

# The Church and the Critical Left in Cuba

Tuesday 16 April 2013, by [FARBBER Samuel](#) (Date first published: 1 November 2013).

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The influence of the Catholic Church in Cuba is growing, a recent and unanticipated development. Why? Has there been a big religious revival that has filled the Church pews? Not really. So, if there has not been a major increase in Catholic religiosity, why has the Catholic Church become important? For entirely political reasons. In contrast with the sometimes open warfare that existed, in the sixties, between the Catholic hierarchy and the revolutionary leadership, the relationship has evolved in recent years into a growing partnership. Thus, the Cuban Communist leadership welcomed the Church and the Spanish government's participation in the negotiations leading to the release, in 2010 and 2011, of most long-term Cuban political prisoners. During the same period, Cardinal Jaime Ortega Alamino, the head of the Cuban hierarchy, traveled to the United States and Europe to act as an unofficial diplomatic bridge between the Cuban government and Washington as well as with the European Union. In return, the Cuban Catholic hierarchy has obtained a substantial number of institutional concessions from the Cuban government. Most have involved the discretionary concession of rights that would be taken for granted in any democratic polity, such as organizing a nation-wide religious procession in honor of the Virgin de la Caridad del Cobre. The Cuban government has allowed the Catholic Church to establish twelve websites and seven electronic bulletins and, more important in light of the limited access to the Internet in the island, to publish dozens of small parish and group publications and forty-six bulletins and magazines that reach about a quarter of a million people directly or indirectly. [1] Although of limited circulation — well below 5 percent of the adult population — these publications constitute the one significant exception to the Cuban government's monopoly of the media in the island. The government has also granted corporate concessions to the Church, such as providing material help for the construction of the new Catholic seminary near Havana. The inauguration of the new seminary was attended by Raúl Castro and other high-ranking dignitaries, and Cardinal Ortega publicly expressed his gratitude to the Cuban government for its contribution. [2]

## The Church as Mediating Reformist Agent

The growing political influence of the Catholic hierarchy can, in part, be attributed to the shift that it made from being a critic of the government - even if mild, cautious, and reformist - to becoming more of a mediating reformist agent between the Cuban government and forces opposed to it, be it Cuban dissident groups or foreign imperialist governments and, in a sense, with discontented elements of the population at large. The Catholic hierarchy, with the support of the Vatican, has had much to gain by this shift, as demonstrated by the concessions it has obtained. It is less clear, however, what the Cuban government has gained from having encouraged the Church into becoming an important, if not yet central, role player in the island's politics. Cuba is not Poland, and Cuban Catholicism has been, even before the 1959 Revolution, among the weakest in Latin

America. [3] Clearly, the government had no need to accommodate the Church because of its growing popularity in the island. Instead, Raúl Castro has chosen the Church as a negotiating partner to implement his foreign policy designs, and he has done so because the Church is an established Cuban institution that is simultaneously part of an influential international organization. In addition, while it cannot be said that the Church enjoys overwhelming popular support, it does have a certain degree of moral authority that the government may attempt to harness to buttress its own power, as the political support for the regime declines, especially after both Castro brothers - Fidel being 86 and Raúl 81 - inevitably pass from the scene.

The Catholic hierarchy's newly acquired role as reformist mediator has important consequences. It means, first of all, that the Church has to "split the difference" between the political premises of both the government and the opposition. But the opposition is very weak in Cuba. There is no underground movement fighting the government - the punishment administered by U.S. imperialism to Cuba is an entirely different matter - much less a mass opposition movement in the style of Polish Solidarnosc. The moderate and right wing dissidents and the nascent critical democratic left are weak. The Church is, in a certain sense, filling a vacuum, although the clearly unbalanced relation of forces sometimes pressures the hierarchy to incline itself somewhat more in the direction of the government. Cardinal Ortega's speech at Harvard University in April of 2012, attacking the dissidents who occupied a Havana church as delinquents and even as mentally unbalanced people, may have reflected, at the very least, a lapse in judgment, but it also reflected the structurally unbalanced equation of the power relations just mentioned. It is very telling that well before the Harvard incident, the Cuban Catholic hierarchy had already disciplined and isolated its more militant priests, like José Conrado Rodríguez, and laymen like Dagoberto Valdés, who dared to go beyond the hierarchy's very mild and diplomatic criticisms of the government's dictatorial practices. The sudden death of Catholic dissident Oswaldo Payá, perhaps the best-known dissident in the island, who often sharply criticized the conciliatory politics of the hierarchy, will help to cement the hierarchy's hegemony and marginalize the broad dissident camp, especially its Catholic sector.

It seems that for the Cuban Catholic hierarchy, supported by the Vatican, tactical collaboration with the Cuban government is part of a patient, long-term strategy to exert its influence in the context of a decaying regime, and to play an important role in shaping the agenda of a transition. In 2011, the government allowed the Catholic Church to open the Félix Varela Cultural Center, one of the very few public spaces where critics and opponents of the government can publicly express their views. The Center has embarked on a quiet but very ambitious and multi-faceted program of activities which, if allowed to go on without government harassment, is bound to greatly increase Catholic influence, particularly in light of the absence of any significant political and ideological competition outside, of course, the overwhelming apparatus of the ruling Communist Party and its official mass organizations.

The Félix Varela Cultural Center has been dedicated to influence Cuban society and politics, and the future Cuban transition, in certain specific directions. The Center has committed itself to the training of self-employed workers and is host to a Masters' of Business Administration program run in association with the Catholic University of Murcia (Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia - UCAM) in Spain. Father Yosvany Carvajal, the director of the Center, was quoted as saying that "Today businessmen are viewed as contributing to society and the economy, but with what tools? We are going to provide those tools...how to start and run a business, marketing and the like." [4] The curriculum for the MBA degree, focused on medium, small, and micro-enterprises, [5] seems to accurately reflect Father Carvajal's ambitions. Its Master's Program for Enterprise Management for the 2012-2013 academic year is structured around the following subject matters: Economic Environment; Marketing; Organizational Behavior; Enterprise and Strategy; Organization of Production; Business Ethics; Economics of Finance and Accounting; Master Degree's Final

Paper. [6]

The Center is not simply planning to intervene in the “practical” world of business education, which of course has an overarching ideological component involving an implicit, if not explicit, view on political economy. It also seeks to provide instruction in humanistic and explicitly value oriented fields, as Father Carvajal was further quoted to the effect that “the MBA is just the first course [that] the centre’s new Institute for Ecclesiastic Studies will offer, mainly in the humanities and theology, for example psychology, in conjunction with foreign universities and Cuban professors.” [7] He even expects to grant, with the authorization of the Congregation for Catholic Education, degrees in higher education equivalent to those of any European university. [8] It is worth noting that Father Carvajal said nothing about the Cuban government having a say regarding those degrees.

The journal *Espacio Laical*, previously the organ of the Lay Council of the Archdiocese of Havana, and as of January 1, 2012, an official project of the Center, announced the creation of the Laboratorio Casa Cuba, designed to carry out social and juridical research that will place a special emphasis “on the most relevant aspects related to the necessary updating of the models of socio-political management in our country.” [9] As its first activity, the Laboratorio initiated a course on “The Cuban Constitution: past, present and future.” Coated in an academic tone and content, the course outline nevertheless deals with a number of politically controversial issues, such as exploring what is and is not democratic in the Cuban electoral system, and with the Laboratorio presenting “proposals for democratization.” [10]

These projects and activities are oriented by an overall political philosophy and strategy that clearly defines the Cuban Church as a reforming and negotiating mediator rather than an even moderate opponent of the regime. In what portends to be a major document, in the sense of reflecting the politics of the Church in the present conjuncture, Lenier González Mederos, the deputy editor of *Espacio Laical*, clearly rejects the position of the critics who want Cardinal Ortega to adopt “a ‘hard’ posture towards the Cuban government... and to insert the Church in the reproduction of a political logic based on the annihilation of the ‘other.’” [11] González Mederos insists that it is the spirit of political realism and pragmatism that made possible for a consensus to develop between the government and the Church thereby transforming certain areas of conflict such as religious freedom and the defense of national sovereignty, into areas of cooperation. [12] In the process, argues González Mederos, spaces have been gained for the expansion of freedom of expression, assembly, and religion without their becoming associated with a logic of internal destabilization. The deputy editor of *Espacio Laical* ends by expressing his hope that “a reinvention of Cuban socialism” is not to be limited to the achievement of economic efficiency, as suggested by Marino Murillo, the Minister of Planning and Economy, but that it also will welcome and integrate “the growing plurality of Cuban society.” [13] This, according to the document, clearly implies a proposal for the radical redesign of state institutions and of the current architecture of the Cuban Communist Party so it can effectively welcome into its ranks all of the country’s diversity, although it is very telling that it does not say a word about abolishing the one-party state. [14]. Yet, González Mederos tries to exercise some pressure when he expresses concern that time might be running out for the country’s current leaders, headed by Raúl Castro, to facilitate an “orderly and gradual transformation of the Cuban system.” [15]

At a higher level of abstraction, González Mederos advocates a Catholic nationalism where the Church, instead of aiming at getting secular power — which would place it in absolute opposition to the government — chooses to join with all Cubans, regardless of their ideology and religion, in the double path of “personal transformation” and the dream of building a Fatherland “for all and for the good of all.” This Catholic nationalism envisions the nation as a house - CASA CUBA - where the fraternity among its dwellers signifies the elimination of all types of exclusion, thereby rescuing a communitarian sense for the nation. [16] One could say that is how the nation would be converted

into a true home. In this new national cosmos, supporters of the revolution at home and exiled Cubans abroad would have at least the possibility of recognizing themselves as part of a unique and indivisible whole. [17] The Catholic theoretician fails, however, to explain how his construction of a single national Cuban community could concretely overcome sharp differences in political, class, and racially based power.

To historically legitimate this Catholic Nationalism, Father Yosvany Carvajal, the director of the Félix Varela Cultural Center, asks the Cuban people to accept a highly distorted account of Cuban history under Spanish colonial rule and of the role that Catholicism played in it. Eliding the difference between the cultural formation of a nation and the struggle for political independence, Father Carvajal claims that the Catholic Seminary of San Carlos and San Ambrosio (in whose original building the Félix Varela Cultural Center is presently located) was the birthplace of Cuba as a nation, an idea that according to Carvajal was originally conceived by Catholic priests. [18] Father Félix Varela, who was himself a product of the Seminary, is justifiably put forward as a Cuban Catholic hero for his role in the development of pro-independence sentiment during the first half of the nineteenth century, although Father Varela developed his pro-independence ideas while he was an exile in the United States and not in the Seminary. Neither Father Carvajal nor any other Catholic spokesperson has acknowledged the Catholic hierarchy's militant support for Spanish rule, particularly during the last War of Independence (1895-1898). [19] One cannot help but notice the similarity of this historical whitewashing with another major example of a highly distorted redefinition of history: Fidel Castro's attempt to convert Cuba's Founding Father José Martí (1853-1895) into an advocate of the one-party state and through this into a precursor of his own rule.

What is the upside and the downside of the Catholic hierarchy's mediation role? It is undeniable that the new relationship between the hierarchy and the government, particularly since Raúl Castro assumed power, has led to some improvements in the political climate. The release of most long-term political prisoners has clearly been one of those improvements. Perhaps a more substantial long-term gain emerging from that new relationship is the opening of some spaces for a substantially broader political debate than had been previously possible in liberal Communist social science organs, such as the journal *Temas*, whether in the Félix Varela Cultural Center itself or through Catholic publications such as *Espacio Laical*. This, in turn, has likely led to a higher degree of political relaxation, particularly for artists and intellectuals, although the new government policy of large-scale but short-term arrests of dissidents has put this into question. Many right-wing dissidents disdain any political relaxation that may reduce the rationale, false as it is, for U.S. aggression, which is in fact their preferred vehicle to attain their political goals. But for left critics and left opponents of the regime, political relaxation and the creation of more spaces for a freer discussion can facilitate the emerging of democratic movements from below that can help bring about a real political and economic democratization of Cuban society.

At the same time, it is in connection with the potential emergence of such democratic movements from below that the current collaboration of the Catholic hierarchy with the government may become an obstacle. First of all, because the Church, in exchange for its negotiating relationship with the government, has explicitly accepted clear boundaries to its own political positions, which include an at least implied commitment to the government's permanence. Second, because as part of the Church-government relationship, the hierarchy has been able to obtain institutional concessions likely to incline the Church against taking any risk. The Polish Catholic Church before and after the emergence of the Solidarnosc movement in 1980 offers a good lesson in this context. By the 1970s, the Polish Catholic Church had established a satisfactory *modus vivendi* with the Communist government of Edward Gierek. Contrary to a widely accepted myth, when shipyard workers on the Baltic Coast went on strike in August 1980 demanding the right to form independent trade unions,

Primate Cardinal Wyszynski urged them to go back to work without having won their demands. Although liberal Catholic intellectuals, like Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Jerzy Turowicz, actively supported the strikes, the Church as a whole largely kept its distance. Later, after Solidarnosc was founded, the Church did support it, but remained wary of the radical democratic spirit that inspired it at that time. [20] It is not far fetched to assume that the Cuban hierarchy would react in a similar fashion to any comparable movement in Cuba, especially when it has already made clear that its conciliatory approach is incompatible with any clear opposition to the regime.

## **Future Perspectives**

Although the Cuban Church does not have either the deep nationalist roots or the popular support enjoyed by the Polish Church at the time of the Solidarnosc movement in the eighties, it does have the great advantage of being the only really important established Cuban institution outside of the state sphere. Its institutional strength and its negotiations with Raúl Castro's government has allowed it to gain significant ground, which may place it in a particularly favorable position, in the context of a Cuban post-Communist transition, to "send a bill" to the Cuban people to collect on its past services on behalf of reform. The Church may not be strong enough by then to make a pitch for political power through the mechanism of a Christian Democratic Party, although such a party already exists in exile and is bound to obtain some support when it is established in the island. But what is more likely is the prospect of the Church pressing for, and obtaining, restrictions of existing social rights.

Cardinal Ortega's socially conservative views are well known. In his pastoral letter of February 25, 2003, the Cardinal claimed, in the absence of any factual or scientific basis, that "experience demonstrates that sex, alcohol and drugs are dangerously intertwined." [21] Several years later, Ortega lamented the moral decadence of Cuban society in more general terms. Once again mixing up different issues, he denounced "the unbridled sexual life, the lack of social engagement, the deafening music disregarding neighbors, the abuse of alcoholic beverages, or the murder of a priest in order to steal from him," (an allusion to the killing of a Spanish priest in July 2009.) [22] The Catholic Church also vigorously objected to several activities by the CENESEX (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual) led by Mariela Castro Espín, a daughter of Raúl Castro, as well as to the broadcast on Cuban television of *Brokeback Mountain*. The Catholic Diocese of Havana issued a scathing denunciation of what it saw as the government's campaign to promote homosexuality, transsexualism and "sexual diversity." [23]

The Catholic Church has historically also expressed its opposition to divorce and, especially, to abortion. Legal divorce was established in Cuba in 1918, many decades before the Cuban Revolution. Because of its deep historical roots in the island, it is very unlikely that the Church would choose to campaign on that issue in the future, although it cannot be ruled out that the Church may advocate some restrictions to the current ease with which divorces can be obtained. Abortion was widely practiced in the island, although it was formally illegal and occasionally prosecuted by the authorities until 1965, when the revolutionary government, for unknown reasons, decided to allow it. As in many other Communist countries, abortion has been used as a method of birth control given the irregular availability of birth control and inadequate sexual education. It reached its highest point of 97 abortions per 100 births in 1986, [24] and then it declined to 52.5 in 2004, [25] although this is still a high figure by international standards. Abortion is clearly not a preferred method of birth control, which makes it vulnerable to Catholic attack.

Although agitation over social issues such as these has not been at the center of the Cuban Church's current concerns, that could likely change in a post-Communist transition. The example of the Polish

Church is instructive in this regard too, because in spite of its different historical roots and degree of influence on the population, it shows a common method of political intervention that Catholic hierarchies have pursued aimed to have their social agenda implemented through the mechanism of government action to affect the entire population, not only Catholic believers. Thus, shortly after the collapse of Polish Communism, the Polish Church pressured Prime Minister Mazowiecki's first non-Communist government to agree to its request for the reintroduction of Catholic education classes in public schools and for very substantial administrative restrictions on abortion rights. Catering to the Church's preference, the government carried out these measures without public discussion or a parliamentary vote (legislation covering the whole area of abortion was brought before Parliament only later.) [26]

### **The Nascent Alternative Hegemony of the Catholic Church**

The Catholic Church is quickly filling the spaces granted to it by the Cuban government, and is implementing a project to establish its ideological and political hegemony, alternative but not counter to the hegemony of the state, through its activities at the Félix Varela Cultural Center and its various publications. The Church's hegemonic efforts are greatly facilitated, as suggested earlier, by the weaknesses of the moderate and right wing dissidents and of the nascent critical and independent left.

These leftists find themselves in an unenviable position. They depend, to a degree, on the spaces provided by a Catholic Church that does not share their fundamental values and that might sooner or later turn against them. What happened in Poland is instructive in this context. In the seventies and eighties critical leftists in that country confronted a situation that had several elements in common with the current Cuban situation. This included a Communist government that had reached a modus vivendi with the Catholic hierarchy, although perhaps not to the same degree as in present day Cuba, and a nascent critical left that had broken with Communism and had to figure out its own attitude towards the Church. It was in this context that Adam Michnik, who was to become a leader of Solidarnosc, the movement that eventually brought down Communism in Poland, published an influential book on the subject of the Polish left and the Church in 1975-76. [27] Born in 1946 to veteran Jewish Communist parents, Michnik grew up in a leftist milieu critical of the Communist authorities. He was much affected by the 1968 events in Poland, where the student protests were not only physically repressed but led the government to engage in a campaign against the intelligentsia that included jailing students, firing professors, and blaming the trouble on Jews, forcing most of them to leave Poland. The events of that year showed the Communist Party drawing on Fascist repressive traditions while sectors in the Catholic Church went all the way out to defend the students. Afterwards, authors that were banned by the government, many of them Jewish, could only publish in the Catholic press. While sitting in a prison as a result of his involvement in the 1968 events, Michnik began to revise his political ideas about the Church, which he eventually articulated in his *The Church and the Left*, where he proposes a dialogue between the secular left and the Church, which according to David Ost, an expert on Polish affairs, was to "mediate differences... accepting the truth on both sides... [and] work toward a common goal." [28]

Michnik's acknowledgment of the contributions of the Polish Catholic Church in the context of Polish Communist repression is as understandable as the attitude of Cuban critical leftists who, today, find a space inside Catholic institutions. However, Michnik's notion of dialogue with the Church turned into a virtual surrender to that institution. In his book, he rejects what he describes as the left's traditional unqualified hostility to the Catholic Church, and affirms that the enemy of the left is not the Church but totalitarianism, [29] and "that the old distinctions [left vs. religion], formed in conditions of bourgeois democracy, are now obsolete." [30] Michnik's change towards the Church

assumes a political method suggesting that there can be only one political enemy at a time. This is an old pragmatic political approach preceding Michnik, which has a close affinity with notions such as “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” It ignores the fact that the manner in which struggles against oppression are conducted one day has a great influence on future political outcomes. Thus, while it is certainly true that an oppressive state, Communist or otherwise, is the principal enemy to an active opposition and resistance, this opposition movement can compromise its central goals by how it relates to other present and potential oppressors. It is ironic that while Michnik criticizes and distrusts the international Communist movement, and accuses them of following the maxim attributed to Montalembert: “When weak I will demand freedom from you, for that is your principle; when strong I will take freedom from you, for that is my principle,” [31] he does not even entertain the idea that the same may also be applicable to the Polish Catholic hierarchy.

And so, Michnik goes on to justify the teaching of religion in the public schools arguing that because the prohibition of public religious teaching was a first step, by Communism in power, to completely abolish the religious training of youth. He also defended the Church’s call on the Polish people to refrain from reading atheistic books, because it was a way to refuse to participate in the official public life of the totalitarian state. [32] In a critique of the Enlightenment traditions of the left, Michnik criticizes as arrogant those who “know the true path of progress and reason,” and claimed that the “implementation of such plans for the New Order and the Kingdom of Progress necessarily lead to contempt for people, to the use of force, and to moral self-destruction.” [33]

In the late eighties, however, Michnik modified his views, distancing himself from the Catholic Church and going so far as to warn that the “Iranization” of Poland had become a distinct possibility. [34] Given that Michnik’s virtual surrender to the Church did not work out, and that in fact contributed to the Church’s hegemony, what can the critical independent left in the island turn to in order to rethink the relationship with the Church?

In a democratic society, the Catholic Church should be considered like other religious, political, and civic organizations and groups and enjoy the same rights as they do. The fact that Catholicism has historically been the most important religion in Cuba, and that even today it has more followers than any other single religion, does not entitle the Catholic Church to any privileges or special standing in the public realm. If, like any other organization, the church, instead of remaining in the purely spiritual realm, makes pronouncements on controversial public policy matters joining the fray of political conflict, it becomes a legitimate target of those who disagree with its public positions, especially if the Catholic Church attempts to impose on society at large norms and rules that it would otherwise have the right to ask its own members to voluntarily observe (like to avoid the use of contraceptives and the practice of abortion.)

The Cuban government has granted concessions to the Catholic Church, but the Catholic Church, like any other institution in the island, has no legal or political rights that the government is obliged to respect. A democratic approach involves converting practically all the concessions [35] that the Church has obtained from the government into religious, social and political rights like the right to organize religious processions, to train future priests and nuns, and ministering to prisoners (a concession that was granted to all religious denominations in 2009). Like any other significant non-state associations, the Church hierarchy is also entitled to a “systematic space” in the mass media, a demand from the Church that the Cuban government has so far refused to grant.

Far more problematic from a democratic point of view are the Church’s demands involving the religious education of children. This demand can mean a number of quite different things. It can refer to the provision of religious education to children in facilities owned by the Catholic Church during vacations, weekends, or after public school sessions, to which there can be no possible objection from a democratic point of view. But it can also mean the establishment of religious

schools as an alternative to public schools based primarily on the argument that parents alone should decide on the education their children receive. This is premised on an exclusively liberal individualistic perspective that excludes any consideration of the critical role that a democratic public education (not that of the present one-party state) can play in shaping the new generation and society as a whole. It also ignores the role of public education in terms of social integration and the promotion of class and racial equality.

Full time private religious and secular schools were common and accepted “facts of life” in the class and racially segregated education of pre-revolutionary Cuba. They were, in fact, the training ground for the upper class and an important part of the middle classes. But the Cuban Catholic hierarchy was not satisfied with the situation, and throughout the history of the Cuban Republic (1902-1958) repeatedly and unsuccessfully lobbied for the teaching of religion in the public schools. Even shortly after the victory of the revolution, Archbishop Enrique Pérez Serantes of Santiago de Cuba attempted, without success, to persuade Fidel Castro (whose life he helped to save after the unsuccessful attack on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953) about the virtues of teaching religion in Cuba’s public schools. [36] So far, the Catholic hierarchy has been rather coy about this issue. However, Orlando Márquez, the official spokesperson for Cardinal Ortega, recently advocated for private religious education on a number of grounds including the savings it would create for the government. At the same time, he tactically conceded to the possibility, already being implemented in at least one Cuban church, of imparting Catholic education as a complement to, but not as a substitute for public education. [37]

Besides religious education, there are a number of other areas that portend considerable friction between the critical left and the Catholic Church in the future. The first involves the strict separation of church and state that has been under attack all over the world. Article 35 of the respected Cuban Constitution of 1940 unambiguously stated that “the Church shall be separate from the State, which cannot subsidize any cult.” [38] Will the Cuban Catholic Church respect that strict separation? There is also the matter of marriage. Historically, the left has viewed marriage as a voluntary union from which either partner should be able to withdraw without facing undue legal obstacles, except for the provision of maximum financial and other kinds of protection for women and children. Sexual freedom is another area of likely conflict including the rights of LGBT people to be married and adopt children. Abortion is clearly going to be an arena of contention. Today’s left demands abortion available on demand and without charge, but not as a substitute for the irregular availability of contraceptive methods and the inadequacy, and even absence of sexual education. [39] Other issues important to the left today include the notion that scientific activities should be informed by ethical and humanistic concerns but not be blocked by religious considerations, as in the case of stem cell research. [40] Government censorship is another area of potential discord where the critical democratic left seeks its abolition whether on the grounds of political content or of artistic expression, which may be regarded as pornographic by the Church. [41]

There is no reason for the nascent critical and democratic left to avoid friendly and constructive dialogue with Catholic rank and file parishioners and with progressive Catholic intellectuals, who agree that a truly democratic society means that they have no right to impose their beliefs and practices on others. This dialogue does not require that any of the sides adopt the liberal relativistic attitude “that all beliefs and practices are equally valid” since if people did not believe that their beliefs are more valid they would not hold them. In addition, this dialogue is not to be construed as an exercise in bargaining where one part gives up a little so the other can also give up a little. Instead, it is an exercise in mutually respectful persuasion, which may or may not lead to agreement or to the successful persuasion of one side by the other. But this process of articulating reasoned arguments to try to persuade the opposite party can lead to clarifying and distinguishing



misunderstandings from real disagreements, thus making it possible to collaborate on areas of real agreement. In the end, the true test will be whether progressive Catholics end up joining with the critical democratic left in any movement that may develop in the island in pursuit of a truly democratic socialism.

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**P.S.**

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\* The original Spanish language version of this article was published in Nueva Sociedad, 242, Nov.-Dec., 2012.

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**Footnotes**

[1] Gustavo Andújar, "Medios católicos en Cuba son distintos pero no ajenos," interview by Patricia Grogg, Cuba a la Mano, Oct. 14, 2010.

[2] Anneris Ivette Leyva, "Asiste Raúl a la inauguración de la nueva sede del Seminario San Carlos y San Ambrosio," Diario Granma 14, no. 309, Nov. 4, 2010).

[3] For some telling figures showing the weakness of pre-revolutionary Cuban Catholicism see Jorge Domínguez, "International and National Aspects of the Catholic Church in Cuba," Cuban Studies 19, 1989, 45-46

[4] Marc Frank, Reuters, Oct. 4, 2011.

[5] Yarelis Rico Hernández, "La Iglesia siempre tendrá algo que decir y algo que aportar," interview with Father Yosvany Carvajal, Palabra Nueva, julio-agosto 2012, 3.

[6] [espaciolaical arquidiocesisdelahabana.org] Suplemento digital No. 194 (June 2012) Convocatoria de la II Edición del título propio de la UCAM-Máster en Dirección de Empresas (MBA) en La Habana.

[7] Marc Frank, Reuters, Oct. 4, 2011.

[8] Yarelis Rico Hernández, "La Iglesia siempre tendrá algo que decir y algo que aportar," 3.

[9] "La revista Espacio Laical crea el Laboratorio Casa Cuba," Suplemento Digital. Espacio Laical. Arquidiócesis de la Habana, No. 190, June 2012.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Lenier González Mederos, "Iglesia Católica y nacionalismo: los retos tras la visita del papa Benedicto XVI", Suplemento Digital. Espacio Laical. Arquidiócesis de la Habana, No. 177, May

2012, 1.

[12] Ibid., 2.

[13] Ibid., 2.

[14] Ibid., 4

[15] Ibid., 1.

[16] Ibid., 4.

[17] Ibid., 4.

[18] Yarelis Rico Hernández, “La Iglesia siempre tendrá algo que decir y algo que aportar,” 3.

[19] See, for example, the historical study by Rigoberto Segreo Ricardo, *Iglesia y Nación en Cuba, 1868-1898*, Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2010.

[20] See David Ost’s Introduction to Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left*, edited, translated and with an Introduction by David Ost. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 17-18.

[21] “‘No hay patria sin virtud’: Carta pastoral del eminentísimo señor Cardenal Jaime Ortega y Alamino en el 150 aniversario de la muerte del Padre Félix Varela” *Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana* 28/29 (verano/otoño 2003): 101.

[22] “El cardenal Ortega lamenta el ‘estado decadente’ de la sociedad” *cubaencuentro*, 9 septiembre 2009, [www.cubaencuentro.com](http://www.cubaencuentro.com)

[23] Matthew Cullinan Hoffman, “Diocese of Havana denounces Cuban Government’s Promotion of Homosexuality,” *LifeSiteNews.com*, June 24, 2008

[24] María Elena Benítez Pérez, *La familia Cubana en la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Cambios sociodemográficos*, La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2003, 88.

[25] Dalia Acosta, “Health-Cuba: Abortion Competes with Contraceptives,” *IPS*, June 1, 2006.

[26] David Ost’s Introduction to Adam Michnik, 26

[27] Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left*.

[28] Ibid., 5.

[29] Ibid., 182.

[30] Ibid., 186.

[31] Ibid., 192.

[32] Ibid., 61.

[33] Ibid., 128. Michnik's emphasis.

[34] David Ost's Introduction to Adam Michnik, 16-17.

[35] The material aid that the State provided to the Church to build a new seminary is a concession that cannot be considered a democratic right. Although such help could be seen as a violation of the separation of Church and State, it could also be understood as just compensation, in a transitional period, for the many years that the State deprived the Church of its rights such as proselytizing new Catholics and training new priests.

[36] De Paz Sánchez, Manuel, *Franco y Cuba: Estudios sobre España y la Revolución*. Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands: Ediciones Idea, 2006, 160.

[37] Orlando Márquez Hidalgo, "La Iglesia Como Puente de Acercamiento", *Suplemento Digital Espacio Laical Arquidiócesis de la Habana*, (July 2012, No. 195), 13.

[38] It is worth noting in this context that the recently deceased prominent Catholic dissident Oswaldo Payá did not uphold the constitutionally mandated separation of Church and State in his very detailed proposals for a transition program in Cuba. See the discussion of this issue in my recently published book *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959. A Critical Assessment*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011, 240-241.

[39] For a very informative source on the serious deficiencies of Cuban Communism in both of these areas during the seventies and eighties, see the account by Cuba's pioneering sexual educator Monika Krause-Fuchs, *Monika y la Revolución: Una mirada singular sobre la historia reciente de Cuba*. Tenerife, Canary Islands: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 2002.

[40] This reference is missing in the original.

[41] Oswaldo Payá also advocated the discouragement and elimination of pornography, which would of course entail widespread and cultural censorship. Ibid., part 2, programa, chapter IX, introduction.