simply wanting more. Here's the kind of change Cubans have seen. The regime now allows Cubans to purchase cell phones. The only problem is that the average Cuban citizen makes about 17 dollars a month. The average cell phone in

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17 (TLB)

⁷ 2 Timothy 4:3, 4 (NIV).

Cuba costs roughly 64 dollars with activation fees as high as 120 dollars - never mind the monthly contract fee.

Another "change" - Cuban citizens can now stay in hotel rooms that have historically been reserved solely for tourists. The problem is that hotel rooms cost as much as eleven times the average monthly salary. These are not changes. They are sham assurances aimed at hiding the regime's struggle to remain financially solvent.

Arbitrary detentions of pro-democracy activists have increased 5 times over from 325 in 2007 to 1,500 in 2008.

Cuba is currently in the midst of severe economic problems. This situation has existed since the former Soviet Union fell apart. Prior to its demise, the Soviet Union had been giving Cuba billions of dollars per year in aid. In the late 1980s, it amounted to seven billion dollars per year. In 1989, with the fall of the Soviet Union, this help ended overnight. The aid had been allowing Cubans to live a "communist dream," when in reality the economy was in a shambles. Productivity in agriculture and industry was very low, but with the infusion of aid no one cared and probably very few even knew. The result of the loss of Soviet aid was that the standard of living plummeted for almost all Cubans. For several years Cubans had barely enough to keep them alive.

Since the economic crisis in Cuba in 1989, the social situation in the country deteriorated dramatically. The counterproductive planned economy has caused a serious shortage of basic products. The shelves in state-run pesos shops are often empty and the products in the dollar-shops are beyond the reach of the average Cuban.

The health system, once the showpiece of the Cuban regime, is at present not even capable of rendering the basic services. Medical consultations are still free, but there is a serious shortage of medicines to be paid in Cuban pesos and basic medical provisions (such as water, hygienic material and nutritious food) in medical and social institutions. Many Cubans find it a gross injustice that the state-run dollar pharmacies sell a wide range of medicines that are not accessible to them. They are often even denied access to the dollar-pharmacies. Meanwhile, the Cuban State is exporting national medicines to Latin-American countries and owns special well-equipped high tech hospitals for foreigners and the communist elite.

Cuba's Recent History

When Fidel Castro took power in the early days of 1959, there were promises of democracy, free press and elections. But such reforms were ill fated. The Castro brothers, Che Guevara, and those who remained loyal to them soon subverted this.

Violence was ordered from street corners through cries of "peredón" - death by firing squad - and those who opposed the regime or dared criticize anything it did were harassed and tormented. And by the way, little has changed to this day.

After executing Cubans considered "anti-revolutionary," one of the regime's first orders was to expropriate privately owned properties and assets. Months later, the regime took further action by expropriating all foreign-owned lands without compensation.

It was these aggressive actions - coupled with the regime's increased ties to the Soviet Union - that prompted President Dwight D. Eisenhower to build a framework for the anti-Castro policy by placing trade sanctions on sugar, oil, and guns.

When barrels of Soviet oil began to arrive in Havana, U.S. oil companies in Cuba refused to continue refining oil - paving the way for further nationalization of U.S. assets - namely the oil refineries. There are well over 1.5 million Cuban refugees in the U.S. and many more in Spain, Mexico, and throughout Latin America and the world where the Cuban Diaspora has gone, escaping tyranny and seeking freedom.

Those who choose to stay behind and courageously oppose the regime's radical ways are subjected to violence, torture, and even murder.

Today private sector businesses can be found in many areas of the economy. All are still sole proprietorships. They are allowed to employ only family members. Produce and foodstuffs are still available, but the biggest sector now caters to foreign tourists who use U.S. dollars to purchase souvenirs and other goods. The result is a growing class of entrepreneurs who have good incomes in U.S. dollars. The influx of U.S. dollars means that not everyone in Cuba has a low standard of living. There are many people who have U.S. dollars, which they can spend on things unavailable to those who only have pesos.

Throughout Cuba the government has opened special stores and entire shopping malls where almost anything can be purchased as long as the buyer makes his purchases with U.S. dollars. Cubans who have access to U.S. dollars can purchase anything from food to clothing, computers to television sets. Thus there are two economies in Cuba: the dollar economy and the peso economy. In the peso economy, most commodities are difficult or impossible to find. New clothing, soap, toothpaste, hygiene products and nearly everything else except the very basic necessities of life are scarce. In the dollar economy, almost anything is available.

Cuban small business owners who deal with other Cubans and sell things in the peso market still have access to U.S. dollars. Cubans can legally exchange their pesos for U.S. dollars at government offices. At the present time the exchange rate is about 20 pesos per U.S. dollar. The rate is exactly the same as what one would receive on the black market. This funnels U.S. dollars to the Cuban government for use in buying petroleum and other commodities purchased on the international market.

Many Cubans complain that while the *canasta básica* (ration book for basic food supply) contains less food than ever and the prices have increased dramatically, the salaries of the Cuban worker stayed at the same low level (the usual salary is between 100 and 500 Cuban pesos monthly).

Serious initiatives of civilians to improve their personal or communal situation are not appreciated by the state and almost always forbidden. For instance, a neighborhood council wanted to organize the garbage collection because the garbage is usually rotting in the streets for weeks, and often is a source of infections. The various petitions of the neighborhood council were rejected because garbage collection is considered the responsibility of the state. Cuban state institutions not only fail to render many social services, they also refrain others from doing so -- *Ni comen ni dejan comer*; they don't eat and they keep others from eating.

Eastern Cuba

The hardship in eastern Cuba in some areas is so acute, that the government tends to bend the rules to help alleviate the problems. For example, prostitutes and foreign tourists negotiate with officers at the Office of Foreign Immigration so that he can spend the night at her home instead of going to a hotel, thereby allowing the prostitute to make extra hard currency for the room.

The City of Santiago de Cuba is the second largest city in Cuba, population around 400,000. The city is surrounded by the country's largest mountains, including Pico Turquino, Cuba's highest peak (6,000

feet). The city is experiencing a continued drought. Water shortage is so acute that from March 2001 until the present, the government has requested that water only be used for cooking and drinking. Bathing should be limited to once per week. Water trucks control the distribution of water in most of the city. Water trucks make deliveries every five (5) days; you can take as much as you can carry. Water trucks often skip neighborhoods. Citizens must then wait ten days before the next delivery. Rainwater collected in cisterns becomes the only solution. Churches are assigned a number of senior citizens who can't walk to carry their own water.

Santiago is Cuba's most Africanized city. The city is in very bad shape; most of the dwellings are literally falling apart. Poverty is very high as is unemployment. The need for help here is just overwhelming. At the Children's Hospital, babies must have cotton earplugs at nights to avoid having cockroaches enter their ears.

The Cuban Revolution in Bullet Points

- The Cuban Revolution began on July 26, 1953 with the failed attack on the Moncada Barracks.
- 1955, after being released from prison on a presidential pardon, Fidel moved to Mexico where he trained an army of men for guerilla warfare against Batista.
- December 2, 1956 Castro, along with over 80 people aboard the yacht called "Granma" landed in eastern Cuba. After warring against Batista's Soldiers, the twelve remaining rebels began recruiting peasants in the Sierra Maestra Mountains to join their movement.
- On January 1, 1959, after assurance that the U.S. would no longer provide support, Fulgencio Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic, then to Spain.
- On January 1, 1959, Castro's rebels enter Santiago de Cuba (Cuba's second largest city). Castro's forces occupied the rest of the island and the scrimmage was over.
- Castro consolidates power by brutally marginalizing other resistance groups/ figures and imprisoning/ executing opponents.

Brief History of the Cuban Persecuted Church

The Revolution greatly impacted the church. From the 1960s until 1990 discrimination against Christians slowed the growth of the church. Cuban Christians suffered under Cuban communism. In the early years some pastors were placed in "re-education camps," a form of concentration camp. After a few years this phase of overt persecution ended, and phase of economic restrictions ensued. Christians, and their families, could not receive a good education or good jobs. This pushed Christians to the lowest levels of society. The situation gradually changed, but even in the mid-1980's declared Christians could still not hold jobs where they would influence other people, especially children. This means no Christian teachers, social workers, counselors, etc. The results of these economic restrictions was that very few people wanted to be associated with Christianity as it would lead to loss of job or status, as well as other types of discrimination.

Another form of discrimination against the church was a restriction on meetings and building repairs. For twenty years, churches were not allowed to repair their facilities or build new ones. Religious activity was restricted to registered church buildings. As the old buildings were eaten by termites, and fell down through exposure to the elements, they could not be repaired or replaced. Since religious activities could take place only in existing registered buildings, as a building collapsed, a congregation was lost.

In 1982, the government eased their restrictions and allowed the congregations permission to repair church buildings, and also started to issue new permits for buildings to conduct religious services.

Seeking a broader and secular role in helping their communities, churches opened a dialog with the Cuban government in the 1990s. For the first time since 1959, a Cuban entity other than the government

was now allowed to help address the social problems facing the Cuban people. The Cuban government had realized the need for faith-based organizations to provide social services to its population.

In 1998 the Cuban government gave permission for Evangelicals to hold joint open-air crusades. This resulted in several months of intense evangelistic activity, door-to-door evangelism, Christian concerts and culminating in nineteen open-air crusades in sports stadiums and plazas. Attendance at the crusades was huge, with the function in Havana being over 150,000.

Christian churches currently conduct neighborhood humanitarian services, providing transportation, obtaining medical supplies, and providing meals. Church-affiliated social services are permitted to receive educational, financial, and material support from sister organizations in the United States. In return, the Cuban government demands that church-affiliated NGOs on the island serve people without regard to their religious beliefs.

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion. The Constitution has provided for the separation of church and state since the early 20th century. In 1992 the constitution was changed, and references to scientific materialism or atheism were removed. The Government does not officially favor any particular religion or church, but it appears to be most tolerant of those churches that maintain close relations with the state through the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC, also known as the Cuban Ecumenical Council).

The Government's main interaction with religious groups is through the Office of Religious Affairs of the Cuban Communist Party. The Office's stated purpose is to encourage dialogue between religious groups and the Government, but many religious figures believe that its real role is to assert the Government's power.

The Government requires religious groups to register with the provincial Registry of Associations within the Ministry of Justice to obtain official recognition. Registration procedures require groups to identify where they will conduct their activities, demonstrate their funding for these activities, and obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, accept imported religious literature through the CCC, and meet in officially recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request exit permits on an individual basis, obtain religious materials through extralegal means, and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places. Proselytizing in general is permitted on a selective basis.

The law allows for the construction of new houses of worship once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely authorizes new construction permits. Several religious leaders allege that the Government more readily gives permission to repair or restore existing churches; however, the process of obtaining a permit for an expansion or repair project and purchasing construction materials from government outlets remains lengthy and expensive.

House churches are subject to numerous regulations, many of which address location and hours of worship. Directive 43 and Resolution 46 require house churches to register with the Government. The vast majority of house churches are unregistered and thus technically illegal; however, most registered religious groups are able to hold services in private homes. Christian Solidarity Worldwide estimates that there are at least 10,000 house churches nationwide. Their numbers have increased in recent years, which religious leaders attributed to the Government not authorizing construction of new churches. The Government allows for a religious wedding ceremony, but only after a compulsory civil marriage.

The Government observes December 25, commonly associated with Christmas Day, as a national holiday.

Religious literature and materials must be imported through a registered religious group and can be distributed only to officially recognize religious groups. The CCC controls distribution of Bibles to its members and to other officially recognized denominations.

Persons who openly declare their religious faith rarely ascend to senior positions in Government; however, in January 2008 four religious leaders (all leaders in the CCC) became National Assembly members.

Religious groups are required to submit a request to the local ruling official of the Communist Party before being allowed to hold processions or events outside of religious buildings.

The Government has not registered the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but maintains a written agreement that allows members to hold weekly meetings and baptize new members. The agreement expressly forbids members from proselytizing, a key component of members' practice in other countries.

The Government does not permit religious education in public schools nor the operation of private primary and secondary schools of any kind, including religious schools, although several international schools in Havana are given considerable leeway in setting their curriculums. Churches provide religious education classes to their members, as well as seminars to wider audiences.

All denominations have experienced a large increase in membership. While the exact figures are unavailable, it is estimated that the total number of Protestants at two million, or roughly 18 percent of the Cuban population. There are roughly 10,000 approved and another 20,000 or so illegal Protestant *Casas culto*, or house churches, since 1990. With between a dozen and several hundred members per house church. In addition to the *Casas culto*, established churches are also overflowing with new members.

Cubans were highly secularized before 1959 with 61% regular church-goers. The further loss of influence of the Catholic Church after 1959 was catastrophic. Nominal adherence to Catholicism dropped from 85% in 1957 to 38.5% in 1983, and the number of priests from 725 to 200. Since the Pope's visit in 1998, the Catholic Church has revived and church attendance has increased. Pray that millions might come to personal faith in Christ.

The Protestant churches were decimated by several waves of emigration to the USA, a move encouraged by the authorities. Recovery and growth was slow, but out of the furnace of persecution high-quality leadership and committed membership arose that witnessed fervently. Since 1989 growth has become spectacular with churches springing up in every corner of Cuba. Evangelicals now outnumber church-going Catholics. The 1,250 evangelical congregations in 1990 has increased to possibly 4,500 congregations and a further 10,000 house groups in 54 denominations. A high proportion of the new Christians are young people. Pray that this growth may continue whatever the political situation.

Leadership for the churches is a pressing need. Many had to flee or were expelled in the years following the revolution. Praise God for those who stood firm for Jesus and who have become mighty for God in the school of suffering. There are now a dozen evangelical and two Catholic Bible schools or seminaries. Student numbers are limited by lack of teaching materials, theologically trained faculty, and the widespread poverty.

The less reached:

a) The unchurched majority. Church attendance was once the lowest for any country in the Western hemisphere. This has risen in the 1990s, but 80% of the population still has no meaningful contact with a church.

b) Spiritism has been actively supported by the government as ‘cultural’. Afro-Caribbean religions under a thin veneer of Catholicism have huge followings. There may be more than 3 million devotees of Santaria and other cults such as Mayombe and Zarabanda which resemble Haitian voodoo. Pray that Christians may exercise love, understanding and spiritual power to see many delivered from this satanic bondage.

Foreign missions have been restricted to tactful support and occasional pastoral visits from outside the country. A few were permitted to remain in a low-profile teaching ministry.

Christian help ministries for prayer:

b) Christian literature has been scarcely obtainable for years. More can now be imported, but permission for local printing is difficult to obtain. There are few resources for pastors and preachers. Pray that this hunger might be satisfied.

c) Christian radio has been a source of strength and encouragement to many. There is no lack of choice with about 2,800 hours of international Christian broadcasting in Spanish every week from Latin America!

History of Religion in Cuba in Bullet Points

- After Fidel Castro took over, Cuba became officially an atheistic state (under their constitution) and punished religious practice.
- From 1959 to 1961 80% of professional catholic priest and protestant ministers left Cuba to go to the U.S.A.
- Through 1968, religious leaders who remained in the Island were summarily collected and sent to work camps for rehabilitation for two years as “work brigades” under the UMAP (Military Units to Aid Production) program. Many died there.
- The relationship between the new Cuban government and religion began to intensify. Following the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban government further limited Church operations by using the excuse of suspicion of religious groups collaborating with the C.I.A.
- In 1991 some restrictions eased but we still see countless severe violations of religious freedom.
- Underground churches thrive in Cuba as they do elsewhere under Communist tyranny. Frequently, the families of Communist leaders worship there in secret.
- Disinformation campaign is effective only with gullible Christians off the island.
- The CDR is not an armed National Guard. It does not repel foreign invaders. Its members are families on each block who spy on their neighbors, copy automobile license numbers of visitors to nearby homes, and inform on secret church meetings.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government continues to exert control over all aspects of societal life including religious expression. The Ministry of the Interior continues to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, religious professionals, and laypersons. Certain groups, particularly Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, face ridicule and maltreatment.

In September 2007 the Government fined Pentecostal pastor Ernesto Oliva \$50 (1,200 pesos) for erecting without authorization a church on his property in the district of Arroyo Naranjo.

Many Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses report discrimination or dismissal from employment due to refusal to work on Saturdays, or in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, refusal to serve in

the military or pledge allegiance to the flag. There continued to be many reports of discrimination and maltreatment in schools, in part because of the groups' refusal to participate in mandatory patriotic activities on Saturdays. Students who are Jehovah's Witnesses reported being severely punished for not saluting the flag or singing the national anthem.

Government officials continue to harass, threaten, and fine unregistered religious groups, and state security forces continue to subject officially sanctioned and unregistered house churches to surveillance. Some Pentecostal church officials continue to consider themselves singled out by the Government's house church regulations. Many Pentecostals normally meet in house churches more than twice a week, a practice that would violate the regulations.

There are no reports that the Government approves any official registration for new religious groups.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On November 20, 2007, police in Santiago de Cuba evicted Pentecostal preacher Alain Tolerano Valiante and his family from their home and demolished the church his congregation had erected without permission in a rural area. Police temporarily detained a member of the congregation who was taking photographs of the incident and confiscated his camera.

Religious rights are systematically violated in Cuban prisons across the country. These violations are committed primarily against prisoners of conscience, and particularly those who openly profess a faith. It appears that these violations occur as part of a concerted effort on the part of the authorities, who apparently recognize the important role faith plays in the lives of these men and women, to “break” prisoners both physically and psychologically. Christian prisoners are arbitrarily denied the right to keep a Bible and/or other religious literature, the right to regular visits from a member of the clergy, and the right to meet with other prisoners for religious study, worship, and/or prayer. When prisoners are granted these rights, they live in perpetual fear that they can be withdrawn at any time, sometimes as a form of punishment and sometimes for no apparent reason at all.

Foreigners are permitted to help, but there are many obstacles. It is often difficult to wade through the bureaucracy when one wants to do something. Although the government is no longer officially anti-Christian, there are people within it who definitely are anti-Christian. These are mainly low and middle level bureaucrats, rather than leaders, but they can make life difficult. Sometimes it is hard to tell when you are up against prejudice or simply an out-of-control bureaucracy. Additional sources of irritation include:

- The Cuban government will not issue us D-8 Religious Visas for large groups of people to visit the Island as a part of a religious group.
- Although the democratic dissident movement of Cuba counts many clergymen, religious persons and Christians among its members, the movement does not receive public support from church institutions or church authorities.

Persecution of Christians has been severe, Catholics suffering even more than Protestants. For decades Christians were subject to arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, discrimination, and any church activities were restricted or arbitrarily banned. All open witness, evangelism and literature production and distribution was made almost impossible. That persecution has diminished but not ceased, but the capriciousness of its application breeds insecurity. Applications for registering or repairing churches are routinely ignored. Discipleship is still costly but many are prepared to pay the price and shine for Jesus. Pray for continued courage and fortitude for believers, and for complete religious freedom.

Restriction on Religious Freedom in Bullet Points

- Church leaders who openly call on the government to respect religious freedom and those who refuse to work on behalf of the government (as informers) have been targeted for particularly severe harassment.
- New ministry of Housing Regulation restricts the transfer of staff/ pastors from one city to another city. Pastors that need to replace another pastor because of death or temporary leave of absence are now prohibited from doing so.
- Reported discrimination and defamation in state run media of Christians and religious groups who renounce the CCP (Cuban Communist Party) or refuse to become members.
- Since 1959 only a handful of new churches have been permitted by the government. Within the past fifteen years the Church has grown 6.5 % each year, growing rapidly with no place to unite. This constitutes as a serious religious liberty violation because Christians cannot exercise their right to meet together to worship.
- Churches established before the revolution that are considering expanding or repairing the structure must have permission from the Office of Religious Affairs. These are rarely granted, many are denied upon request or don't receive a response.
- Because new church establishments are not permitted many churches meet at what's called "house churches", homes used to hold church services. There are reportedly 10,000 to 20,000 house churches, very few granted authority by the Cuban Government.
- Many house churches have been subjected to systematic intimidation by the CCP and the CDR (committees for the defense of the revolution). House churches receive regular visits by officials urging threats and repercussions for holding the religious activities.
- Since the 2005 legislation on the House Churches there have been reports of destruction to church buildings.
- Churches and pastoral houses have been confiscated by the local governments, with rare compensation.
- Church leaders are the targets of severe harassment including death threats, imprisonment and house/church vandalism.
- Church leaders of all denominations report difficulties in applying for exit visas and permits for church vehicles, and have no chance of appealing the decision.
- Government informants planted in churches and seminaries are a serious problem. Many pastors are forced to practice self-censorship, watching all they say as not to be considered anti-revolutionary in any sermons or teachings. Religious leaders, as the only ones other than government officials that are permitted to speak publically to groups, are viewed as potentially dangerous.
- Churches are not afforded the right to set up radio and television
- Shortage of bibles results from severe government restrictions on the import of bibles and other religious literature. The lack of bibles is heightened in rural areas but is a significant problem in all cities and denominations.
- The Church faces restrictions in regards to written and electronic communications.
- The Cuban Church struggles with reaching out because of the atheism established by the government.
- Churches can only accept donations from state approved funding sources.
- Churches must provide full financial audits, are limited to the number of services and must receive permission to host foreign visitors, such as missionaries.
- Prisoners reported being denied the right to pastoral visits and the right to meet together to worship, pray and study the bible.
- Prisoners have bibles confiscated as a form of punishment or simply out of the capriciousness of the government.

- Despite recently signing the U.N Human Rights Convention, the government continues the serious violations of religious freedom in the treatment of Prisoners.
- “Freedom of speech and freedom of the press do not exist in Cuba,” “Freedom of assembly does not exist either. Today, a network of formal and informal restrictions has the effect of limiting religious activity.”
- “Cuban law prohibits the observance of religious events when they conflict with work obligations or patriotic celebrations.”
- “Telephones are monitored, mail opened, and one’s comings and goings are watched twenty-four hours a day by the block wardens of the Committee for the defense of the Revolution. Meetings, parties, and other activities are subject to particularly intense scrutiny. Listening to foreign radio and television broadcasts is dangerous because of this surveillance. “
- Since Castro took power, a minimum number of Bibles have entered Cuba. The Communist sympathizing CCC/Ecumenical Council controls these shipments of donated bibles. Conventions which are not members of the Council of Churches (such as the Southern and American Baptists affiliates, Assemblies of God, and others) receive none of the Bibles. They must purchase them if there are any left-over after distribution to its members. Pentecostals, Adventists and Baptists, not represented on the CCC.
- Their attempts to restrain Christians go beyond the church. The Marxist muzzle covers believers educationally, politically and legally as well.
- Christians still are not able to freely print their own literature.
- The government has routinely destroyed Bibles and other Christian literature.
- There are no Christian bookstores in Cuba.
- In December 1995, a regulation was enacted that forbids the sale of paper, ink, typewriters, computers and mechanical parts for photocopiers and printing presses to religious organizations.

Cuban Religious Demography

The country has an area of 68,888 square miles and a population of 11.4 million. There was no independent authoritative source on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership. The Roman Catholic Church estimates that 60 percent of the population is Catholic. Membership in Protestant churches is estimated to be 5 percent and includes Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Episcopalians, Methodists, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), and Lutherans. Other groups include the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Baha'is, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The remainder of the population is either non-practicing of any particular religion, atheist, or agnostic.

Some sources estimate that as much as 80 percent of the population consults with practitioners of religions with West African roots, such as Santeria or Yoruba, for assistance with specific immediate problems such as bearing children, curing illness, or ensuring safe passage.

Catholic Church officials estimate that 10 percent of baptized Catholics attend Mass regularly. Membership in Protestant churches increased and was estimated at 550,000 persons. The Baptists, represented in four different conventions, are possibly the largest Protestant denomination, followed closely by the Pentecostal churches, particularly the Assembly of God. The number of Pentecostals is believed to be rising sharply. Jehovah's Witnesses report more than 86,000 members, the Seventh-day Adventists 30,000, and Methodists 18,000. There are 22,000 Anglicans and 15,000 Presbyterians. The Jewish community has 1,500 members, with 1,200 of them residing in Havana. The Muslim population consists of 6,000 temporary residents and 300 native-born. There are small communities of Quakers (300) and Mormons (30).

Foreign missionary groups operate through registered churches. Visits by religious figures are handled by the Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Religions	Population %	Adherents	Annual Growth
Christian	46.88	5,250,881	+0.0%
non-Religious/other	35.47	3,972,883	+1.0%
Spiritist	17.00	1,904,116	+0.4%
Hindu	0.21	23,521	+1.4%
Chinese	0.19	21,281	+0.4%
Other	0.10	11,201	+0.4%
Muslim	0.08	8,961	+0.4%
Buddhist	0.05	5,600	+0.4%
Baha'i	0.01	1,120	+0.4%
Jewish	0.01	1,000	n.a.

Christians	Denom.	Affil. %	,000	Annual Growth
Protestant	33	3.40	341	+5.3%
Independent	16	1.66	185	+8.9%
Anglican	1	0.03	4	-0.3%
Catholic	1	38.82	4,348	-0.7%
Orthodox	1	0.01	1	+0.0%
Marginal	1	1.61	180	+4.0%
Unaffiliated		1.35	151	n.a.

Churches	MegaBloc	Congregations	Members	Affiliates
Catholic	C	252	2,787,000	4,367,900

Jehovah's Witnesses	M	1,252	85,714	180,000
Assemblies of God	P	325	39,028	86,028
Evang Pentecostal	I	233	42,000	80,000
Evang Conv of C (WT)	P	320	35,000	58,000
Methodist Ch of C	P	435	13,043	45,000
Seventh-day Adventist	P	184	21,278	44,000
Bapt Conv of Eastern C	P	357	20,000	33,400
Bapt Conv of Western C	P	160	16,000	30,000
Christian Pentecostal	I	130	13,000	30,000
Presbyterian Reformed	P	80	6,000	16,000
Pentecostal Holiness	P	86	6,000	11,000
Ch of God (Cleveland)	P	25	2,371	8,000
Freewill Baptist Conv	P	12	2,100	4,200
Episcopal	A	25	1,300	3,600
Other denoms [39]		2,418	67,201	122,530
Total Christians [54]		6,294	3,157,000	5,100,000

Trans-bloc Groupings	pop. %	,000	Annual Growth
Evangelical	4.6	521	+6.5%
Charismatic	5.6	632	+3.0%
Pentecostal	2.7	301	+6.5%

Members of the Cuban Council of Churches

Ejercito de Salvacion	The Salvation Army
Iglesia de los Amigos	Church of the Brotherhood
Iglesia Apostolica de Jesucristo	Apostolic of Jesus Christ
Iglesia Bautista Libre	Free Baptist Church
Iglesia Congregacional Pentecostal	Congregational Pentacostal Church
Iglesia Cristiana Reformada	Christian Reformed Church
Iglesia de Dios	Church of God
Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba	Episcopal Church of Cuba
Iglesia Evangelica Bethel	Evangelical Bethel Church
Iglesia Metodista de Cuba	Methodist Church of Cuba
Iglesia Mision Mundial en Cuba	World Mision in Cuba
Iglesia del Nazareno	Church of Nazartene
Iglesia Prebiteriana Reformada	Presbyterian Reformed Church
Iglesia Santa Pentecostes	Holy Pentacost Church
Observer Churches & Member Institutions	
Fraternidad de Iglesias Bautistas de Cuba	Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba
Iglesia Biblia Abierta	Open Bible Church
Iglesia de Confesion Luterana	Lutheran Confesion Church
Iglesia de Cristo	Church of Christ
Iglesia de Cristo Apostolica	Christ Apostolic Church
Igllesia Evangelica Libre	Evangelical Free Church
Iglesia Getsemani	Getsemani Church
Iglesia Hermandad Agraria	Agrarian Brotherhood Church
Iglesia la Luz de Dios Pentecostal de Cuba	Light of God Pentacostal Church
Iglesia Misionera de Dios	Misionary of God Church
Union Latinoamericana de Juventudes Ecumenicas	Latinamerican Union of Ecumenical Youth

Movimiento Estudiantil Cristiano	Christian Student's Movement
Accion Social Ecumenica Latinoamericana	Latinamerican Ecumenical Social Action

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