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THE CHURCH AND THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES
IN MODERN CUBA

Christian tradition being a characteristic basic feature of Cuban culture, the more startling the fact is that Cuba is the only Latin-American country of our day where Christmas is not a holiday. In 1969 the greatest feast of Christianity was expelled from the official holiday calendar on state initiatives with the involuntary consent of Church leaders. Although not disappearing from Cuban society Christmas retired to private life in family houses and among church walls.

The government justified the ban and the feast's subsequent shift to New Year by referring to the vital importance of unbroken continuity of work during the *zafra*, the sugar-producing period of the year. The national campaign for achieving 10 million tons of sugar per year went on in the late 60ies. The lack of any considerable opposition in society against expelling Christmas and pressing it back to private life throws a characteristic light on the artificially heightened producing-enthusiasm of the time and on Cuban religiousness as well.

Perhaps the story of Cuban Christmas can have a symbolic meaning just because it contains these references to the anomalies of Cuban religiousness. It mirrors equally the weakness and marginal position of the Church and the indifference or at least an aversion to institutionalized religion on the side of the population.

Experts agree that today Cuba is the least religious country in Latin-America; a country where the Churches including Roman Catholicism with her vast historical tradition have only a modest social influence.

Opinion prevails that this is the direct consequence of the 1959 revolution: Castro's church policy with the dominancy of Marxism and the official ideology of atheism have been responsible and can be blamed for the marginal position of the Church. This explanation seems to be evident, is nicely rounded and even gives opportunity to draw East-European parallels but a deeper insight into the history

of Cuban Catholicism reveals its incompleteness.

The Church had been losing ground in Cuban society long before the Revolution, as early as the period of national awakening and fighting for independence in the second half of the 19th century. From the very beginning the social challenges of 20th century Cuba proved to be unanswerable or only partly answerable for the Roman Catholic Church. The history slowly building up of these answers can be interpreted as a long and painful peregrination (not without digressions) to find a characteristic voice, an individual face, an authentic role in society. Paradoxically enough Cuban Church has arrived to the desired self-identification in our days. The documents of Cuban National Church Encounter (*Encuentro Nacional Eclesial Cubano*, further: ENEC) in 1986 are evidences of the renewal.¹

In the early 20th century period of transition from colonial to republican era the majority of the Cubans thought the Church an alien, obsolete and anti-Cuban force. The masculine part of the population thought religion fit for women and children only and did not even attend Mass. The 19th century social and economic processes played an important role in the formation of irreligiousness and anticlericalism and even more important was the conflict developing from the middle third of the century between the Cubans' gradual awakening to national consciousness and the Catholic Church representing Spanish colonial interests.

No matter how strange it may sound, the first losses of the Church were caused by the 19th century great economic change towards the dominance of a sugar plantation economics, based on slave labour. Sugar transformed Cuban society. Slaves in huge waves were transported to the Island; around 1873 their number mounted already about half a million. The Church could not meet the requirements of the challenge embodied in the problems of Christianizing the slaves and assimilating them in the standards of colonial Catholicism. The slave learned some catechism and got baptized compelled by his master who was obliged to do so by the law under penalty of excommunication. But the slave did not

1 See: *Encuentro Nacional Eclesial Cubano*. Documento Final e Instrucción de los Obispos - further: ENEC. Don Bosco, Roma, 1987

turn into a true Christian. Under the thin polish of superficial Catholicism elements of African cultures and religions lived on and got new fresh impulses from the endless slave transports. Keeping and saving African identity meant protesting against submission and in a certain sense it can be called the ideology of revolt. All what Catholicism could achieve was the gradual penetration of Christian teaching into African religiousness, a fusion resulting in special syncretic cults like the *santería*.

In all probability the syncretic cults were already present in the popular ideologies of last century's struggles for independence. At least there is the fact that 60 percent of the *mambí* soldiers of the 1895-98 Liberation War came from coloured people, and a great number of them had been fighting already in the Ten Years War (1868-1878).²

In the 20ieth century religious syncretism influenced strongly the poorer strata of the white population as well especially in the slums of the big cities and in the backward parts of the country (e.g. Oriente).

The Catholic Church had refused to take notice for a very long time of the wide currency and spread of the syncretic cults and regarded them condemnable superstitions. The 1986 National Church Encounter brought about a change in judgement. The Final Document of the ENEC admits that the religiousness of the majority of Cuban population may be connected with the syncretic cults. According to the Document, this religiousness is dispersing on a wide scale. As one extreme, the variants of spiritualism and African animism are in touch with Catholicism only slightly and superficially. Popular Catholicism hued by African beliefs signifies the other end.³

The identity crisis of 19th century Church led to the unpopularity of Church in the early 20ieth century. From the middle third of the 19th century the Clergy turned against the developing Cuban national consciousness, turned down the thought of independence, and identified itself with the interests of the Spanish

2 Poumier, María: *Apuntes sobre la vida cotidiana en Cuba en 1898*. Ed. Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 1975, p. 62.

3 ENEC, p. 80.

Crown. This behaviour was the logical consequence of the Spanish policy. Having lost almost all the American colonies in the early 19th century, the Spanish state made enormous efforts to keep Cuba, to suppress the independence movement and by applying the Right of patronage made the Church an obedient servant. During the course of the 19th century the rehispanisation of Cuban Church was carried out.⁴ The Chairs of the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba and the Bishop of Habana were given exclusively to Spaniards from the home country and even the lesser church dignities fell victims to the invasion of clerics from Spain.

Data clearly reflect that as a result Cubans were abandoning Church career. A faint glow of the 18th century golden age of Church still lingered in 1817 when 1044 priests and clerics took care of the spiritual welfare of a population counting half a million people. By 1857 this total nearly reached one million while the number of clergy lessened to 438.⁵ The decrease was partly due to certain anti-clerical measures of Spanish liberalism e.g. the secularization of monastic properties in the early 1840ies.⁶ But the tendency of decrease went on during the colonial era. When the independence of the country was declared the total number of priests and clerics in Cuba was hovering around 300 (exact data are not known).⁷

According to the ENEC Document, this was a painful period of decline and decadence marked by the impoverishment and bad administration of a grievously manipulated Church, by the disintegration of spiritual welfare services and by the moral decline of the clergy.⁸

In the Ten Years War (1868-1878) and in the Liberation War (1895-1898) the Church physically disappeared from many parts of the country. The fighting parties

4 ENEC, p. 37.

5 Prien, Hans-Jürgen: *La historia del cristianismo en América Latina*, Salamanca, 1985, pp. 961-962.

6 Leiseca, Juan Martín: *Apuntes para la Historia Eclesiástica de Cuba*, Carasa y Ca., La Habana, 1938 pp. 152-156.

7 José Luciano Franco said in interview that there were only 7-8 Cuban-born priests in a total of 2-300. See: Poumier op. cit. p. 186.

8 ENEC, p. 37.

often used occupied church buildings as hospitals or barracks and almost as often set them on fire to prevent the enemy from using them.

There were several priests of Cuban origins who supported the claim for independence. When the 1868 revolution broke out the Spanish military authorities arrested six priests including 82 years old Father Pedro Nolasco Alberre charged with conspiracy and sent them into exile. Parish priest Francisco Esquemebre from Cumanayagua was shot on suspicion of betrayal. Others like Father Braulio Odio from Santiago de Cuba followed their flock to the war and worked as army chaplains in the mambí army.⁹

But a priest sympathizing or even co-operating with the forces of independence was a rare exception of the period. Cubans have in mind more lasting memories of the Church working against revolution and independence and singing thanksgiving *Te Deum* in churches when the death of José Martí, Antonio Maceo and other independence leaders were announced.¹⁰

The ENEC Document tells that at the beginning of the republican era the Church faced the greatest danger and challenge in the irreligiousness of the masses, in anticlericalism, in the lack of religious culture and in indifference.¹¹ The termination of colonial rule caused a radical alteration in the position of the Catholic Church and created a new situation. A crisis in Church authority was ahead because the two prelates and the Spanish priests and clerics left the island in company with the Spanish soldiers.

Between 1898-1902 i.e. in the period of the first USA occupation of Cuba the American military government executed the separation of State and Church and declared liberty of religion and conscience. This concept was codified by the 1901 Constitution of the republic created under heavy American patronage. The principle of the separation of State and Church is present in later constitutions as well:

9 Leiseca, op. cit. p. 186. and 188.

10 See: Kirk, John M.: 'Ante el Volcán. La Iglesia en la Cuba prerevolucionaria'. Revista Latinoamericana de Teología, UCA, San Salvador, Año V. No. 13. (1988), p. 69.

11 ENEC, p. 39.

the progressive 1940 Constitution and the 1976 Constitution of socialist Cuba also contain it.¹²

In the years of first occupation the USA military government reorganized education and health service. The educational monopoly of Church was put to an end and nuns and monks were removed from public education. As a part of the reform secular education was declared and religious instruction was forbidden in state schools. Though from the 1930ies the Church protested against it several times this decree stayed in force in the whole period of the "neocolonial republic". Religious school instruction was given only in private schools.

Establishing the republic more liberal reforms were codified. Civil marriage and civil registration likewise the termination of the Church's right of disposal over cemeteries can be mentioned. These measures caused further decline in the low enough prestige of the Church and resulted financial losses as well.

So the Catholic Church has lost the old privileges of the colonial era and, moreover, her religious monopoly got to an end. The USA authorities openly supported the entering of Protestant Churches and sects. The 1943 census mentions already 20 Protestant denominations.¹³ Nowadays there are more than 50.¹⁴ In the 1950ies their congregation was estimated 200.000 people. Nowadays the number of the active Protestants in Cuba is estimated a couple of ten thousands.

At the beginning of the republican era the problem of economic independence was a special case for the Church. In the last century of the colonial era the Church was not independent economically, her possessions and estates were under Spanish Crown control, her functioning depended on government subventions and private donations.

12 See: Pichardo, Hortensia: *Documentos para la Historia de Cuba*. Vol. II., La Habana, 1979, p. 79.; *Nueva Constitución de la República de Cuba*. Luz-Hilo, 1940, p. 37.; *Constitución de la República de Cuba*. Ed. Departamento de Orientación Revolucionaria del CC del PCC. La Habana, 1976, pp. 38-39.

13 *República de Cuba*. Censo del año 1943. P. Fernandez y Cía. Habana, pp. 330-331.

14 Gonzalez, Doria: *Iglesias y Creyentes en Cuba Socialista*. Ed. Cultura Popular. La Habana, 1987, pp. 16-18.

The Act declaring the separation of State and Church prohibited government-subvention of the Churches. Theoretically the Catholic Church had to become self-supporting from her own incomes. This need gave a definite answer to the question of primacy in re-conquering the different strata of society and printed out the necessary direction of social orientation. Practically government subvention did not stop completely. The Church was regularly allotted donations not indicated in state budget. As another form of support the Cuban state undertook the obligations of the Spanish State and indemnified for the Church properties secularized in the 19th century liberal era. This case had been started by the American military government, the properties had been evaluated 2 million dollars and the Cubans payed with government securities yielding 5 percent a year.¹⁵

As a summary we can conclude that the early 20ieth century demanded from the Church a start towards transforming herself into a national institution.

The Church answered the social challenges of the new period with a comprehensive reorganisation characterized by turning towards Rome (*romanización*) and - at least at the beginning - by striving to **cubanize the Church**. In this process the Vatican established six dioceses between 1903 and 1912 in the place of the colonial two (i.e. the Archbishopric of Santiago de Cuba and the Bishopric of Habana). So a church district system corresponding with the state administration scheme was developed and stabilized. The last diocese of our time around Holguin was established by the Vatican not earlier than 1979. In 1903 Pinar del Rfo and Cienfuegos, in 1912 Camagüey and Matanzas were established. The importance of the Habana diocese was acknowledged in 1925 when Pope Pius XI. gave it the rank of Archbishopric.¹⁶ The reorganization brought about the appointment of Cuban-born priests to higher church dignities even Bishoprics in the early times of the republic.

In 1912 in spite of the slow return of Spanish clerics and the settling down of some USA resident orders the total number of priests and monks was not more

15 *Historia de Cuba*. Ed. Dirección Política de las F. A. R. La Habana, 1968, pp. 522-523.

16 ENEC, p. 39.; Leiseca, op. cit. p. 208, 212, 253.

than 371 in Cuba.¹⁷ The lack of priests and the demand to strengthen the national character urged the Church to try to make church career more attractive and to extend the training of priests. This attempt brought only very modest success and as for strengthening the national character of the Church it was in fact a failure. As late as 1955 only 133 seminarists came from a population mounting already to six million.¹⁸ The Church had been filling the gap with "Spanish import". As a consequence by the fifties Cuban Catholic Church was scarcely more than a "missionary outpost of Spain" as Margaret E. Crahan calls it.¹⁹ More than 80 percent of her staff consisted of Spaniards. The report of the Cuban bishops to the first, 1955 conference of the CELAM (Latin American Bishops Conference) contains more detailed data. According to the document, out of 220 parish priests only 95 were Cuban; out of 461 ordained monks only 30. Female orders, sisterhoods had 1872 members with 556 Cuban nuns in them. The majority of 329 monks not ordained was foreigner as well.²⁰

This structure alone prevented the Church from perceiving the country's social tensions in their true dimensions and made her identification with the people's interests weak and poor. We must not forget the fact stressed by John M. Kirk that the majority of these Spanish priests had been educated in Franco's Spain and had a world view based on the refusal of any kind of leftist thinking. In certain cases even a sympathy with the Falangist movement could be discerned. The conservatism of their education and thinking manifested itself in the conflict of Church and Revolution after 1959.²¹

17 *Stimme der Stimmlosen*. Dokumente zum Sozialen Engagement katholischer Christen in Lateinamerika. Ed. by Kersten Radzimanowski, Union Verlag, Berlin, 1983, p. 246.

18 Treto, Raúl Gómez: *La Iglesia Católica durante la Construcción del Socialismo en Cuba*. (CEHILA), Matanzas, Cuba, 1988, p. 20.

19 Crahan, Margaret E.: 'Cuba: Religion and Revolutionary Institutionalization'. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 17., Part. 2., Nov. 1985, p. 319.

20 Quoted by Treto op. cit. p. 20.

21 Kirk op. cit. p. 74.

The outlines of the Catholic strategy to win the flock back became distinct by the 1920ies, 1930ies. The Church aimed her activities mainly at the upper class bourgeoisie and the urban middle class, and brought less care to bear upon winning the lower strata of society, the industrial and agricultural workers. Big cities became the main fields of work, 85 percent of Church staff concentrated in Habana. Vast territories were left unprovided in the country, especially in the backward parts like the large provinces Las Villas and Oriente. In the lengthy interview given to Frei Betto, Fidel Castro remembers his childhood in Oriente and mentions that they had seen priests very rarely, only once a year when the time of baptizing set in.²² In the country Church presence could be felt only in those districts where the small colonial food or tobacco farmsteads had been surviving. Such traditional sphere of the Church was e.g. Pinar del Río and the major part of the province of Habana. But on the great sugar plantations which dominated the economics of the country the Church was not present for the most part. The latifundistas, the wealthy owners were often reluctant to give a few thousand pesos to promote the building of a chapel on the sugar workers' colonies while they donated hundreds of thousands for the building of luxurious Habana churches as Father Guillermo Sardiñas pointed out in an interview referring to his experiences in Las Villas.²³

The lack of the Church's physical presence had an aftermath in the rural majority's superficial identification with the values of Catholicism and even weaker identification with the Church as an institution. In the fifties the AGRUPACIÓN CATÓLICA UNIVERSITARIA, a conservative youth organization under Jesuit leadership published two surveys about the religious feelings and living conditions of the rural population. Their data, especially the shocking statistics of the living conditions, are often quoted all over the world. In this paper I use only a few index numbers concerning the state of affairs in religion.

22 Betto, Frei: *Fidel y la Religión*. Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, La Habana, 1985, p. 101.

23 Portuondo, Yolanda: *Guillermo Sardiñas. El Sacerdote Comandante*. Ed. Cultura Popular, La Habana, 1987, p. 44.

According to the 1954 survey 96.5% of those interviewed believed the existence of God and a national average of 72.5% declared themselves to be Catholics. But only 24 percent of the Catholics visited Mass regularly, 42 percent went only occasionally. 31 percent visited Church now and then in a couple of years. But very different are the index numbers characterizing the religious feelings of the rural population. In rural areas, only 52 percent of those interviewed declared themselves to be Catholics, whereas 41 percent declared themselves "indifferent" as to "religious affiliation".

Statistics slightly differ in different studies but they all show the same tendency: the very low level of practicing religion. 88-93.5 percent of rural family heads had never attended Mass. More than 53 percent of rural workers interviewed declared that they had never seen the parish priest of their district. This group included 27.3 percent of the Catholic peasants, too. 91 percent of the children were baptized but only a meagre 16 percent attained to church marriage. Only 3 or 4 percent trusted in the Church's activities to improve the conditions of agricultural workers.²⁴

The Catholic Church of the first half of the 20th century had an élitist mentality. It has been mentioned that in the "neocolonial republic" the Church regarded the upper classes of society, the leading groups of economic and political life and the urban middle class as the rock giving her a firm stand. What means were in her possession to win these circles, to gain their respect and their financial support, to influence their opinions?

School was far more important than church in this situation. From the early years of the century the network of Catholic elementary and secondary schools and colleges expanded at a good pace. The majority of them were run by monastic orders. In 1914 there were only 55 Catholic colleges in Cuba; in 1955 their number was 212 and they had 61,960 students.²⁵ It is not an overstatement that these church schools brought up and let out the social and intellectual élite of the

24 Quoted by Marimón, Mateo Jover: *"The Church" in Carmelo Mesa-Lago ed. Revolutionary Change in Cuba*. Pittsburgh, 1974, pp. 400-401.; see too Kirk: *Ante el Volcán...*, ed. cit. pp. 75-76.

25 Treto op. cit. p. 22.

country. The Jesuit schools were especially famous for the high level of education. In theory school fees were not very high. We are informed by Fidel Castro that in the early 40ies in Colegio Belén (Bethlehem College) of Habana which was regarded the most élitist college of the country, boarders payed about 50 dollars per month.²⁶ But in practice private school fees (even those of cheaper elementary schools) were inaccessible for the children of the low-income majority.

The strategical importance of education is signified by the fact that a greater percentage of church staff worked in and for it than in the parishes.

In 1955 90 percent of monks not ordained (299) were teaching and one third of ordained monks (153 out of 461) worked in education as well. In like manner education was the vital part of the activities of sisterhoods, 1167 nuns out of 1872 worked as teachers. Between 1946 and 1959 three Catholic private universities were founded by the Augustine Order, the Jesuits and the La Salle Brothers. The Saint Thomas of Villanueva University run by the Augustine Order counted ca. 1000 students coming from the wealthiest families of the country.²⁷

Reorganized congregations, religious associations, secular Catholic societies with the bulk of middle-class members became another field to gain influence. Keeping to the spirit of the social doctrine of Pope Pius XI. the majority of these organizations were active in charity work under the "New-Christianity" slogan of re-christianization society. The CABALLEROS CATÓLICOS (1925), the FEDERACIÓN DE JUVENTUDES CATÓLICAS (1928), the AGRUPACIÓN CATÓLICA UNIVERSITARIA (1931) can be mentioned. By 1943 the four sections of the ACCIÓN CATÓLICA were fully developed. By the fifties the new youth organisations specialized mainly on students and intellectuals inside the Acción Católica (JUVENTUD UNIVERSITARIA CATÓLICA, JUVENTUD ESTUDIANTIL CATÓLICA etc.).

The rich choice of church journals and periodicals served also as means to win the middle-class and the political-economical élite.²⁸

26 Betto op. cit. p. 141.

27 Treto op. cit. p. 22.; Kirk op. cit. p. 74.

28 See: Leiscea op. cit. p. 257.

The Church strategy proved to be successful in the last analysis. As John M. Kirk points out, in the fifties it was fashionable in the leading circles to be a Catholic. The major daily papers e.g. conservative *Diario de la Marina* reflected this when they started separate columns for Church news and spread Church opinion on social and cultural problems.²⁹

In the republic era the Church attached herself to the power as a "sleep partner" and only occasionally touched politics until the 40ies. She had not formed a standpoint of her own in the principal social, political, national problems intriguing the public. She kept quiet about the USA interventions, the Machado dictatorship, the suppression of the 1933-35 revolution, etc. From the 40ies the Church and the connected Catholic organizations got slowly engaged in politics, adopting the anticommunist mentality of Pope Pius XII. After World War II the Church joined the policy of Cold War, attacking above all the People's Socialist Party i.e. the communists in her statements.

The role of the Church and the Catholics in the struggle against Batista in the pre-revolutionary period is a highly controversial question. I judge most outstanding the deed of MONS. PÉREZ SERANTES, the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba who interceded personally on behalf of Fidel Castro and thus saved his life after the failure of the attack against the Moncada barracks. He was lead by humanitarian intentions not by political considerations.

The Church as institution tried to retain her neutrality and stay out of the conflict between dictator and nation even after the guerilla war broke out. But the worth of this behaviour was diminished by the widely known excellent personal relationship between Cardinal Manuel Arteaga, Archbishop of Habana, and the dictator. This fact suggested the appearance of legitimacy of Batista's rule. From the beginning of 1958 in Church circles discussions started and went on concerning the future of the country.

There were Bishops who proposed that the Church should initiate making Batista resign. This proposal was broken down by the conservatism and hesitation of the bishopric corporation. Officially the Church did nothing against Batista.

²⁹ Kirk op. cit. p. 77.

The silence of the Church, the prelates' policy of waiting reflected the uncertainties and hesitations of the middle-class which was the principal social basis of the Church but this silence can't be called the standpoint of the total of active believers. The very same middle class, the groups of socially and politically responsive intellectual youth gave the bulk of those Christians who consciously undertook the anti-Batista struggle. The majority of them took part in urban resistance but a great number took up arms and was fighting in the guerilla war. An outstanding representative of these groups was JOSÉ ANTONIO ECHEVERRÍA, the martyred Catholic leader of the fighting Habana students. Protestant FRANK PAÍS was the second man of July 26 Movement until his death in 1957. The fermentation inside the clergy can be illustrated by the example of the life of father GUILLERMO SARDIÑAS. He joined Castro's guerillas as early as 1957 and went up to the Sierra Maestra. Though he did not take up arms and he worked as army chaplain his behaviour was of great political importance and made enormous impression on public opinion. The revolutionary government acknowledged his merits by giving him the highest military rank of the day: he was promoted *comandante*. In the last phase some moderate and even politically conservative Catholic groups like that of MANUEL ARTIMÉ joined the armed fight against Batista.

Names and examples could be multiplied. Fidel Castro also acknowledged several times that Cuban Catholics had resolutely supported the case of freedom.

I put greater emphasis on the phenomenon that until 1959 ideological factors like the problem of religiousness or atheism played a secondary role in the struggle against dictatorship. Being convinced of the illegitimity of the dictatorship which had come to power by military coup, brought forth a temporary political concord among people with widely raging world views. The July 26 Movement itself was not homogenous in this aspect. It functioned as a special 'collective and collecting party' in which various ideological and political tendencies were living together in the years of struggle. Differentiation and separation showed themselves only after the victory in the debates about the new social and political order.

The best known and elaborated phase of the history of Cuban Catholicism has been the last three decades. It seems pointless in this short paper to repeat facts

and events exposed and surveyed by others. In the conclusion I point out only some relevant tendencies and connections of the subject.

The period is marked by the painful proceeding from conflict to the beginning of dialogue in the relationship of Church and a State based on socialist-communist principles. In his objective and factual book - *La Iglesia Católica durante la Construcción del Socialismo en Cuba* - Cuban Catholic author RAÚL GÓMEZ TRETO distinguishes five inner phases in the course of shaping Church and State relationship: dissension (1959-60), confrontation (1961-62), evasion (1963-67), encounter (1968-69) and dialogue (1979-85).³⁰ Other authors use basically similar periodisations though slight differences can be discerned as well.

According to Mateo Jover Marimón, the Church opened towards dialogue as early as 1969.³¹ John M. Kirk holds the view that 1969 witnessed only "Emerging from Cocoon" and the Church got from 'Modus vivendi to Dialogue' between 1980-85.³²

Whatever periodisation is applied the role and position of Church was decided and defined by the confrontation of the first years. Dominated by pre-Synod mentality the Church was prepared neither politically nor intellectually for the radical and rapid social and political changes developing from the beginning of 1959. In this situation her leaders made a strategical mistake when in spite of lacking program and proper political experience and miscalculating their power and social influence they undertook to act on behalf of the desorganized bourgeoisie. The full growth of the conflict was urged by the bishops anticipating communist danger - which after all proved to be true - in their declarations and pastoral letters.³³ Some believers and clerics used not only intellectual weapons but changed churches, schools, church buildings and other institutions in general

30 Treto op. cit. p. 26.

31 Marimón op. cit. p. 403.

32 Kirk, John M.: *'Between God and the Party. The Church in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1985.'* *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*. Vol. XI. No. 21 (1986), pp. 93-109.

33 E.g. the "Pastoral Letter from the Cuban Episcopate" of August 7, 1960, criticized the rise of communism in Cuba. Quoted by Treto op. cit. pp. 35-37.

into stages of political conspiracy. On this account Catholics on the whole became suspected of being counter-revolutionaries and the revolutionary government, shifting rapidly leftwards, naturally took repressive measures. In the days of the Playa Girón (Bay of Pigs) invasion the security forces occupied church buildings and executed preventive arrestments. In summer 1961 the nationalisation of private schools struck a heavy blow on the mental influence of the Church and on her finances as well. The conflict culminated in September 1961 when the government sent a bishop and 131 priests into exile. Later several clerics were imprisoned charged with counter-revolutionary activities.³⁴

The period of confrontation was not a conflict of faith and atheism. It was a definitely political antagonism in which the social conservatism and dogmatic anticommunism of Church faced the improvised church policy of revolutionary intransigence. As an outcome the Church lost her social positions built up in the former decades. In a short time the majority of active believers and supporters emigrated. The bourgeoisie as social basis proved to be quicksand instead of firm rock. The emigration of the masses of foreign priests and monks endangered even the normal everyday functions of the Church. The majority (460 persons) chose voluntary emigration instead of keeping the priest's calling in the difficult situation. The total number of clergy had stabilized by the mid-sixties a little above 200. A similar number of social-worker nuns (nursing elderly and sickly people) had stayed in the country.

In the period of confrontation Cuban Catholic Church was being tempted by the hamartia of Greek tragedies. Her tragic flaw was to have secular aims completely differing from and even opposing to the short-distance interests of the people, her true potential basis.

Since the 1959 Revolution both Church and Cuban reality have undergone considerable changes. There has developed a society with basically atheist education and monolithic political structure but with the surviving presence of Christian traditions and cultural values. Focusing on the idea of moral responsibility for progress the Church has been re-formulating the principles of her social mission

34 Treto op. cit. p. 48., pp. 58-59.

from the early-seventies. Two pastoral letters of the Bishops' Conference signified the opening in 1969 ("Cuban Bishops Call for End of Trade Blockade", "On Contemporary Atheism") while the climax set in with the mentality embodied in the Final Document of 1986 National Church Encounter (ENCUENTRO NACIONAL ECLESIAL CUBANO). This important document leaves no doubt that the Church has revised her historical role, had adopted the main Latin-American results of the Catholic *aggiornamento* and as a supporter and mild critic of socialist development she won respect in spite of the small member of believers, estimated 75-100 thousand in the 80ies.

The consolidation of her prestige has been supported by the strengthening of Latin-American Catholic progressives, which from the late 70ies several times has prompted Cuban party leadership propound the possibility of strategical alliance between communists and Christians.³⁵

But in Cuba herself achieving such a "new tie" - as suggested by the Final Document of the ENEC as well - demands a lengthy dialogue and the settlement of unsolved problems.

35 See e.g.: *Programa del Partido Comunista de Cuba*. Ed. Política, La Habana, 1986, p. 187.; *Resoluciones Aprobados por el II Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba*. Ed. Política, 1981, p. 57.; Betto op. cit., etc.

AZ EGYHÁZ ÉS A TÁRSADALMI KIHÍVÁSOK A MODERN KUBÁBAN

A tanulmány azokat a főbb társadalmi kihívásokat tekinti át, elemzi, amelyekkel a katolikus egyháznak szembe kellett néznie a "modern időkben": a 19. sz. második felétől napjainkig. Megállapítja, hogy az egyház befolyásának csökkenése és a vallás térvesztése nem pusztán az 1959-es forradalom következménye. Kuba a 20. században Latin-Amerika legkevésbé vallásos országa.

Ennek egyik fő oka, hogy a 19. sz. második felében a gyarmati egyház a spanyol érdekekkel azonosult, elutasította a függetlenségi törekvéseket. A századfordulón, a függetlenség elnyerése idején sokan elfordultak az egyháztól, mint "idegen" intézménytől. Az egyház térvesztésének másik alapvető oka, hogy nem tudott megfelelni annak a kihívásnak, amit a rabszolgák evangelizálása vetett fel, tovább éltek az afrikai kultuszok, illetve katolikus elemekkel átszőtt szinkretikus vallásosság alakult ki, amely ma is jellemzi a lakosság tekintélyes hányadát.

Az ún. "újgyarmati köztársaság" évtizedeiben az egyház a középrétegeket tekintette fő bázisának, befolyását elsősorban a magániskolák, a világi katolikus egyletek és a katolikus sajtó révén növelte. "Elfeledkezett" viszont a lakosság döntő többségét alkotó szegényekről, különösen a vidék szegényeiről.

A legnagyobb kihívás századunkban az 1959-es forradalmat követő gyors társadalmi és politikai átalakulás volt az egyház számára, amellyel múltja és Zsinat előtti konzervativizmusa miatt képtelen volt azonosulni. Az állam és az egyház közötti konfliktus a hatvanas évek elején működési terének, befolyásának beszűkülését eredményezte. A ma egyháza nehéz körülmények között, és fájdalmas tapasztalatok árán jutott el társadalmi szerepének újrafogalmazásához.