

## **CUBA: A NEW CHURCH IN A NEW SOCIETY**

*Few reports by Northern observers of the churches and Christians in Cuba appear as objective and forthright as that which appeared in New World Outlook's special October issue on Latin America and the Caribbean. The author, Thomas Anthony, is a Canadian clergyman who has recently visited the island.*

sion and performance in American diplomacy becomes more patent. There appears also to be little recognition of an emerging constituency among black Americans which is becoming increasingly aware not only of Africa in general but of American policy in particular. As cohesion and awareness develop within this group, the desirability of our being South Africa's second largest trading partner might have to be reassessed. This reappraisal, however, seems unlikely. U.S. policy towards the area seems more inclined to respond to African sensitivity and black American awareness by empty symbolic gestures, such as closing our consulate in Salisbury, and by hollow platitudes, such as vain appeals for tolerance. We are, it appears, far from attempting to disengage foreign investment from racist regimes.

Although it is sad to contemplate, we appear to have learned little from our decade of experience with independent Africa. We have even failed to manipulate symbols satisfactorily. Our abstention last December on a United Nations resolution condemning the Portuguese bombardment of Senegalese villages may have done more to show where we stand than our approbation for the Lusaka Manifesto which we manifestly failed to comprehend. We pay far more deference to a moribund NATO alliance and its self-serving constituency than we do to all of Africa. The primacy of Europe goes unchallenged at the State Department and, indeed, it sometimes seems that we continue to defer to the former colonial powers on matters concerning Africa.

The United States has legitimate interests in Africa which are not served by disengagement and retrenchment. Nor are they served by making U.S. foreign policy the handmaiden of American corporations who value profit over principle. Although it may well be true that a massive black-white cataclysm is years off in Africa, it is the prudent state which assesses its options beforehand. Our present policy, if pursued, will probably result in a closing off of many of the possible options. In that event, we may contemplate the prospect of facing an implacably hostile Africa with all that implies in regard to our position in the world.

There is surely an intermediate area between the frenzied bargaining for cold war allegiances which characterized the early 1960's and the "benign neglect" which marks the present policy. Failure to support black, independent African states in their period of consolidation is an abdication of a necessary and legitimate American role. This abdication is compounded when we make it appear that our only abiding interests in Africa are directed at sustaining the reactionary governments of the South.

"Cuba is a socialist country. This is historical fact. We, believers in Jesus Christ, parishioners and pastors of the Church, live in Cuba, and we will continue to live in this beautiful land. These are two real facts."

"Like it or not, the Revolution is here and the building of the New Society involves us as the Christian Church. The Church, despite the desire of many both from the Marxist side and from the Christian side to 'dis-incarnate' or 'de-secularize' it, is a Church which is in the world. It cannot separate itself from the intimate relation it has with the world, because the world is the reason for the existence of the Church."

These statements by two leaders of the Church in Cuba today epitomize the honest dialectic within which Christians in Cuba are living their faith today. It is at once an inspiring and a profoundly sobering experience to observe that tension.

Church life in Cuba continues in most of the traditional ways: Sunday morning worship, Sunday school or Bible classes, and young people and adult groups meeting in church buildings or in smaller groups in homes. Because of the general Cuban austerity in non-essential items (every effort is directed at basic national economic development), church publications are fewer in number and made of lower quality materials; but they are published and circulated regularly. There is complete freedom of worship.

There was nothing particularly inspiring about any of this—the Church functions were not unlike those in the U.S.A. or elsewhere in the Caribbean. Indeed my recurring thought was, how foreign, traditional and unsuitable to the new Cuban revolutionary society so much of Western Church tradition and organization seems.

In a still-developing Marxist society whose gospel

of social justice and welfare echoes from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and whose revolutionary evangelical fervor is very much in the ascendant, the Church and individual Christians are severely challenged to make their faith real. While there is no religious persecution in Cuba, there is no question that the psychological advantage is no longer with the Christians, as has been the case for so long in much of Western society, particularly former Spanish colonies.

Today one cannot be a Christian and belong to the Communist Party or any of its organizations. While this virtually proscribes direct political participation by Christians, there is little evidence that the practice of the Christian faith has affected the economic or social welfare of the faithful. During the tempestuous early years of the Revolution there were of course many Christians whose political and economic self-interest or cultural ties provoked them to work openly or covertly against the Revolution. Most of these persons have now left the country.

In a Revolutionary society dedicated to increased production, spiritual values have an unusual significance. I discovered several persons, both young and old, who had been asked to join Party organizations and were willing to, but had been turned down after long debates about their unreasonableness in not giving up their "bourgeois religious" hang-ups! Several others reported their active participation in block organizations, and dialogues with friends, and neighbors who are Party members. A number of those Christians I met hold responsible high-level jobs in education and industry.

A sign of a bold new spirit of participation in the Revolution was the fact that the whole theological faculty and student body of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Matanzas was in the fields cutting cane from 5:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. for two weeks, together with a training group of rural and small town Party leaders. It provided opportunity for dialogue and practical witness as well as a valuable contribution to the national agricultural effort. The contrast between this renewed Biblical spirit—salt of the earth, leaven of the loaf, light of the world—and the now largely ghettoized formalities of traditional Church activity could not be greater. In Cuba as well as in North America, Christians are discovering that they must break out of traditional structures and styles of life if they are to fulfill the Church's mission today.

In Cuba prior to the Revolution, the Church and Christians enjoyed undeserved positions of privilege accumulated over long centuries through both political and economic power and influence. Today in Cuba the Church has been largely neutralized as a

direct political or economic power. Its only influence now is moral or prophetic.

The situation in which the Church finds itself in Cuba can be described by the impact of current U.S. policy towards Cuba. This is more particularly significant for the U.S. churches with their strong historical and cultural ties to the Protestant churches in Cuba.

• There is not the slightest doubt that the impact of current U.S. policy towards Cuba is negative. Even the most counter-revolutionary individuals with whom I spoke, including several who plan to emigrate to the U.S., indicated that current U.S. policies are counter-productive as attempts to debilitate, reverse or destroy the Revolution. On the contrary, current policies are some of the most effective stimuli to legitimating the further militarization of Cuban society, to greater dedication of the Cuban people to national development and defense, and to Cuban encouragement of social revolutions in other Latin American nations. At the least, I was informed, U.S. policies are viewed as relatively ineffective and of nuisance value, and therefore of secondary importance to the development tasks facing the Cuban nation . . . .

I happened to arrive in Cuba one week after the abortive Alpha 66 Cuban exile invasion attempt at Baracoa on the northeast coast in April. This was a barometer by which to gauge feelings. No one supported such efforts, and no one saw the slightest hope of their succeeding. Almost all interpreted the action as unwarranted intervention with at least tacit U.S. approval.

Christians in Cuba, even the more conservative theologically, and the least revolutionary in spirit, did not express significantly different feelings. Churchmen were more restrained than government officials but not essentially different in attitude. On several occasions, the distinction was made between repudiation of the policies of a given government or administration and repudiation of the peoples of another nation. Younger persons were notably "revolutionary."

Christians in Cuba often said that the trade embargo has been unfortunately effective on food and special medicines. Such an embargo, they feel, is lacking in "Christian and humanitarian concern."

Churchmen particularly were also concerned about the lack of diplomatic relations. Despite the unavoidable TV and radio contacts, and a surprising amount of telephone communication with the U.S., Cuba is essentially cut off from other parts of the

world. Mail delivery is delayed three months to a year, and most books and publications do not get through. Given U.S. State Department restrictions on travel, few U.S. citizens get to Cuba.

With reference to normalizing trade relations, my feeling from travel through half of the island was "Cuba is making it" despite the U.S. economic blockade. Cuba trades with Britain, France, Spain, Italy and other capitalistic nations to a significant degree, in addition to trade with the USSR and other socialist countries. Within the last several months Chile and Cuba have begun trade relations again, which is the first break within the O.A.S. trade blockade aside from Mexico.

The U.S. blockade has slowed Cuba's development, since almost 100 per cent of industrial, agricultural, and consumer hard goods prior to the revolution were U.S. made. Cost of transportation for import and export of goods and materials has been greatly increased by elimination of U.S. and most Latin American trade. Replacement of parts has been a major problem.

However, Cuba is a large and fertile island, and the massive efforts at sugar, rice, citrus, beef, dairy products and fishing industry production are beginning to pay off—the people believe—and I saw no evidence to the contrary. Everyone is clothed and eating a substantial basic diet. Food is still severely rationed, however . . . .

The major tasks of the Revolution are now well advanced in development. Free medical and dental care and educational opportunities for all ages and levels of previous training are in the forefront of the social benefits of the Revolution. Housing has been nationalized and private property no longer exists. In rural areas new barrios with modern housing and community facilities have been developed . . . .

The U.S. naval base at Guantanamo is viewed as an essentially unnecessary military installation which remains as a clear example of U.S. provocation and intransigence, but little else.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that the government and the people still fear a massive military intervention with U.S. support in Cuba. While they suppose that no immediate threat exists because of the deep U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, that involvement itself is viewed as analogous to the Bay of Pigs. U.S. policy in maintaining Guantanamo does not allay those fears.

Like it or not, the Cuban revolution is here to stay, and the building of the new society between men and nations involves us all as Christians and as the Church of Christ throughout the world.

## *in the magazines*

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II, this increase has not been at the expense of Congress. Quite the contrary, both the President and Congress have found their powers and responsibilities increased. . . .

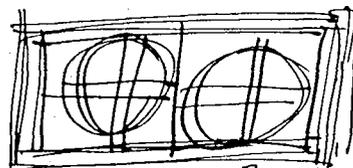
" . . . Much of the increased role played by Congress in foreign policy is related to its constitutional powers of the purse. Few major policies envisioned by the Executive can be implemented without appropriations from Congress. The pre-eminence of the appropriations process since World War II has also altered the relative influence of the two chambers, the House making greater gains than the Senate.

"Contrary to the general view, both chambers of Congress have been involved in great policy decisions as well as in the slower process of modification of existing policies. The Senate, for its part, is constitutionally required to participate in the process of treaty-making, and case studies of its activities in this area—for example, the Japanese Peace Treaty of 1952, the North Atlantic Treaty, and American participation in the United Nations—attest to the vigor it brings to the task. The House, particularly the Appropriations Committee, has found its views often anticipated in administration proposals.

"Furthermore, Congress dominates many areas of foreign policy which in themselves appear to be peripheral. Collectively, however, they constitute a major portion of U.S. foreign policy. For example, Congress is generally credited with dominant influence over decisions on economic aid policy, military assistance, agricultural surplus disposal, and the locations of facilities, to name only a few. In addition, immigration and tariff policies are generally considered part of foreign policy and there is considerable evidence to indicate that Congress remains a major actor in these fields.

" . . . The simple fact is that most broad foreign policy positions taken by this country have been developed, not from a comprehensive model of a better world order, but rather from an incremental evolution of often vague and ambiguous precepts applied pragmatically to a changing world situation. What the critics fail to see is that the oversight [*sic*] function of Congress, with its penchant for detail, cannot be arbitrarily divorced from the policy-making process . . . . Congress is required by the Constitution to play a less visible role than is the Executive. Even so, the case studies indicate that the contemporary Congress is very capable of conceptual innovation, legislation modification, and energetic oversight [*sic*]."

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