

Baptist World Alliance Heritage and Identity Commission July 2001 Charlottetown PEI

FOLLOW UP REPORT FROM CUBA

by

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Everyone knows about Cuba. Every one knows our President. News about Cuba is very hot.

We also have very sombre news. The Government is improving socially and morally Cuba is alive. There is worsening situation in our history. Somethings are improving. Prostitution is terrible. Students do it from the Universities in order to buy clothing and food. With morals down the church has a significant opportunity.

The Government is permitting us to worship. We want our fidelity and faith. We have 500 churches in Cuba, 200 ordained pastors and lots of lay people. We have 50,000 baptized members and more than a 100,000 who have been converted and attend church.

We have good relationships with our people. They go to church because they need it. Our Seminary is the oldest evangelical Seminary in Cuba. It was organised in 1906. Now we have 8 biblical centres in our conventions. In each Province there are one or two biblical centres where people preach, teach and learn to plant churches. Each week we establish a group and we call that a church or a house church. Buildings are not important. We begin a group where families ask for teaching.

We are publishing a history of our Convention - the Eastern Convention. Last year we wrote a Baptist History in Spanish. It is very important for us to teach who we are as Baptists.

In Cuba there are 57 churches, 27 are Pentecostal churches and it is important for us to be able to explain who are the Baptists.

I am the oldest pastor. I have been preaching for 46 years. I am the oldest pastor in Cuba. It is difficult to begin. It is difficult to finish. I am the fourth generation in Cuba. God has called me to stay in Cuba. I have been in prison for seven years.

Since 1965 - 1972 it has been very difficult. I have been a missionary in prison. I have been preaching everywhere. We can go to the hospitals to visit sick people and visit those who are in prison. When I was 33 years of age I told God to "send me everywhere." Maybe I thought that God would use me to be a missionary in China or Mexico but it has been to my own land. Being put in prison was very difficult. Prisons are not like those in the US with good food and a shower. It has been terrible like the Count of Montecristo. One time we were in prison and there were seven pastors. We had a meeting every night and we would sing and pray but there were 1,000 men. One man said "you Christians are very happy in your faith." "You can afford prison

because we do not have faith". You have to have something to be like you. Prison was very much a mission among many men.

My children then were converted. My wife had to preach. Wives of pastors had to preach. It was a difficult time but God had control of our lives. We continued to preach and do everything we can. In Cuba there are no cars so we have to walk. There is no Social Security you do not have to pay anything. Here we go to the baseball and have a good time. If we die Fidel Castro puts you into the cemetery free and that is a very nice opportunity. How do you stay in Cuba for a long time? We stay in Cuba because God told us. We are not afraid. We have no hate. When I go to Miami there are many Christians and we say we do not hate Castro. We have to love him.

I pray with my secretary as if she is my daughter. We have to love everybody if we don't love we don't win. We are strong because we have love.

Cuba is very hungry for the physical but also hungry for the eternal bread. They ask for Bibles and they read them all the time. Cuba is in victory. The victory is not to have much and many things the victory is to have eternal life. This life could be short or long but eternal life is in Jesus.

God is blessing Cuba in a special manner. We are not afraid, we have no hate, God is blessing us. Now we are seeing the seeds put in there with tears. Now we are seeing growth sprouting into flower. We have the song of love.

The speaker was asked if our coming to Cuba in the year 2000 had any effect on the Cuban Baptists? The answer, the meetings were a great blessing. We asked the Government for the use of the Capitol buildings and we had to buy some facilities but we also had to paint and clean the place, especially the church which was being used for the meetings. They said to us we have to include every Baptist group. It was difficult to do that but wonderful. We used that we could preach in many churches. They said the Baptists are a very large group of people. The Cubans love everybody. Sometimes Cubans see the opportunity to get out of Cuba. Many want to get to the USA but we Baptist evangelicals are doing a good work.

Question: Was our coming and meeting with Fidel Castro and Government representatives did that make any difference at all as far as the Government relationships with the Baptists.

Answer: I was present with Fanini, Kim and Lotz. Castro and the General Secretary. We asked for this meeting a long time in advance. When Fidel Castro asked who are the Baptists we said that we cannot say everything. He said, "you are more positive and evangelical in Cuba." He said in my own town (the same town as Baptista), Baptista was educated in an evangelical orphanage. Fidel Castro was a baby from a rich family and educated in the Catholic school. He said that the evangelical education is better. He received a Bible from Dr Billy Kim. He said many good things about Baptists, our history. He had received a lot of information. He believes we are doing a very nice work, working for morals, the education of the people, working against drunkenness, prostitution and gambling.

