

Liberty University

School of Music

**The Phenomenological Effects of Fidel Castro's
Communist Revolution on the Christian Church in Cuba**

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the School of Music
in Candidacy for the Degree of
MA in Music and Worship

by

Daniel Orama

Lynchburg, VA

August, 2024

Abstract

The claims that religious freedom in Cuba can coexist alongside the Communist, Marxist, Socialist regime without hindrance contradicts the Word of God and eyewitness testimonies of those who serve in the Cuban Christian church. Church pastors in Cuba often suffer imprisonment as long as twenty years before being allowed to return to their homes and communities. This study regains the views of countless pastors and those serving in churches throughout Cuba, whose opinions concerning Christians who put themselves in harm's way against the communist authorities are expurgated. Using the qualitative research paradigm, this study utilizes qualitative artistic and creative research to explore previously undocumented perspectives on the lives of Cuban Christians both during and after the communist takeover. This work is essential in highlighting how the worship of God can serve to attract individuals who may not have otherwise engaged in religious practices in Cuba. The project explores the relationship between Christians and the communist regime in Cuba and how it has impacted their theology and way of life. By examining the effects of Communism on the Christian church in Cuba, this research model may be utilized to conduct investigative, narrative, and convergent research methods, which expands our understanding of this topic. In addition, researchers may discover similar tactics used by other governments worldwide, including the United States of America.

Keywords: Communism, Christian, Cuba, Worship, Church

Dedication/Acknowledgments

I dedicate my thesis work to my wife, Tami, and my daughters, Alivia and Brielle, for their love and support during countless hours of writing, research, and discovery. I also dedicate it to all the Cubans who continue to suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ. I also want to thank Dr. Jerry Newman for his patience, guidance, and direction, and Dr. Thomas A. Seel for his invaluable support.

Contents

List of Figures	vii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Introduction Statement of Primary Research Question	1
Background of the Problem and Significance of the Research Questions.....	4
Core Concepts.....	8
Working Hypotheses for Both Research Questions.....	12
Method/Design.....	13
Research Plan.....	13
Chapter Two: Literature Review	15
Introduction.....	15
Fidel Castro.....	16
Church Persecution	18
José Martí.....	27
Communism.....	29
Marxism	32
Socialism.....	33
Santería	36
Conformed Theology	38
Summary.....	40

Chapter Three: Methods.....	46
Phenomenon.....	46
Constructivist Worldview	47
Ethnography	49
Causality Affect	51
Questions and Hypotheses	55
Historical.....	58
Setting	59
Data Collection Method.....	60
Procedures.....	61
Researcher Positionality.....	62
Summary	65
Chapter Four: Compiled Research.....	69
Denomination and Church Leadership Statistics: Figures 1 - 4	69
Church Leadership: Figures 1 and 2.	70
Persecution Incidents Against the Christian church in Cuba.....	81
Summary	82
Chapter Five: Conclusion/Discussion	84
Summary of Study	85
Summary of Findings and Prior Research	87

Limitations	91
Recommendations for Future Study	93
Implications for Practice	94
Summary	95
Appendix A: Permissions	98
Appendix B: Thesis Proposal Approval	99
Bibliography	100

List of Figures

Figure 1. Catholic Priests	709
Figure 2. Catholic Nuns	80
Figure 3. Protestant Church	81
Figure 4. Membership by Denomination	82
Figure 5. Pastorate by Denomination, 1956-1970	86
Figure 6. Pastorate Lost to Exile	88
Figure 7. Various Protestant Church Numbers	89
Figure 8. Persecution of the Christian Church	90

Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction Statement of Primary Research Question

The phenomenological effects of Fidel Castro's Revolution on the Christian churches in Cuba from the 20th Century to the present day are of paramount importance. The impact of the Communist Revolution takeover of Cuba in 1959 is still felt in the Christian church today. The conflicts during this time significantly affected the church and its leaders. Pastors who did not align with the Communist regime were often imprisoned, creating an environment of trepidation for the church. According to author Marilyn Stewart, "pastor Obed Millan, an adjunct professor at the Miami extension center of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was one of many pastors forced to leave their homes and pulpits during the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s."¹ Fidel immediately took steps to purge Cuba of any beliefs that were a threat or in opposition to the new regime's plan. He, pastor Obed, was, in Stewart's words, "imprisoned for *proselytism* and endured two years and seven months of hard labor in a 'concentration camp' in eastern Cuba, where he worked on government-confiscated sugar cane fields."² Communist leader Fidel Castro brazenly suggested that conflicts arose due to the leadership or congregation of religious organizations, citing them as the root cause of conflicts. He states, "In my opinion, many conflicts were caused by the leadership or social group associated with a particular religious congregation."³ One of Fidel's strategies places the blame for the country's woes on the church to create an atmosphere of resentment toward the leadership.

¹ Marilyn Stewart, "Imprisoned Under Castro, Cuban Pastor Obed Millan Shares Message of Hope," September 17, 2018.

² Ibid.

³ Fidel Castro, "Christianity and the Revolution." *New Blackfriars* 59, no. 695 (1978): 152.

Castro's Communist Government reshaped the Christian landscape in Cuba by placing parallels to biblical Christian teaching with Marxist-Leninist doctrine by carefully crafting similarities. For example, when faced with the question regarding a statement found in education books for ten-year-olds that science proved that Christ never existed, Castro never directly answers the question. He instead states, "It is true that we take Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a starting point, but we stress the social aspects really."⁴ Castro states that the state could have non-religious schoolbooks: "I think that a state can have textbooks with a non-religious orientation or even an orientation that opposes the religious view in the fields of philosophy or history."⁵ Christian families were not only mandated to send their children to public education, but they also faced the challenge of their children being exposed to teachings that contradicted the Bible.

The Christian community under the communist regime then and now are held on a tight leash by the government that oversees the church's worship gatherings statewide. The reality is that Cuban pastors and worshipers face prison if their views collide with those of the Cuban Government. If a community of Christians host a worship service at their home, they face incarceration because it is not within the confines of government mandates. Beverly Swaren quotes Maria Montero Triana, a representative of the Cuban Government, who says, "Parents are not, however, allowed to arrange for religious instruction to be given their children outside church."⁶ A Cuban Christian may worship and teach their children about Christianity as long it is within the church's walls.

⁴ Fidel Castro, "Christianity and the Revolution," 164.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Beverly Swaren, "The Church in Today's Cuba." *America* 119, no. 8 (September 21, 1968): 212.

The early church in Acts faced persecution because of the preaching of the gospel and the increasing number of believers. In Acts, chapter four, verse three, Peter and John were arrested, and the apostles were imprisoned in chapter five. In Acts chapter eight, Stephen became the first martyr. According to Acts, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison” (Acts 8:3, NKJV). Later, the communist party under Fidel Castro's rule removed church leaders from their homes and churches, imprisoning them for years. Colton Babbitt quotes Criswell about their mission's work: “There have been, languishing in the prisons of Cuba, two of our greatest missionaries for several years now, Herbert Caudill and David Fite.”⁷ The communist government, under Fidel, targeted church leadership they saw as a threat to the ongoing assimilation of the Cuban people.

Many do not understand that the attack on the church in Cuba was also an effort to cut any links it had to the churches in the United States. For example, in 1970, the United Presbyterian church was forced to break its ties with the denomination in the United States and would forego any economic support. According to Theron Corse, “for the first time in decades, they would go without financial assistance from the Americans.”⁸ The idea of coexistence for the church alongside the Communist regime is a one-way street favoring the Government, not the church.

The level of religious freedom in Cuba from 1959 to 1970 is ambiguous due to the expulsion of church leaders who were seen as a threat to the Marxist-Leninist government during Castro's Revolution. On May 1, 1961, Fidel Castro gave a speech condemning the church

⁷ Colton Babbitt, “*Caudill Under El Caudillo: Southern Baptists, Cuba, and the Origins of Conservatism, 1959-1979.*” (Florida Atlantic University, 2019), 62.

⁸ Theron Corse, “*Presbyterians in the Revolution: An American Missionary Church and the Challenge of Castro's Cuba, 1959–1970.*” *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000): 2.

because he accused it of vocally supporting the Bay of Pigs. Swaren states, “Castro went on to announce retaliatory measures against the church’s opposition, the first of which was the nationalizing of all private schools, which were mainly Catholic. Spanish priests were expelled, and many Cuban priests decided to leave.”⁹ Not only did the church have the Communist Government to contend with, but they also experienced a spiritual battle by government members openly admitting and practicing Santería. One author describes this practice: “Santería is a Cuban creole religion with elements of West African Yoruba and Catholic practices.”¹⁰ The nationalization of private schools enabled the Communist regime to influence the population and promote its ideals.

Background of the Problem and Significance of the Research Questions

According to Sara Kozameh, the revolutionary Government confiscated land under the Agrarian Reform Law. She states: “perhaps in response to the pressure waged by peasants and agricultural workers, in mid-1960 the pace of expropriation and land redistribution sped up.”¹¹ The same problems met at the initial Revolution takeover of Cuba still exist today. Yoe Suarez states that the church still faces persecution: “during all these years of ‘Revolution,’ the church has been subject to persecution, being prevented from exercising its religious freedom, having its buildings closed, its ministers sent to prison or

⁹ Beverly Swaren, 211.

¹⁰ Ivor Lynn Miller, "*Belief and Power in Contemporary Cuba: The Dialogue between Santería*."

¹¹ Sara Kozameh, "Agrarian Reform and the Radicalization of Revolutionary Cuba, 1959–1962." *Cuban Studies* 51 (2022): 42.

forced to leave the country.”¹² Fidel Castro and his Communist government portrayed the church as anti-revolutionary in order to oppress and restrict its influence in Cuba.

Religious freedom in Cuba is held tightly, only allowed in the church or home, but non-existent in the public arena. If religion were not a real issue for the Communist regime, there would have been no reason to arrest Christians like, as one author notes, “Southern Baptist missionaries Herbert Caudill, David Fite, and dozens of Cuban Baptists in 1965.”¹³ Instead, the church was subjugated to Castro’s regime and put under foot if any ties to the United States were deemed a threat.

In an interview with Frei Betto, Fidel Castro likened the goals of Marxists to those of Christians. One author expressed it this way: “he had the impression that the Bible has very revolutionary content; I believe that the teachings of Christ are very revolutionary and completely coincide with the aims of Socialists, of Marxist-Leninists.”¹⁴ According to Castro, Christ was also a revolutionary who dedicated his time to aiding the impoverished, combating injustice, and preventing humiliation. After all, Jesus states, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9-10, NKJV). During Castro’s address to the World Council of Churches, Fidel Castro said: “In my opinion Christ was a great revolutionary”. . . He condemned the rich, the merchants and the Pharisees with very strong words.” Fidel’s opinions were instrumental to his influence over the people of Cuba, further equating that Christ is somehow the same revolutionary as himself.

¹² Margarita M. W. Suárez, “Renewal in the Cuban Evangelical Church: The Perspective of Two Feminist Pastors.” *CrossCurrents* 64, no. 2 (2014): 236–61.

¹³ Colton Babbitt, “*Caudill Under El Caudillo: Southern Baptists, Cuba, and the Origins of Conservatism, 1959-1979.*,” (Florida Atlantic University, 2019). 38.

¹⁴ Fidel Castro and Frei Betto. *Fidel and Religion: Castro Talks on Revolution and Religion with Frei Betto*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 19.

Castro's statement contradicts the goals mentioned because of the horrific experiences many in the Cuban Christian community endured under the brutal control of the Marxist-Leninist regime. John W. Kennedy states, "Castro implemented hard labor and so-called re-education programs for those he considered the dregs of society: drug addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals--and pastors."¹⁵ Documentation supports a Seventh-Day Adventist pastor who spent years in prison: according to Kennedy, "Noble Alexander, a Seventh-day Adventist youth pastor from a Havana suburb who spent 1962 to 1984 in nine Cuban prisons."¹⁶

When Pope John Paul II visited Cuba in 1998, hope was high that the gates of religious liberty would fall upon Cuba. However, the Pope's visit could create a more hostile environment toward the Christian church. Richard Luna of Open Doors comments regarding the Pope's visit: "But if this turns out to be a meeting between two heads of state, each with a specific constituency that does not include the evangelical church, it could be very harmful to evangelical Christians."¹⁷ The danger and threat of the Pope's visit could have incited adverse reactions, causing persecution once he left.

Preaching the gospel in Cuba still posed significant dangers because of the threat involved in sharing one's faith. The Cuban church risks loss of life in the traditional sense of meaning, causing it to focus on its most crucial task and weigh all other options carefully. As a result, Cuban believers are discovering that their ultimate allegiance is to the resurrected Lord. According to author Thomas C. Oden, "Being a Christian in Cuba is still a risky business."¹⁸

¹⁵ John W. Kennedy, "Cuba's Next Revolution: How Christians are Reshaping Castro's Communist Stronghold." *Christianity Today*, January 12, 1998, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸ Oden, Thomas C. "The Church Castro Couldn't Kill." *Christianity Today*, Vol. 38, Issue 5 April 25, 1994.

Today, Christians in Cuba face persecution but in ways that are less obvious to the world community. For example, the Voice of the Martyrs website states: “Government officials often summon Christian leaders for questioning or are detained for up to 48 hours to pressure them and hire gangs to demolish churches so the government can deny responsibility.”¹⁹ Christians in Cuba must meet in house churches secretly because “Legal church buildings are seized, and no new ones have been legally built in the country since the revolution.”²⁰ The Christian church is under surveillance and subject to investigation should any attempts to share the gospel message beyond the church’s walls and secret home fellowships are discovered.

Fidel countless times stated that there is the exercise of religious freedom in Cuba. The exercise thereof, however, is within the laws of the Cuban Government. Sharing religious literature outside the church’s walls is against the law and subject to incarceration. Conflicts arose when pastors used materials outside the church to reach their communities; Kennedy points out, “Yet, constraints that limit Christian expression are formidable. Religious literature distribution outside church buildings is illegal.”²¹ The notion of praying to God to heal the sick could land a person in jail is not implausible, “Praying for God to heal the sick is considered an illegal practice of medicine.”²² Fidel and his Communist Government were in complete contradiction of the Scriptures when James chapter five instructs believers to call the elders in the church to pray for the sick.

¹⁹ Voice of the Martyrs https://www.persecution.com/globalprayerguide/cuba/?_source_code=WHPB20C

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ John W. Kennedy, "Cuba's Next Revolution: How Christians are Reshaping Castro's Communist Stronghold." *Christianity Today*, January 12, 1998, 4.

²² Ibid., 4.

The list of what is illegal includes operating religious schools, raising money, evangelizing, and preaching a sermon that threatens the regime. It is not limited to whatever the Cuban Government wanted to enact to persecute the church. According to John W. Kennedy, “Two armed G-2 agents, the Cuban equivalent of the KGB, arrested the 28-year-old Noble after he preached at a service in February 1962. His crime? A sermon about original sin.”²³ The dismantling of the Christian church became a simple task when Fidel’s Communist Government created laws that prohibited all of the activities designed for the growth of the church.

Core Concepts

The key concepts for better understanding the opposition of worship in the Christian church in Cuba are rooted in the fact that the regime proclaimed itself a communist, Marxist-Leninist, and atheist society. According to Lemass’s statement, “The saddest thing for me about Cuba is its atheism. It is not just a case of Church and State being separate. It is official State policy that there is no God.”²⁴ The Communist regime disbelieves in the existence of God, and their whole education system is on that premise. The education system contradicts the teachings found in the Bible while claiming that there are no contradictions between Christianity and socialism. As one source says, “Where do the contradictions between Christian teachings and socialist teachings lie?”²⁵ A contradiction found between biblical Christian teaching is that Socialism is against the whole of the family, which they say creates class inequality.

²³ John W. Kennedy, "Cuba's Next Revolution, 7.

²⁴ Peter Lemass, “Fidel Castro’s Cuba.” *The Furrow* 36, no. 6 (1985): 374.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 375.

Another crucial issue concerns church properties that the Cuban Government compulsorily takes. An example is the Maranatha Church in Cuba, which has requested a permit to construct a larger facility several times because the current one is full. However, J.C. Derrick's article reveals that the "Cuban authorities have refused to grant the permit and have announced that they are seizing the property that has belonged to the Eastern Baptist Convention since 1947."²⁶ Additionally, the Maranatha church would need to pay rent to the Cuban communist Government if they wanted to continue using the building. Derrick reported that former "President Barrack Obama told Congress he plans to remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism."²⁷ Several Republicans pushed back on the idea and quickly acted to create a bill that would block such a move by the Obama administration.

A critical concept is how Castro attempted to confuse Christianity with Marxist socialism by giving examples of how Jesus was for the poor and destitute. The realization is that the two have no commonality for a person who does not believe there is no God. Dennis P. Petri writes, "One pastor and his wife refused to send their children to a public school, 'arguing that the state system emphasizes a Marxist-Leninist atheist ideology that contradicts their beliefs."²⁸ Over five generations have been indoctrinated within Cuba's public education system, teaching that there is no God. A person had the right of conscience to believe there was a God, but any attempts to mobilize the people beyond the church walls or home were subject to arrest. Coexistence only survives underfoot by the

²⁶ J.C. Derrick, "Taken by Raul: Castro Regime Steps up Persecution of the Church in Eastern Cuba." *World* 30, no. 11 (May 30, 2015): 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁸ Dennis P. Petri, "*Christians in Cuba: Dealing with Subtle Forms of Repression*" (Atlanta GA: 2022), 331.

Communist Government of Cuba; a church can be boarded up and closed is a simple enactment.

To fully comprehend the origins and motivation behind Marxism, it is crucial to understand its historical context. In the early 1920s, Marxist ideology gained traction in Latin America and became a driving force behind revolutionary efforts to achieve liberation and social change. Cuba played a pivotal role in the development of Marxism, with Carlos Baliño emerging as a key figure in promoting its principles. According to Monal, “the early initiator and promoter of Marxism on Cuban soil was the laborer Carlos Baliño (1848- 1926), who had become a Marxist during his long stay in the United States.”²⁹ Another example of Baliño becoming a Marxist and bringing back this ideology to his own country is similar to the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch, who found salvation in Jesus Christ and returned to his country with that news.

Baliño expressed ideas that were clearly socialist and Marxist. These included the belief “that social phenomena follow laws and that social struggles are influenced by significant forces within society.”³⁰ Baliño argued that Cuba needed a revolutionary uprising to overthrow capitalism and establish a new culture where the working class would hold political power. To gain support for this cause, Baliño collaborated with Jose Marti, another revolutionary, to reach out to Cuban workers in Tampa and Key West, Florida. According to Monal, “Baliño joined Marti in his efforts to obtain support from the Cuban workers, especially the tobacco workers in Tampa and Key West, Florida.”³¹ One reason

²⁹ Isabel Monal, “Cuban Foundational Marxist Thought.” *International Journal of Political Economy* 34, no. 4 (2004): 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

for this collaboration was Baliño's concern that the United States posed a growing imperialist threat to Cuba. Carlos Baliño and Jose Marti played a vital role in the historical development of Marxism in Cuba, entrenched to this day.

Marxism is a revolutionary communist ideology emphasizing the working class and enforcing government rule. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels introduced it in their Manifesto of the Communist Party. The founders depicted society's history in this document as a series of class struggles. They argued that capitalism is a profoundly exploitative system, and according to their theory, the working class will overthrow the ruling bourgeoisie class through a revolution and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. One would easily question whether establishing a dictatorship of a particular group exploits the people to cement a government's agenda. As previously mentioned, "Following that, the workers' state will abolish capitalism, build socialism, and eventually establish communism, a classless society of material abundance and stateless self-administration."³² A classless society stripped of their God-given talents to serve the community for the greater good dictated by the ruling government.

It would be in the best interest of this study to include a brief explanation of Atheism and its beliefs. Many atheists believe that religions and gods are products of human imagination, however, there are different opinions among atheists on how to approach religion. Some view religion as a harmful social perception that must be eliminated because of the threat of mere human invention. Author Dylan Evans states, "All atheists agree that religions are human creations and gods mere figments of the

³² Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 236.

imagination.”³³ Fidel quickly instituted in public school education that God does not exist because science had proven otherwise.

Religious groups are seen by the Cuban regime as a potential threat due to their networks and resources that transcend borders and their disapproval of Communism. As a result, “In 1961, the new Cuban government declared itself officially atheist and implemented a militantly anti-religious policy.”³⁴ Furthermore, the 1975 Constitution made it unlawful to oppose the Revolution based on religious beliefs. A Cuban who is in the communist regime that receives the salvation of Jesus Christ is in danger, “Consequences for that individual and family members can be severe.”³⁵ Marxism, Communism, and biblical Christianity are not the same; the contradictions are evident by Fidel’s admittance of Atheism.

Working Hypotheses for Both Research Questions

Hypothesis (1), What are the effects of Fidel Castro’s Revolution on Christian churches in Cuba?

Hypothesis: The effects of Castro’s Revolution on Christian churches in Cuba include Communism, Socialism, and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Hypothesis (2): In what ways did Cuba’s communist Government’s teaching of Marxism-Leninism socialism reshape Christian worship in Cuba?

Hypothesis: The communist Government’s teaching of Marxism socialism reshaped Christian worship in Cuba, placing parallels to biblical Christian teaching with that of Marxist Socialism, Atheism, and the redistribution of land ownership.

³³ Dylan Evans, "Atheism and Religion." In *All That Matters: Atheism*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2014.

³⁴ Dennis P. Petri, 328.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 329.

Method/Design

Qualitative research seeks to comprehend the experiences of people or assemblies and the significance of their challenges. This approach involves asking questions, developing protocols, gathering data in the person's natural settings, analyzing data to identify common ideas, and interpreting the findings. The information format can be tailored to meet the specific requirements of the research.

This study's qualitative research approach allows for a deductive historical content-based analysis. Creswell notes that “qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally.”³⁶ It also allows for the creation of a concise report on the challenges the Cuban church faces in the 21st Century. The research investigation will explore the historical, social, and cultural factors that shaped Cuba and their impact on the church. The church can only exist by God's grace against Fidel Castro's Revolution or face imprisonment.

Research Plan

In order to gain insight into the impact of Christian worship in Cuba, it is necessary to conduct a detailed study of Fidel Castro's mindset. This research will examine various sources that reveal his communist ideology, personal books, and interviews with him. This data will be the foundation for analyzing the text and assessing the researcher's documentation and methodology. Under Castro's communist regime, the church was considered counter-revolutionary, which resulted in its dissolution. In *Religion in Cuba's Socialist Transition*, Aurelio Alonso states, “At the end of the conflict, however, institutional

³⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design*, 8.

Christianity was left deeply wounded.”³⁷ The immense power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is evident in the extreme measures taken by the Cuban Government to enact laws and promote violence in an attempt to eradicate the presence of the church.

The analytical beliefs and identifiable systems used in the approach are two crucial elements. The research approach is the plan or proposal that outlines, in one author’s words, the “philosophy, research design, and specific methods used in the study.”³⁸ Researchers must carefully consider their fundamental study, choose a research design that aligns with it, and determine the methods or procedures necessary to execute the approach effectively. The data collected for this work reveals the predicament the Christian church faces in the communist country of Cuba. The research will be resolved by including procedural aspects of the study, data on scholarly sources, and the testimony of Cubans who face the ongoing persecution of the Cuban church in the 21st Century.

³⁷ Alonso, Aurelio. “Religion in Cuba's Socialist Transition.” *Socialism and Democracy* Volume 24, Issue 1: Cuban Perspectives on Cuban Socialism (2010), 152.

³⁸ John W. Creswell, *Research Design*, 4.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The Revolution led by Fidel Castro resulted in severe persecution of the Christian church, which requires further examination into different aspects of the communist regime. A literature review can help readers understand the implications of Communism, Marxism, Socialism, religions, and a conformed theology in the new Cuba placed on the Christian church. Highlighting the transformations that significantly impacted Christians worshipping in Cuba can help readers better understand the challenges encountered by the Christian church. The changes brought about by the 1959 Revolution continue to impact the Christian church today in Cuba.

Current research shows little information on the effects of Communism, Socialism, Marxism, religions, and a conformed theology that caused the changes in the Cuban church. The persecution of the Cuban church communicates a general view, producing a literary gap in connecting each area of Castro's Revolutionary effects on the Christian church in Cuba. The literature finds, however, a gap in connecting each area of Castro's Revolutionary effects on the Christian church in Cuba. The general sense would be in the reports of the destruction of church buildings "until, that is, 20 November 2007 when the Cuban authorities launched a massive operation to destroy the church building."¹ Along with the destruction of churches, evictions of Pastors and their families from their own homes reveals another identifying factor of the persecution. As stated in *The Stones Cry Out*: "Pastor Alain Toledano and his family were evicted from their home, which was confiscated along with all their belongings."² The efforts of

¹ Baroness Cox and Benedict Rogers, *The Very Stones Cry Out: The Persecuted Church: Pain, Passion and Praise*. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 26.

² Ibid.

the Cuban Government to demolish church buildings have profoundly impacted the lives and ministries of numerous families.

The literature review examines the effects of Communism, Socialism, Marxism, and a conformed theology to assist the reader in understanding a deeper level of each philosophical and theological thought of the new Cuba. Understanding these areas brings greater awareness of how each area of change in Cuba has impacted the Christian church over the last 60 years. A thorough explanation will be helpful in not overlooking each piece of the puzzle of the persecution the Christian church endured in the past and faces today. The literature review reveals how each part of Communism, Marxism, and the Revolution's successes posed a great danger to the worship of God and sharing that message with others outside the church's walls.

Fidel Castro

Exploring the life of Fidel Castro offers a fascinating glimpse into the mindset of a dictator who successfully overthrew another dictator and went on to establish a Marxist-Leninist communist regime in Cuba, which endured for more than 50 years. Angel Castro Argiz, the father of Fidel Castro, faced a difficult upbringing as an orphan in Galicia, Spain. When he turned thirteen, he traveled to Cuba to live with his uncle. It is worth mentioning that Fidel's father, Angel Castro came to Cuba with the Spanish army. He firmly believed that the Americans had unjustly deprived Spain of their triumph over the Cuban insurgents. This instilled a deep-seated animosity towards the Americans in Angel Castro, which also resonated with his son Fidel.

The first of three children, “Fidel Castro was born on August 13, 1926 of Angel Castro, who was not married to Fidel’s mother, Lina Ruz Gonzalez of Cuba.”³ From a young age, Fidel Castro was known to exhibit violent behavior when he did not get his way. As Rafael A. Lecuona quotes Tad Szulc, "Castro had a tendency to resort to violence against his parents, teachers, siblings, and playmates when he didn't get his way."⁴ Lecuona further notes that Fidel displayed many qualities of a young dictator. Lecuona states that "Fidel himself has declared that he has ‘always been violent, given to tantrums, devious, manipulative, and defiant of all authority.’”⁵ Additionally, Fidel admitted to using violence, displaying a bad temper, manipulating others, and defying authority.

It is essential to bring attention that Fidel, who was nine years old, was still engaging in unethical behavior at school. He had gone so far as to involve his family in his latest scheme by deceiving his teachers into giving him a new report card after falsely claiming to have lost the original one. Fidel intended to falsify the new card with excellent grades and then sign the actual grades onto the original card before returning it to school. Lecuona notes that “to complete the deceitful scheme, Fidel would take back to school the other card, the one from the school with real grades, after he had signed it himself.”⁶ The Bible emphasizes the deceitful and wicked nature of the heart, stating, “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NKJV). Fidel's heart reflected deceitfulness as displayed by his actions.

³ Rafael A. Lecuona, “Jose Marti and Fidel Castro.” *International Journal on World Peace* 8, no. 1 (Paragon House, 1991), 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

Any reports of Fidel Castro being a man who displayed respect toward those at his school and the teachers are contradictory to his actions as an insurrectionist. According to Volker Skierka, “By the time he was 13 he was trying out his first insurrection. Accusing his father of exploiting the sugarcane workers on the farm, he stoked them up and tried to organize a strike.”⁷ Castro’s education in Catholicism was foundational in his early years when one of the initial things he remembers to believe in was the “Three Wise Men,” instead of Jesus Christ: “One of the first things we were taught to believe in were the Three Wise Men.”⁸ Ultimately, Castro would place his confession of faith in communism “In the early sixties, after Castro’s profession of faith in communism,” and further alienating the church, “Anyone who declared for the Church was subject to discrimination.”⁹ Under the Castro communist regime in Cuba, equality was only accessible to those who aligned with the government. Those who opposed or did not support the regime faced oppression, and this was particularly evident in the treatment of the Christian church and its leadership.

Church Persecution

In 1992, the National Assembly of Cuba amended its constitution, declaring Cuba a Socialist country. According to Volker Skierka: “Socialist state of workers...organized with all and for the benefit of all as a united and democratic republic, for the enjoyment of political liberty, social justice, individual and collective well-being, and human solidarity”¹⁰ The judicial

⁷ Volker Skierka, *Fidel Castro: A Biography* (Newark, NJ: Polity Press, 2004), 12.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief: a World Report: A World Report* (London: Routledge, 1997), 122.

system, overseen by the Supreme Popular Tribunal, comprises expert and lay judges elected by the prevalent political assembly. Interestingly, “more than half of these judges are not affiliated with the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).”¹¹ While the PCC holds a significant constitutional role in the Cuban state and is guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the thought of José Martí, the revised constitution permits the direct election of candidates. It allows religious believers to profess their faith in areas beyond the capital and the National Assembly. Unfortunately, as of 1997, five years after the original amendments, these provisions were not implemented. One would argue that the judicial system in Cuba is not genuinely democratic, given the PCC’s role and the lack of implementation of the revised constitution’s provisions for religious freedom.

The exercise of the Freedom of religion found itself in contradiction to the Freedom of religion of conscience. According to Boyle’s analysis, the 1992 revisions to the Cuban constitution established the fundamental right to “Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief. The 1992 constitution revision removed references to ‘scientific materialism’ as the basis for the Cuban state.”¹² The separation of church and state is acknowledged, showing that the state identifies with, respects, and assures the Cuban people of religious freedom that all can share and enjoy, whether they choose a religious belief or not. One author puts it this way: “the principle of separation of church and state is declared. Article 8 also states that ‘different beliefs and religions enjoy equal consideration.’”¹³ As a result, individuals could not freely practice their Christian faith beyond their thoughts and places of worship.

¹¹ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 122.

¹² *Ibid.*, 124.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The revised laws allowed certain freedoms but were also subject to state control, as outlined in Article 39, which establishes the educational system, based on scientific and technical advancements and the principles of Marxism, as under state control. Similarly, freedom of the press and speech were guaranteed but had to align with the socialist regime's objectives. Boyle notes, "Article 53 states that freedom of the press and speech are guaranteed, but must conform to the purposes of a socialist society."¹⁴ While Cubans can express themselves, these freedoms are ultimately constrained by socialist and Marxist-Leninist principles. Boyle reiterates, "Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of the state."¹⁵ Arguments are raised that freedoms are allowed to the people of Cuba so long as they do not interfere with the state's ruling.

The prisoners in Cuba met horrid conditions where men were failing in health, collapsing from passing out, and malnutrition made it impossible to keep a stance. The condition described by author Herbert Caudill, "Then another fainted, and another, till about 20 men had collapsed. A guard yelled for no more men to faint, but the sun was hot, and they were weak from malnutrition."¹⁶ Caudill spent a total of nineteen months in Cuba's prisons, and when released, he was not allowed to attend any community or partisan meetings. Furthermore, Captain Carracedo instructed him not to be a part of any work in the churches, preach, or attend services. Caudill states, "I was not to have any participation in the work of our churches and convention."¹⁷ Fidel and his Communist regime actively targeted the Christian church and its

¹⁴ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 125.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Herbert Caudill, *On Freedom's Edge: Ten Years under Communism in Cuba* (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1975), 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

leaders, seeking any opportunity to persecute and oppress them. Those who stood firm in their faith faced the harsh consequences of imprisonment under oppressive conditions.

Considerable time and effort went into the construction of new churches and schools in Cuba, only for the Cuban Government to eventually nationalize these projects. During a dinner at Candler College in Havana, the shift occurred when Raul Castro expressed gratitude to around twenty evangelical pastors for their involvement in the Revolution. It became evident that religious freedoms were contingent on their loyalty to the Government as stated, "But he also hinted that he expected Christians to adapt themselves to the Revolution. Our religious freedom would depend on our loyalty to the Government."¹⁸ Before the situation deteriorated, hundreds of people were attending a newly built chapel, but the communists were actively working to suppress the message of the gospel. According to Caudill, "That is one place where the Communists have tried to eradicate the message of Christ from the hearts of believers. The chapel has been torn down by those who dislike Christians."¹⁹ The Christian church eventually conformed to the Communist government to maintain any role in Cuban society, seemingly under the guise of oppression.

A growing discontent of Christians escalated to seminary students being arrested, which gave concern as to what may be coming next for the church and leaders. According to Caudill, pastors were concerned that staying in Cuba was no longer safe. Caudill states, "On September 7, 1959, a pastor told me he was planning to go to the United States for he was sure it was no longer safe for him to continue where he was."²⁰ Soon after the nationalizing of business and

¹⁸ Herbert Caudill, *On Freedom's Edge*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

land, many were taken from the rural areas to work in the cities with doctors, teachers, and working professionals were made to work in isolated areas. Christians were also included in this round up of forced relocation and made the best of the situation to preach the gospel where ever they were assigned. According to Caudill, “they accepted the responsibility-not only to teach children in school or heal the sick, but also to give the message of Christ to the people where they were working.”²¹ It's worth noting that praying to heal the sick went against Cuban law and the Cuban Government's favored position on science.

Fidel Castro publicly declared his allegiance to Marxism-Leninism, a lifelong commitment to Communism: "I am a Marxist-Leninist. I have been a Communist all my life"²² Castro's declaration profoundly affected the Christian church, as government officials conducted inspections of private schools and assumed control of the buildings. The decree issued on May 1, 1961, also included the Cuban Government's nationalization of all private schools, impacting the four small schools affiliated with Baptist churches in western Cuba. Caudill quoting Castro “that there was no place for private education in a communist state.”²³ The new changes had a significant impact on denominations across the country, resulting in substantial property value losses, effectively placing the education of children in the hands of the communist Government. The Government controlling the education was the plan that, in one author’s words, was "designed to wean this younger away from home and church influence."²⁴

²¹ Herbert Caudill, *On Freedom's Edge*, 24.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

Numerous firsthand accounts attest to the complex situation of religious freedom in Cuba, where specific religious communities appear to face disproportionate attention. According to Boyle, “The experiences of some minority religious groups differ from those of most Cubans; Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists have been monitored, harassed, and detained.”²⁵ All religious groups were required to register with the Ministry of Justice in Havana, leaving it up to the Interior Ministry to approve or reject their application. Recognized groups are limited in terms of where they can practice their faith, and they are not allowed to build churches. As a result, congregations often gather in private homes, which is illegal under Cuban law.

Religious organizations in Cuba face significant obstacles when it comes to accessing mass media due to the Government's firm ownership and control of all media outlets. According to Boyle's report, "Religions may not have access to the mass media. The media remain under the ownership or control of the Government."²⁶ Government control is not limited to building construction and meeting congregations but also includes spreading religious ideas in Cuba. Any ideas expressed in Cuba that are considered anti-revolutionary regardless of religious and theological convictions are addressed as an interference with the Revolution of Fidel Castro. Sharing religious beliefs outside of designated areas infringes on the education system because it conflicts with Cuba’s Revolution, as stated by Boyle, “Marxism-Leninism and its strict adherents among the Cuban revolutionaries who regarded religion as inherently counter-revolutionary.”²⁷

²⁵ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 125.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

During the years 1965-1966, the Cuban Government became aggressive in its anti-religious persecution of Protestant ministers and other religious leaders taken to concentration camps. Author Louis Segesvary states that they sent them to “eastern Camagüey province, along with others considered social scum.”²⁸ One would argue that the persecution of religious leaders was to maintain control over the population’s beliefs. During an impassioned speech, Fidel Castro said, “Today we say with more force than ever: socialism or death, Marxism-Leninism or death!”²⁹ Marxism-Leninism or death is the stronghold held over the church in Cuba and cunning to say that religious persecution did not exist. According to author Tom White, “Political and religious leaders in this Communist stronghold would have the West believe that religious persecution does not exist.”³⁰ Persecution came in various forms, like the closure of church facilities, Marxism integration, abuse, and imprisonment.

Author Tom White shares Pastor Jose Zapata's story, likening it to an owner's relationship with his dog. ““This persecution reminds me of the story of the dog," he began. "You have a nice dog, You feed him and love him; you pat him on the head and say nice things to him.”³¹ A successful relationship with a dog would require not pulling the tail to avoid getting bit. In the same manner, as long as a person within the church in Cuba did not pull the tail of the Government, they were safe to continue; otherwise, they faced a persecuting bite. "Churches which meet only when and where the government permits, which do not testify openly but enter

²⁸ Louis Segesvary, "In a Place Without a Soul": The Testimony of Former Cuban Political Prisoners, ed. Howard Cincotta (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Information Agency, 1985), 13.

²⁹ Tom White and Don Tanner, *The Spiritual Battle for Cuba: Pulling the Devil's Tail*, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

useless Marxist-Christian dialogs are patting the Communist dog on the head."³² As long as the church remained compliant, it would not experience oppression.

After Fidel Castro declared Communism the official stance of the Cuban Government, the Christian church in Cuba began to feel the looming threat of persecution. According to Pastor Humberto Noble Alexander in his book *I Will Die Free*, "The Christian church in Communist Cuba was operating on borrowed time."³³ The Cuban Government arrested Pastor Alexander without any word of the charges against him, however, it was rooted in the series of meetings he and Pastor Vásquez conducted at the church. Eventually, the Cuban Government would accuse Pastor Alexander as part of a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro. Alexander and Rizzo note that "Pastor Vásquez and I, 'Pastor Alexander,' had debated for some time whether or not, in the face of the increased persecution from Castro and his supporters, to cancel the planned series of meetings."³⁴ The risk of moving forward with the meetings would result in a 22-year nightmare for pastor Alexander.

Details of the persecution emerged with the arrest of Pastor Humberto Noble Alexander, a Seventh-Day Adventist. The Cuban Government "Silently, I wondered what else my captor could possibly do to me. I soon found out. I was ordered to strip out of the few Clothes I was wearing."³⁵ His cell had no toilet or sink and a hole that served as the place where prisoners would relieve themselves. One author expresses the horrible conditions: "A hole in the opposite corner was designed to act as a toilet, but it had long since clogged. Piles of excrement lay about,

³² Tom White and Don Tanner, 13.

³³ Noble Alexander and Kay D. Rizzo, *I Will Die Free* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing, 1991), 6.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

barnyard like.”³⁶ Castro played the role of friend to the church, revealed to be a lie with the admission of Communism, which led to civilian-looking military men harassing the church. The main characters of the Revolution were Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, and Raul Castro, who were a part of the Communist Party. An author states: “after placing these men and others like them in key positions in the Cuban government, Castro began to use plain-clothed military men to harass the churches.”³⁷

Religious persecution continued to be a pressing issue thirty-six years after the Communist takeover of Cuba by the Castro Revolution. Despite this, many individuals in Cuba remained hesitant to speak out against ongoing persecution for fear of making matters worse for church leaders. In 1995, Pastor Orson Vila Santoyo, a Pentecostal leader, hosted church services in his home; conducting such gatherings was against the law in Cuba. Author Paul A. Marshall reported that "He was arrested on May 24, 1995, and charged with holding 'illegal meetings'"³⁸ Consequently, church equipment was confiscated, Pastor Vila was arrested without trial, and the Cuban Government issued an order to shut down all house churches. "Following Vila's arrest, the Cuban Ministry of Justice sent letters ordering the closure of all house churches on the island."³⁹

Nothing has changed concerning the persecution of the Christian Church since Castro came into power. Within a few months of his takeover, Castro's Government was already at work in dismantling the Christian church. After the Bay of Pigs invasion attempt in 1961, the persecution of the Christian and other religious organizations suffered tribulation. According to

³⁶ Noble Alexander and Kay D. Rizzo, *I Will Die Free*, 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸ Paul A. Marshall and Gilbert Lela, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution against Christians in the Modern World* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 89.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Marshall, “All religious activities except worship services inside church buildings were prohibited, and sermons were monitored to ensure they remained harmless.”⁴⁰ The Government made clear that sharing the gospel outside the church walls was forbidden, and the regime made sure by infiltrating the church with Government spies. The Government closed the “Cuban Bible Society and placed a twenty-year ban on importing Bibles and religious literature.”⁴¹ Ultimately, Christians would face discrimination within the place of employment, education field, and imprisonment for parents who kept their children home for religious holidays.

José Martí

José Martí devoted his life to protecting Cuba from colonial rule, particularly those under the control of the United States, since the late 1800s. Author Carlos Ripoll states, "Martí worked tirelessly to end colonial rule in Cuba and prevent the island from falling under the control of the United States or any regime opposed to the democratic principles he held."⁴² Martí was imprisoned in Cuba for resisting Spanish colonial rule and wrote about the deplorable conditions of the prisons. After being exiled to Spain, he eventually moved to New York from 1881 to 1895. While in the United States, Martí observed and learned from the nation, saying, "It is necessary to study the way this nation sins, the way it errs, the way it founders, so as not to founder as it does."⁴³ Although Martí's thoughts may seem rational, a closer examination reveals

⁴⁰ Paul A. Marshall and Gilbert Lela, *Their Blood Cries Out*, 90.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Carlos Ripoll, *Jose Marti, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban* (1st ed. 1984), 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

that his faith was in morality. According to J Ripoll, "Martí's thought has ethical foundations: as a political theorist and artist, he can be understood only in terms of his faith in morality."⁴⁴

Martí's mindset underwent a significant transformation, believing that freeing oneself from indifference and superiority was essential for man's salvation. This conviction was articulated in the statement, "To attain the salvation of man the only thing needed, he felt, was to free man from apathy and egotism."⁴⁵ It is essential to acknowledge, however, that genuine freedom and justification are only possible through Jesus Christ, as stated in Romans: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23-24, NKJV). It is plausible that these ideas would eventually lead to disagreements and theological views in the Christian church of Cuba.

Martí believed a nation should not be controlled by a single class that would dictate and manipulate the people. He states: "a nation is made of the rights and opinions of all its children, and not the rights and opinions of a single class."⁴⁶ This is clear contradiction to what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels state in the Communist Manifesto: "The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy."⁴⁷ If the single class of the proletariat is raised to power, then the cycle repeats itself with a single ruling class in control. Martí studied the United States *The Truth About the United States* and insisted: "It is necessary to study the way this nation sins, the way it errs, the way it

⁴⁴ Carlos Ripoll, *Jose Marti, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban*, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 91, Accessed March 7, 2024.

founders, so as not to founder as it does."⁴⁸ Jesus underscores the detrimental effect of hypocritical judgment, illustrating that focusing on the faults of others while ignoring one's shortcomings prevents growth.

José Martí's artistic creations highlight the incredible achievements of the American people. Ripoll notes that "through his art were revealed to Spanish America myriad pictures of the United States as a land where the people performed feats worthy of giants."⁴⁹ It is important to note that Marxist-Leninist principles tend to suppress individual talents and abilities. By placing collective interests over individual freedom, Marxism-Leninism subject's individuals to the authority of the state's leaders. In Cuba, the Revolution resulted in a government led by the laboring class, grounded in Marxist-Leninist philosophy and extensively taught in the country's educational system.

Communism

It is essential to examine the historical impact of Communism on the Christian church to gain deeper insight into Fidel Castro's approach to the Revolution in Cuba. Throughout its existence, Communism has been at odds with God, Jesus, and the church, akin to Satan's enmity towards God and His creation. According to Xina M. Uhl, The pursuit of an ideal society has been a human endeavor for centuries: "People have been trying to create an ideal society for thousands of years"⁵⁰ Plato, in his *Republic of 370-375 BCE*, envisioned a society led by a highly intellectual upper class who would govern together and share everything, including spouses and children. As one author said, "to Plato, this society involved an upper class of specially trained

⁴⁸ Carlos Ripoll, *Jose Marti*, 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ Xina M. Uhl and Link, *Communism* (New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 2019), 4.

rulers who would live together and share property, spouses, and children.”⁵¹ Plato’s thinking starkly contrasts the Word of God, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14, NKJV).

Cuba underwent substantial changes due to Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution, which permeated every aspect of Cuban society. According to the University of Florida Digital Collections, “Works by and about a group of Cuban philosophers, scholars, clergy, scientists, and thinkers who advocated new ideas and significantly influenced the development of Cuba.”⁵² However, as indicated in the University of South Florida Digital Commons' collection on Cuban Thinkers and intellectual Leaders, none of these individuals shared a common belief in the Holy Word of God or faith in Jesus Christ. Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Raul Castro, and many men alike were not born again or viewed the Bible as the Word of God. Fidel Castro said at a World Council of Churches gathering, “We should make an alliance, between religion and the Revolution. Where do the contradictions between Christian teachings and socialist teachings lie? Where?”⁵³ The message of salvation is not endorsed in Communist, Socialist, or Marxist regimes such as Cuba.

The Communist Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, propelled the rise of Communism, ignited by the introduction of the Industrial Revolution, which brought about unfair conditions and the exploitation of the people. One author expressed it the following way: "Marx described the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as one of exploitation."⁵⁴ History has shown, however, that one form of power often replaces another, as

⁵¹ Xina M. Uhl and Link, *Communism*, 4.

⁵² University of South Florida Digital Commons, Cuban Thinkers & Intellectual Leaders.

⁵³ Peter Lemass, “Fidel Castro’s Cuba.” *The Furrow* 36, no. 6 (1985): 375.

⁵⁴ Xina M. Uhl and Link, *Communism*, 6.

seen in Fidel Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, which resulted in another dictatorship, "An exile named Vladimir Lenin took over, and established a dictatorship in which the government-owned almost all industry."⁵⁵ This mirrored the Communist regime established by Lenin in Russia and Castro's actions in Cuba.

China adopted Lenin's Communist theories, which Mao utilized to effect monumental changes in the country's economic, political, and industrial systems, however, these changes also brought about a repressive regime that resulted in widespread famine and executions. While these changes facilitated China's industrialization, they also resulted in a severe clampdown on its citizens. According to Uhl, "it also resulted in an iron-tight grip upon the Chinese people that led to mass starvation and the imprisonment and execution of those who disagreed with the government."⁵⁶ Those who dared to oppose the Government often found themselves imprisoned or executed, leading to a period of widespread oppression. Similarly, Fidel Castro's Revolution in Cuba led to the passing of the Agrarian Reform and Urban Reform Law, causing the church to lose its properties. In various countries, implementing Marx and Lenin's ideologies resulted in similar reforms and the suppression of free speech.

The notion that the entire earth was an open platform for all to use is traced back to the early Christian church. This idea was further perpetuated through the communist ideology of "communal living," where "Early Christian groups such as the Gnostics and Manichaeans believed that private property was evil and that the whole earth was for the use of all people."⁵⁷ The debate over whether the Gnostics could be categorized as a Christian group or followers of

⁵⁵ Xina M. Uhl and Link, *Communism*, 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

Jesus Christ adds an engaging element to this historical narrative. Paul, in Colossians, warns believers of the Gnostics, who believed that excellent knowledge preceded the necessitation of salvation. Paul states, “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3, NKJV), that all wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. Paul used the ancient Greek word *apokruphos* for “hidden,” which reflects that this knowledge is in Christ and not worldly books or knowledge.

Manichaeism were not followers of Christ either because they did not believe in Jesus Christ but were instead a religion from the Iranian culture. According to Iain Gardner, “Even a hostile source such as the Acts of Archelaus depicts Mani as a clever and astute propagandist, acquiring Christian texts, studying them, and ingeniously integrating their ideas into his own to make the latter more acceptable to potential Christian converts.”⁵⁸ Jesus warned His disciples of the propaganda of false prophets, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15, NKJV).

Marxism

Before founding the 26th of July Movement and leading the armed struggle, Fidel Castro was not associated with the existing Marxist-Leninist Party, the Popular Socialist Party. He later adopted Marxist-Leninist ideology and studied the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin before the attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953. Castro mentioned, "We bought our first books on Marxism-Leninism at the Communist Party bookstore. The core group of us who organized the 26th of July Movement acquired our books from that store."⁵⁹ Castro, a central figure in the

⁵⁸ Iain Gardner, *The Founder of Manichaeism: Rethinking the Life of Mani* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2020), Viii.

⁵⁹ Joe Pateman and John Pateman, “Why Has Marxism-Leninism Succeeded in Cuba?” *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 15, no. 2 (December 2023): 240.

Cuban Revolution, expressed his belief in the ideological alignment between the principles of Martí and Marxist-Leninist ideologies. He confidently stated that in contemporary times, “Today Martí would be a Marxist-Leninist, he would be a communist, there is not the slightest doubt.”⁶⁰ Fidel was following the footsteps of Martí, further developing the new Communist regime in Cuba.

Marxism emerged as a revolutionary communist ideology for the working class. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels first outlined the fundamentals of this doctrine in their Manifesto of the Communist Party, initially published in 1848. In this document, the founders described society's history as a history of class struggle. According to Marxism theory, the working class would overthrow the ruling bourgeoisie through a revolution and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. As one author notes, “Following that, the workers’ state will abolish capitalism, build socialism, and eventually establish communism, a classless society of material abundance and stateless self-administration.”⁶¹ Class struggle was virtually eliminated through years of assimilating the Cuban people into the education system grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Socialism

According to author Gregory Baum, the churches in Cuba underwent a significant transformation due to ideological forces. The author notes that “we can see a political, economic, and social system-socialism-as the force playing the missionary role.”⁶² The economic hardships of Cuba were blamed on the blockade the United States imposed, preventing the academic and

⁶⁰ Joe Pateman and John Pateman, 237.

⁶¹ Ibid., 236.

⁶² Gregory Baum, “The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context” *Horizons 14*, no. 1 (1987): 186–87. (New York, NY: Circus, 1986), 10.

the church from learning more about what is called the "Cuban reality," which was the new implementation of Fidel's Marxist ideologies. Despite the academic and church communities' inability to access information about Cuba's reality due to the United States' blockade, Fidel's own decisions ultimately determined the consequences they faced.

Church leaders such as Sergio Arce reveal a new theology based on the changes in socialism in Cuba. Arce openly acknowledged that he is a Christian because his parents are Christians, which raises concerns about his salvation and church leadership. In his exact words, he said, "I am a Christian because my parents were Christians."⁶³ The basis for Arce's Christianity could work within the confines of Marxist thinking, explaining further that his Christianity was not one of establishment but rather "that an entire home can be a temple in which the presence of God is evident at all times."⁶⁴ The Scriptures state that the Holy Spirit resides in believers in Christ by personal choice, not by upbringing, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19, NKJV). Christian parents do not determine a person's salvation, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, NKJV). Arce's revolutionary ideals have challenged traditional biblical theology. However, he sees himself as a Christian because he aligns with a society that values human dignity and prioritizes it in their goals and accomplishments.

The Bible teaches that a person's salvation is a personal choice and not determined by their upbringing, values held, or accomplished works. The Holy Spirit resides in believers based on their decision to follow Christ. Choosing to follow Christ means that the Holy Spirit resides

⁶³ Sergio Arce, "The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context" *Horizons 14*, no. 1 (1987): 186–87. (New York, NY: Circus, 1986), 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

within the person, however, the church faces a challenge in reconciling biblical teachings with the ideals of Revolution. Arce's belief that being part of a revolutionary society automatically makes one a Christian seems contradictory to the Bible's teaching that faith is a personal revelation from God. According to the Scriptures, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17, NKJV).

Due to the introduction of new ideologies that were transforming Cuba, the Cuban Church became divided. Despite their efforts, church leaders were unable to stand against the Marxist Christians who began to erode the church. As one author said, "The Church, fragmented, unsure, too closely linked with foreigners and the rich, challenged a popular government and was resoundingly and humiliatingly defeated."⁶⁵ Bishop Evelio Diaz and other church leaders supported the agrarian reform law, which further deepened the divisions within the church and caused non-believers to emerge in Cuba.

During the post-revolutionary period in Cuba, the reforms of agrarian law played a crucial role in redistributing land ownership. Their primary goal was to break up large landholdings and distribute them among Cuban peasants, supporters of the Revolution, and the Government. These reforms were enacted between 1959 and 1963, post-revolution, and allowed significant land ownership to be eliminated and reassigned to those previously working on the land. The farmers were also included in institutional and mass organizations, including the creation of several groups such as the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), militias, and the National Association of Small Farmers

⁶⁵ Margaret E. Crahan, "Cuba: Religion and Revolutionary Institutionalization." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985), 325.

(ANAP). This agrarian reform significantly stripped individual land ownership and directly affected churches in Cuba.

Initially, the majority of Cuban citizens were in favor of the Revolution, however, as the Government implemented policies of nationalizing private land and companies, more individuals were impacted and consequently withdrew their support. This drastic measure led to a trade embargo against Cuba, which had a direct impact on the country's churches. The embargo prevented pastors from receiving their salaries and hindered access to Christian education materials, creating significant difficulties for the church and its members. Carlos E. Ham explores these challenges in his book, noting, "As the nationalization of private companies became more radical, more and more people were affected, causing a decline in support."⁶⁶ The church faced difficulties due to these reforms, yet it also encountered other forms of opposition.

Santería

The Christian church in Cuba encountered opposition from various sources, including Santería. Santería, which originated in Cuba, emerged from the unification of religious beliefs and practices of enslaved Africans, the Roman Catholic Church, and French spiritism. According to Harry G. Lefever, "What emerged from the encounter of these three traditions was a new syncretized religion that was neither African, Roman Catholic nor spiritist but which borrowed elements from all three."⁶⁷ Much of these beliefs came from the imported slaves. The arrival of the first enslaved people in Cuba dates back to the sixteenth century, however, it was not until

⁶⁶ Carlos Emilio Ham, "Missional Formation at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas, Cuba." *International Review of Mission* 106 (1): 82.

⁶⁷ Harry G. Lefever, "When the Saints Go Riding in: Santería in Cuba and the United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 3 (1996): 319.

the nineteenth century that a new wave of slaves, particularly the Yoruba from southwestern Nigeria and, to a lesser extent, the Bantu from the Congo, arrived. These later arrivals were the primary bearers of African religious beliefs and practices, significantly influencing the development of Santería.

Santería held close ties with the Catholic church, which is a compelling fact. According to Maha Marouan, "The initiation into Santería, or Regla de Ocha, another name of Santería, requires baptism in the Catholic Church."⁶⁸ Santería gained widespread attention when Fidel Castro threw his support behind it. Maha states, "Fidel Castro declared Cubans as an Afro-Latin people, and Santería became the religion of the nation, regardless of race or cultural heritage."⁶⁹ This has not been entirely the case, however. What is truly remarkable is how Santería, practiced by most, has managed to preserve Cubans' link to Catholicism as a historical survival model. Juan Dionisio, a santero and the head of the House-temple of Regla in Havana, commented, "There are very few people in Cuba who go to the Catholic Church to see the Virgin Mary. They go to see Yemayá, the Yoruba goddess of the sea."⁷⁰ A striking parallel is seen here in the prophet Jeremiah, who warns the nation of Israel in seeking to worship other gods: "Do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands; and I will not harm you" (Jeremiah 25:6, NKJV). According to the Scriptures, spiritual leaders and the people of Cuba who adhere to teachings such as Santería are in a precarious position before God.

⁶⁸ Maha Marouan, "Santería in Cuba: Contested Issues at a Time of Transition." *Transition*, no. 125 (2018): 59.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

Santería places a strong emphasis on the community and its needs, which contributes to its widespread appeal. In speaking to the Corinthians, Paul the Apostle says, “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14, NKJV). Many Cubans see Santería as a symbol of socialism due to its foundation in the principle of sharing. During animal sacrifice ceremonies, the entire neighborhood comes together to share food and drink, regardless of religious beliefs. Although the importance of community needs should not be overlooked, they are not elevated over the commands of God. Wirtz, Kristina states, “Consider the santero who blamed a bad divination sign on his ritual godfather's earlier mistake. His godfather had tried to save money by purchasing one sheep to offer to two orichas,”⁷¹ demi-gods in Santería that significantly influenced new theological concepts.

Conformed Theology

The Cuban Council of Churches is an organization made up of churches that have received approval from the communist regime in Cuba, which does not recognize the existence of God. It is the communist regime that sanctions without the revelation of Jesus Christ and who will be judged, as stated by Paul, “But those who are outside God judges. Therefore, “Put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Corinthians 5:13, NKJV). The CCC is not monitored to any degree by those who are, in the words of one author, “non-members such as denominations and Protestant house churches.”⁷² The relationship between the church and the state has deteriorated since the Revolution due in part to the Marxist-Leninist government's policies, which included nationalizing private schools and the departure of church leaders. In addition, discrimination

⁷¹ Kristina Wirtz, *Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World*, (Gainesville, FL: UPF, 2007), 2.

⁷² Rose T. Caraway, “Religion, Sustainability Movements, and Ecumenism,” *Journal for the study of religion, nature and culture*. 12, no. 4 (2019): 441.

against those within the church seeking to enter fields of study or job market was prevalent. Caraway states, “Religious individuals became increasingly marginalized in the early 1960s; some were denied entrance to university or other jobs.”⁷³ It was a strict requirement that unless church leaders conformed to the Cuban Council of Churches, they would not have an opportunity for inclusion in the Cuban government, highlighting the control exerted by the government over the church.

In Cuba, young members of various Protestant churches debated aligning biblical doctrine and theology with certain aspects of the communist Government. To quote one writer, the youth “posited a need for a doctrinal base that promoted the positive aspects of the revolution, with a specific focus on social justice.”⁷⁴ The conversation between Marxist and Christian groups in seminaries affiliated with Matanzas, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches, however, was one-sided due to the Government's strict control over religious organizations through the Council of Cuban Churches. Despite the country's shift towards a more secular approach, religious gatherings and associations were still subject to significant limitations under the regime. Regardless of the changes, one author notes that “there were still clear limitations on religious gatherings and associations.”⁷⁵ The church that sought to find the good in the communist regime was still under the influence of the Cuban Council of Churches.

While studying at Princeton University, Sergio Arce was profoundly impacted by two theological professors, John A. Mackay and Paul Lehmann. Mackay and Lehmann were not followers of Jesus Christ or believed that the Bible was the inerrant Word of God. Arce found

⁷³ Rose T. Caraway, “Religion, Sustainability Movements, and Ecumenism, 446.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Mackay's expertise in Hispanic philosophers, such as Unamuno, an educator and philosopher, particularly beneficial. Arce was moved by Lehmann's interpretation of Marx, which highlighted crucial social-ethical implications that resonated with and inspired him. Later, Arce would acknowledge that Lehmann's principles were a significant driving force behind his evolving theological and ideological perspective. Unfortunately, Arce did not reference that the Bible was the driving force behind his developing theological and ideological perspective.

In 1962, at the national convention of Cuban Presbyterian men, a lecture was delivered by speaker Sergio Arce. He believed that one could genuinely comprehend and honor God by engaging in the historical context of their surroundings, where God's creative and redemptive purposes are active. The idea of socialism and the Presbyterian church were entrenched by 1985 which led to Sergio Arce's dismissal as stated by Theron Corse, "Socialism and Christianity was widely accepted in the Presbyterian Church, and in 1985, Arce was ousted by more moderate leaders, socialist in outlook but more critical of the Revolution."⁷⁶ Socialism still prevailed in the Cuban Presbyterian church with leaders that were not as extreme.

Summary

The Christian church in Cuba bore the brunt of Fidel Castro's Communist government, leaving it scarred by the ordeal. Understanding the impact of Castro's revolutionary takeover on Cuba requires thoroughly examining various curated sources. This involves scrutinizing how Marxism, Communism, Atheism, and Socialism influenced the Christian church in Cuba. The existing literary sources on the persecution of the

⁷⁶ Theron Corse, "Presbyterians in the Revolution: An American Missionary Church and the Challenge of Castro's Cuba, 1959–1970." *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000): 115.

Christian church in Cuba had significant gaps, which this study aims to fill by examining the effects of Castro's revolution in each area.

The life of Fidel Castro offers a captivating glimpse into the psyche of a dictator who successfully ousted another dictator and established a Marxist-Leninist communist dictatorship in Cuba, which endured for over 50 years. Fidel Castro's father, Angel Castro Argiz, had a challenging upbringing as an orphan in Galicia, Spain. At thirteen, he journeyed to Cuba to live with his uncle. Notably, according to British historian Hugh Thomas, Angel Castro arrived in Cuba with the Spanish army during the Spanish-American War. He firmly believed that the Americans had unjustly deprived Spain of its victory over the Cuban insurgents. This deep animosity towards the Americans, held by Castro's father, also influenced Fidel Castro as a young man.

Fidel Castro's life and rule were characterized by repressive actions that led to a Communist system punishing any group that did not align with the Revolution, especially the Christian church. Pastors from different denominations were imprisoned in harsh conditions for over twenty years. Castro enforced his repressive communist dictatorship through security forces, a civilian army, and a judiciary system restricted from independence. The persecution also involved state surveillance, public acts of repudiation, and beatings still used in Cuban society today.

Fidel's adult behaviors were deeply rooted in his formative years. Extensive research indicates a troubling pattern of violent behavior from a young age. His methods notably involved the application of force, evident in his seizing control of Cuba, his consistent defiance of authority, and his adept use of manipulation. Notably, even as a young individual, Fidel

demonstrated early signs of a dictatorial nature by challenging authority through the use of manipulative tactics and resorting to violence.

A one-party state inevitably leads to the persecution of other groups who are subjected to the dominant government forces, particularly under Marxist Communism. Some argue that the judicial system in Cuba lacks genuine democracy, given the role of the PCC and the failure to implement the revised constitution's provisions for religious freedom. The revised laws allowed certain freedoms but were subject to state control. Similarly, freedom of the press and speech were guaranteed but had to align with the socialist regime's objectives, which cancel any contrasting views. For example, "Article 53 states that freedom of the press and speech are guaranteed but must conform to the purposes of a socialist society."⁷⁷ While Cubans can express themselves, socialist and Marxist-Leninist principles ultimately constrain these freedoms, the state's official ideology. Arguments are raised that freedoms are allowed to the people of Cuba as long as they do not interfere with the state's ruling.

Religious freedom in Cuba hinged on the Revolution's support, as emphasized by Raul Castro in his meeting with twenty evangelical pastors. Raul conveyed, "But he also hinted that he expected Christians to adapt themselves to the Revolution. Our religious freedom would depend on our loyalty to the Government."⁷⁸ Pastors and leaders who opposed the Revolution faced imprisonment, such as Herbert Caudill, who was arrested and confined for nineteen months. After his release, Caudill was barred from participating in church functions, stating, "I was not to have any participation in the work of our churches and convention."⁷⁹ This raises the question of

⁷⁷ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 125.

⁷⁸ Herbert Caudill, *On Freedom's Edge*, 7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

how one can function in a society that demands absolute obedience to a Communist Marxist regime, especially when the Apostle Peter states, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, NKJV). Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution worked relentlessly to eliminate the gospel message of Jesus Christ from society.

The challenges faced by the Christian church intensified as the Cuban Government seized land and facilities and gained control of all media outlets, further restricting the spread of the gospel. The Government aimed to limit the construction of churches, congregational meetings, and the dissemination of the gospel beyond church walls. The Castro regime would deal with any such activities if they were seen as having any hint of anti-revolutionary rhetoric. Boyle states, "Marxism-Leninism and its strict adherents among the Cuban revolutionaries regarded religion as inherently counter-revolutionary."⁸⁰ The Communist regime suppressed any actions that opposed the new education system.

The Cuban Government escalated its persecution of Protestant ministers and other religious leaders by sending them to concentration camps in the eastern Camagüey province, along with others considered social outcasts. In a passionate speech, Fidel Castro declared, "Today we say with more force than ever: socialism or death, Marxism-Leninism or death!"⁸¹ His statement reflects the dominance of Marxism-Leninism over the church in Cuba and the denial of religious persecution by political and religious leaders in the Communist stronghold. As mentioned, "Political and religious leaders in this Communist stronghold would have the West

⁸⁰ Herbert Caudill, *On Freedom's Edge*, 126.

⁸¹ Tom White and Don Tanner, *The Spiritual Battle for Cuba: Pulling the Devil's Tail*, 9.

believe that religious persecution does not exist."⁸² Persecution took various forms, such as the closure of church facilities, Marxism integration, abuse, and imprisonment.

The Christian church had to wrestle with new theological perspectives required to align with the Communist Government. Jose Marti's concept of salvation emphasized liberating people from indifference and selfishness, which he called "apathy and egotism."⁸³ According to Marti, the key to achieving the salvation of humanity was freeing individuals from indifference and self-centeredness. Marti's perspectives on self-reliance led to the rejection of God by advocating for people's denial of Him.

Cuba's people were transformed by the influence of various intellectuals, including philosophers, scholars, clergy, scientists, and thinkers who championed new ideas. None of these individuals, however, shared a common belief in the Holy Word of God or faith in Jesus Christ. The three figures who brought lasting change were Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro, who did not embrace Christianity or view the Bible as the Word of God. Fidel Castro even mentioned at a World Council of Churches gathering the need for a cooperation between religion and the Revolution. The contradictions between Christian teachings and socialist principles raise questions. Jesus taught to love one another, and His coming was to save the world, not to condemn it. The message of salvation is not promoted in any Communist, Socialist, or Marxist regime, such as the one in Cuba.

Marxism first emerged as a revolutionary communist ideology for the working class. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels articulated its principles in their seminal work, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. The founders of the Manifesto characterized society's history as a series of

⁸² Tom White and Don Tanner, *The Spiritual Battle for Cuba*, 10.

⁸³ Carlos Ripoll, *Jose Marti, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban*, 2.

class struggles. The introduction of new ideologies in Cuba sparked a division within the Cuban Church. Despite their best efforts, church leaders were unable to resist the influence of the Marxist Christians, who began to undermine the Church's authority. The fragmented and unsettled Church, closely aligned with foreigners and the affluent, posed a challenge to the popular government and suffered a significant setback. Over time, church leaders endorsed the agrarian reform law, deepening the rifts within the Church and creating non-believers in Cuba.

Following the Revolution, the relationship between the church and the state deteriorated due to the Marxist-Leninist Government's policies, which included nationalizing private schools and the departure of church leaders. Discussions between Marxist and Christian groups in seminaries affiliated with Matanzas, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches were heavily influenced by the Government's strict control over religious organizations through the Council of Cuban Churches. Despite the country's shift towards a more secular approach, religious gatherings and associations remained significantly restricted under the regime. The Cuban Council of Churches continued to shape the church's efforts to navigate its relationship with the communist regime.

Sergio Arce played a crucial role in adapting the Word of God to the significant changes taking place in the Cuban church. While studying at Princeton University, Arce was deeply influenced by two theological professors, John A. Mackay and Paul Lehmann, who believed that the Bible contained contradictions and errors. Arce later acknowledged that Lehmann's ideas significantly shaped his evolving theological and ideological perspective, which was not rooted in the Scriptures. The Christian church faced intense persecution in various forms, including the forcible takeover of Cuba, land, educational institutions, church buildings, and a departure from biblical and theological beliefs, all of which disregarded God's redemptive plan in Jesus Christ.

Chapter Three: Methods

Phenomenon

The phenomenological research approach is a construct of examination stemming from the philosophical and psychological schools of thought in which researchers share the experiences of individuals involved by sharing living experiences that determine the phenomenon in question. The philosophical approach is rooted in the historical challenges faced by the Christian church, particularly the psychological impact of Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution. In the case of Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution, the entire country experienced this phenomenon either by persecution, acceptance, or escaping dictatorship under the assimilation of Communism, Marxism, Leninism, and Socialism.

Fidel Castro employed the philosophical approach via Marx-Lenin ideology through means of education, which required a few decades to assimilate the population into the new change in the country. In quoting former United States president Ronald Reagan, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction."¹ It took the Communist regime of Cuba two decades to completely turn the tide of not only the general population but that of the Christian church that was infiltrated with the philosophical thought of Marx-Lenin Communist ideology.

In the case of this phenomenological approach, the findings of an entire country relied on interviews with Fidel Castro, works of Cuban theologians, imprisoned pastors, and eyewitnesses that were directly affected. The approach of this study includes the root of each building block that Castro's Communist Government implemented throughout its history. The building blocks were Atheism, Communism, Socialism, Marxism, Leninism, past historical figures, and

¹ National Archives, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, January 5, 1967: Inaugural Address (Public Ceremony).

theological conformity to the new society. The qualitative research approach leads to another part called the Constructivist worldview in the next outline of this study's revelation based on the eyewitness accounts of the people of Cuba, both secular and religious.

The research provided helps the qualitative method by constructing an analysis that those seeking to learn and understand the persecution of the Christian church in Cuba will have an easier time following the conditions of the church in Cuba. The understanding comes via knowledge revealed by the individuals involved in both Castro's Marx-Lenin Communist ideologies that do not reflect the Christian church bound to the Word of God. In addition, this study helps motivate others to seek answers that are easily deduced by the various components of how the leaders of Cuba thought and the influences that guided their decisions. The research of the Cuban experience from one dictator to another dictator helps interpret the practices and the perspectives held to develop knowledge of the phenomenological effects of Castro's Communist Revolution on the Christian church in Cuba.

Constructivist Worldview

Individuals seek to understand and actively participate in the world around them according to social constructivists. Researchers from supportive interpretations of their experiences focused on specific objects or phenomena based on researchers' observations of the people of Cuba. These varied and complex elucidations lead scholars to explore the diversity and richness of perspectives instead of simplifying them into narrow categories or concepts. John W. Creswell states, "The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied."² Their findings informed the researchers' understanding of

² John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches 5th Edition*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 7-8.

the Communist takeover that the Christian church in Cuba was compelled to comply or face severe consequences.

Epistemological frameworks are theoretical models encapsulating beliefs and principles regarding how different academic disciplines approach knowledge acquisition. These frameworks consider various factors, including the methodology used to investigate a specific subject area, the type and quality of evidence needed to support claims, and the relevance and impact of knowledge produced, whether it has practical or theoretical applications. Ultimately, epistemological frameworks shape scholars' thinking and pursuit of knowledge in their respective fields. The frameworks help the researcher discern between knowledge of confirmed historical facts and direct opinion.

The educational programs implemented by Cuba's Communist regime under Castro were rooted in the principles of Communism, Socialism, and Marxist-Leninist ideology. This approach emphasizes that individuals construct knowledge by reflecting on their experiences and interactions with their social and cultural environment. The educational system in Cuba was designed to exert control over the environment and shape society by establishing a foundational set of educational principles via assimilation. As Boyle states, "Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of the state."³ Consequently, knowledge was viewed as a fluid and dynamic process based on how individuals interpreted and engaged with the world rather than as a fixed or objective entity.

The constructivist perspective challenges the conventional notion that knowledge is something that individuals can passively acquire from external sources. Instead, it posits that people actively construct knowledge by engaging with their surroundings, drawing on their prior

³ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 125.

knowledge, and collaborating. This perspective has noteworthy implications for education, as it underscores the importance of learners actively constructing their understanding of the world instead of passively receiving information. This research study shows that the Christian church was subject to strict control over what it could disclose beyond its walls. Furthermore, theologians such as Arce introduced a new theology that aligned with the Communist regime by resigning and not holding them accountable to the Word of God. Arce argued “That there are no irreconcilable contradictions between “the Marxist” philosophical and sociological understanding of the world, history, human nature, and the biblical perspective.”⁴

Ethnography

The qualitative research approach employs an ethnographic design, a research methodology that entails immersing oneself in a specific community or organization to observe its behaviors and interactions closely. In this study, extensive effort was invested in sourcing materials that reflected individuals immersed in the changes occurring in Cuba for its communities abroad. The written report created by the ethnographer following the research is also known as "ethnography." Creswell offers that “Ethnography is a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time.”⁵ This adaptable research approach grants a holistic comprehension of a group's collective culture, customs, and social dynamics, however, it does present practical and ethical challenges.

⁴ Sergio Arce, “The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context” *Horizons* 14, no. 1 (1987): 186–87. (New York, NY: Circus, 1986), 56.

⁵ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches 5th Edition*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 13.

Ethnographers are renowned for their thorough examination of cultural nuances in qualitative research. They meticulously identify the dominant cultural motifs of the studied society, which may encompass social regulation, language, stability, transformation, or social structure such as familial ties and kinship. Thanks to their astute powers of observation and analysis, ethnographers can attain a more profound comprehension of the culture and its influence on the everyday existence of its denizens. John W. Creswell states, “Qualitative inquirers use theory in their studies in several ways. First, much like quantitative research, it is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypotheses.”⁶ To understand the Revolution spearheaded by Fidel Castro, one must delve into the history of the actors involved, the ideologies espoused, and the reshaping of societal paradigms.

One of the first constructs of social change came from Fidel Castro’s announcement that Cuba proclaimed itself an Atheist country, which promoted that there is no God. Atheism permeated the mandatory public education system of Cuba and taught new generations the rejection of any gods at all. Instead, it looked to the regime as holding the truths in the newly forming Cuban society. According to King David, Fidel Castro and his regime are fools: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good” (Psalm 14:1, NKJV). David makes clear that those who deny the existence of God are fools, immoral, and capable of detestable deeds.

The success of turning the people’s hearts to a system that proclaims there is no God makes way for observing the behavior of a particular culture, namely, the Cuban people. Behavioral observation is a widely accepted and practical method for assessing behavior, valued

⁶ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 61.

for objectivity. This method systematically observes and documents an individual's behavior in their natural environment. Unlike other methods that rely on subjective interpretations, behavioral observation offers an impartial and dependable way of measuring human behavior. Real-time monitoring and documentation through behavioral observation allow a comprehensive understanding of an individual's behavior across diverse contexts. Whether utilized in clinical, educational, or research settings, behavioral observation is a valuable tool for comprehending and enhancing human behavior.

The story of Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution in Cuba offers insight into the current state of the Cuban people. The Revolution brought significant changes, such as land reforms and an atheistic education system. However, it also resulted in the persecution of the Christian church and prohibited the sharing of the gospel outside of church walls. The pervasive emphasis on collective welfare and the subordination of individual interests fostered an illusive sense of uniformity among the people. This overarching focus on altruism in Cuba suppressed individualism, impeded innovation, and dampened entrepreneurial endeavors, indispensable for sustainable economic advancement and personal growth.

Causality Affect

The research process involves crafting factual statements to provide a lucid understanding of the topic or describe the relational effects of a Communist regime's advances against the church. Creswell states the following: "in quantitative studies, researchers advance the relationship among variables and pose this in terms of questions or hypotheses."⁷ The ultimate aim is to uncover meaningful insights and patterns that can inform decision-making and

⁷ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 7.

advance knowledge in the field. One such insight is the significant impact of a Communist regime on the church, which we delve into in this research. “Causality means that we would expect variable X to cause variable Y.”⁸ This meant that Cuba's Communism would significantly affect the church because those types of governments take over land and businesses and the type of work a person will do. It also affects the church by stifling avenues for them to reach the community with any literature to give to the people, which is against the law. Another effect the Communist Revolution had on the church was the development of a new theology to fit the state's narrative. In other words, they are changing the Word of God to get along with the regime in the face of prohibiting gatherings in homes for the worship of God.

The establishment of Cuba's new political system prompted the departure of many individuals from the ministry who chose to leave the country. Additionally, the Government aimed to suppress any ideologies that opposed the Communist regime, which directly impacted the Christian church. Communism, Marxism, Socialism, and Atheism became the prevailing ideologies, with the Government expecting the populace to adhere to their mandates. Those who did not comply faced severe consequences such as imprisonment, deportation, or capital punishment. One author noted it as follows: “parents who kept their children home from school on religious holidays were subject to imprisonment. By the end of 1961, 3,400 nuns and priests had fled from the island in fear,”⁹ further supporting that persecution was used as a means to control the Christian church.

⁸ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 49.

⁹ Paul A. Marshall and Gilbert Lela, *Their Blood Cries out: The Untold Story of Persecution against Christians in the Modern World* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), 90.

Living under a Marxist Communist regime strips the individual's right to their God-given talents for the benefit of forsaking self for the benefit of the whole. All are expropriated from individuals regarding creativeness, business ownership, and religious freedom in the public square. In Cuba, young members of various Protestant churches debated aligning biblical doctrine and theology with certain aspects of the Communist Government. The youth, as Caraway said, "posited a need for a doctrinal base that promoted the positive aspects of the revolution, with a specific focus on social justice."¹⁰ The conversation between Marxist and Christian groups in seminaries affiliated with Matanzas, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches, however, was one-sided due to the Government's strict control over religious organizations through the Council of Cuban Churches. Despite the country's shift towards a more secular approach, the causality of religious gatherings and associations was still subject to significant limitations under the Communist regime.

Sergio Arce, a theologian during the Revolution worked within the confines of Marxist thinking, explaining further that his Christianity was not one of establishment but rather that he was a Christian because he grew up in a Christian home. "I (Arce) said: "I am a Christian because my parents were Christians."¹¹ History has demonstrated that replacing one dictator with another often leads to a cycle of oppression or even worse outcomes, as evidenced in Cuba. The Cuban people were indoctrinated and compelled to embrace the ideologies of the communist regime. They had no choice but to conform, and those who resisted had to leave the country, live in hiding, or face imprisonment. The ultimate result was the emergence of a new belief system

¹⁰ Rose T. Caraway, "Religion, Sustainability Movements, and Ecumenism, 447.

¹¹ Gregory Baum, "The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context," 3.

based on Communism, causing confusion within the church and giving rise to a new church not grounded in the teachings of the Bible but in the doctrines of Marxist Communism.

The Christian church in Cuba would encounter substantial obstacles if leaders like Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro, who do not adhere to the Christian faith or acknowledge the Bible as the Word of God, were at the helm. Marxism preaches that the working class should overthrow the ruling class and assume power, but this frequently leads to another group taking charge. As Marx states in the *Communist Manifesto*, "Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!"¹² The critical divergence is that such a paradigm restricts individuals from owning businesses, exercising inventiveness, and pursuing comparable endeavors.

Should a communist revolution occur in Cuba, the church would likely be among the first institutions to be persecuted. The ability of believers to gather and worship would be severely curtailed under a communist regime, and any religious activity perceived as a threat to the regime's agenda would be quickly suppressed. Segesvary states, "Under extremely harsh conditions, thousands of these U.M.A.P. inmates (among whom figured the current Archbishop Havana, Laime Lucas Ortega Alamino) suffered this new form of repression until the camps were closed in 1967."¹³ Additionally, individuals deemed to be a threat to the regime would be subjected to prolonged imprisonment, with some pastors receiving sentences of up to 20 years. It

¹² Xina M. Uhl and Link, *Communism* (New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 2019), 20.

¹³ Louis Segesvary, "In a Place Without a Soul": The Testimony of Former Cuban Political Prisoners, ed. Howard Cincotta (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Information Agency, 1985), 13.

is believed that the regime recognized the need for time to thoroughly indoctrinate the younger generation with Marxist-Leninist ideology and establish a new societal dictatorship.

During the years 1965-1966, the Cuban Government became aggressive in its anti-religious persecution of Protestant ministers and other religious leaders taken to labor camps. Author Louis Segesvary states that they sent them to “Eastern Camagüey province, along with others considered social scum.”¹⁴ A Communist takeover would give them complete control over mass media, therefore restricting the gospel from being shared over Cuban airwaves. In contrast, Religious organizations in Cuba would face significant obstacles when it came to accessing mass media due to the Government’s firm ownership and control.

Questions and Hypotheses

The qualitative research method is a highly adaptable tool that enables researchers to investigate a broad range of questions and hypotheses about societal changes resulting from a particular philosophy or social or cultural shift. In the case of Cuba, Fidel Castro proclaimed the country as a Communist, Marxist-Leninist, Socialist state to assimilate Cuba fully. In an impassioned speech, Castro declared, "Today we say with greater force than ever before: socialism or death, Marxism-Leninism or death!"¹⁵ The impact of Castro's Revolution on the Christian church was varied, with complete control over the church, its leaders, and the subsequent persecution. Castro swiftly implemented a re-education program that would fundamentally transform Cuba's future by indoctrinating its citizens with Communist, Socialist, and Marxist-Leninist ideologies.

¹⁴ Louis Segesvary, "In a Place Without a Soul," 13.

¹⁵ Tom White and Don Tanner, *The Spiritual Battle for Cuba: Pulling the Devil's Tail*, 9.

Hypothesis: The hypothesis proposes that after years of education in a subject that suppresses dissent, a new society with a Communist, Socialist, and Marxist-Leninist ideological mindset emerges.

Qualitative researchers rely on theoretical frameworks to structure their studies and aid in interpreting their findings. The new “Fidelista” takeover of Cuba is fundamental to understanding the behavior and attitudes of individuals in the Christian church being investigated. Creswell states, “It [theoretical frameworks] are used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypotheses.”¹⁶ By utilizing theory, readers gain a more profound understanding of Cuba’s intricate social interactions and experiences.

Fidel Castro's Revolution had a great deal of influence on Christian churches in Cuba and their worship practices.

Hypothesis: The hypothesis posits that the Revolution brought Communist, Socialist, and Marxist-Leninist philosophies that impacted the Christian church in Cuba. Additionally, the Government's educational initiatives promoted Marxism and Socialism, leading to a reimagining of Christian worship. This involved connecting biblical teachings with Marxist-Leninist ideology, advocating for Atheism and Socialism, and endorsing the redistribution of land ownership. Each of these ideologies directly impacted the Christian church in Cuba, and the research put forth in this work directly exposes it.

Qualitative research employs a methodology that concentrates on formulating theories that can result in various outcomes. This is accomplished through an inductive process of collecting extensive information from participants and organizing it into categories or themes,

¹⁶ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 61.

such as Marxism, Communism, Socialism, Theology, and persecution. By doing so, the influence of these ideologies on the Christian church in Cuba can be identified and further developed into patterns, theories, or generalizations. These insights can then be compared to personal experiences or existing literature, leading to diverse results.

It is crucial to acknowledge the significance of examining the phenomenological effects on the Cuban church when conducting research. This is especially true when the following fact is taken into account: Fidel Castro declared Cuba a Communist nation, guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology, which contradicts the belief in a higher power. One author explained it this way: “In 1962, Castro's government seized and shut down more than 400 Catholic schools, claiming that they spread "dangerous" beliefs among the people. Many church leaders, including pastors and priests, were also sent to re-education through labor farms along with other "undesirables.”¹⁷ Consequently, the educational system was reformed to align with these principles. In this context, the research questions and hypotheses are highly important, providing a compelling framework for our study.

The impact of Fidel Castro's Revolution on the Christian church can be summarized by its initial denial of the existence of Jesus Christ. Every child mandated to attend public school would face assimilation into an ideology that Jesus never existed. Castro, to deflect a question that was asked, stated the following: “The following passage appears in a Cuban school textbook for ten-year-olds: About 2000 years ago, rumors began to spread about the existence of Christ who was supposed to be the Son of God. But science has proved that Christ never existed.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Lena Lopez, CUBA: Draconian new restrictions on "home religious meetings" *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* September 15, 2005, 2.

¹⁸ Fidel Castro, “Christianity and the Revolution.” *New Blackfriars* 59, no. 695 (1978): 164.

Castro's first response supported the fact of the question when he referred to his stance on Marxist-Leninist doctrine by focusing on an area that would compound the denial of Jesus. Castro stated, "It is true that we take Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a starting point, but we stress the social aspects really."¹⁹ A hypothesis can be drawn that Castro's focus on the denial of Christ within "social aspects" would produce a snowball effect of "Marxist-Leninist doctrine."

Historical

Qualitative research is a means to understanding the individuals, groups, and, in this case, the Christian church in Cuba. Castro's Revolution takeover of the country revealed a high level of persecution, contrasting ideology, and a setting that would change the landscape of how the Christian church in Cuba would either conform or resist the Communist change. Creswell defines qualitative research with the participants involved as a "process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data."²⁰ The data gathered during this research process contributes to understanding the transformations experienced by the Christian church, drawing from firsthand testimonies. The dictator himself stated that "it is true that we take Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a starting point."²¹ Fidel Castro, the country's leader, provided one such testimony, acknowledging Cuba's shift towards a Marxist-Leninist state.

The historical evidence indicates that the Christian church encountered significant resistance from the emerging Communist regime. There was a long-term trend of integrating new

¹⁹ Fidel Castro, "Christianity and the Revolution," 164.

²⁰ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 4.

²¹ Fidel Castro, "Christianity and the Revolution." 164.

members into the church, many of whom were educated within an ideological framework that rejected the notions of God and the existence of Jesus Christ. Historical documentation highlights the fact that Fidel Castro's Marxist-Leninist Cuba led to the imprisonment of numerous pastors. According to Kim Lawton, "In Cuba, popular Pentecostal pastor Orson Vila remains under house arrest for conducting worship services in his back yard."²² This historical backdrop offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by the Cuban church, shedding light on the persecution it endured and the internal transformations it underwent.

Setting

The historical events involve posing thoughtful questions to guide researchers toward thoroughly understanding the topic. In this study, the researcher collects data by observing the transformation of the Cuban people's environment through research works collected from various authors and witnesses. This process allows the researcher to identify general themes and draw conclusions and inferences about the Christian church in Cuba. The analysis is conducted inductively, starting with specific details and building towards identifying general themes.

The eradication of anything that stood in the way of the new Communist regime had a direct impact on the Christian church in Cuba. The persecution that Christian pastors endured included imprisonment and working in harsh conditions in labor camps. Pastor Obed Millan, an adjunct professor at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was among many pastors forced from their homes, imprisoned, and worked at concentration camps. Speaking of pastor Obed, He was "Imprisoned for *proselytism* and endured two years and seven months of hard labor in a "concentration camp" in eastern Cuba, where he worked on government-confiscated

²² Kim A. Lawton, "The Suffering Church." *Christianity Today*, 1996 Jul 15, 1996/07/15/. 54.

sugar cane fields.”²³ Despite these hardships, the arrested church leadership continued sharing the gospel wherever they found themselves.

The Christian church in Cuba faced a significant challenge when the education system underwent a transformation that conflicted with the Word of God. The Marxist-Leninist ideology stood in complete contradiction to the Word of God, which conformed to the new ideology implemented by the Castro regime. Christian education was confiscated when the Communist Government took over most facilities that taught children Christian education. The attack on the Christian church created a setting that would disconnect them from any help from American churches. As one author said, “for the first time in decades, they would go without financial assistance from the Americans.”²⁴ The concluding result was that under Communist rule, the Christian church was purged of its leaders and eventually replaced with those accepting the Revolution in Cuba.

Data Collection Method

The research was primarily conducted using the Jerry Falwell Online Library resources to understand the context and setting of the Christian church in Cuba. The findings were instrumental in interpreting the events through the testimonies of the participants who spearheaded them and those affected by the Communist takeover. As Creswell notes, "the process of qualitative research is largely inductive; the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field."²⁵ Throughout the research, various aspects were explored to understand

²³ Marilyn Stewart, “*Imprisoned Under Castro, Cuban Pastor Obed Millan Shares Message of Hope*,” September 17, 2018.

²⁴ Theron Corse, “*Presbyterians in the Revolution: An American Missionary Church and the Challenge of Castro’s Cuba, 1959–1970.*” *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000): 2.

²⁵ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 8.

the challenges faced by the Christian church in Cuba, including information on Fidel Castro, persecution, Jose Marti, Communism, Socialism, Marxism, Santería and conformed Theology. Each area provided essential background for understanding the problem's significance, the key concepts for gathering information, the hypotheses that drove the inquiry, the methodology and design, and the research plan utilized.

In qualitative research, theorists utilize theory to offer a comprehensive explanation, similar to the approach taken in quantitative research, such as ethnographies, which is a scientific means of describing the individuals within a culture. In the case of the Communist takeover of Cuba, theoretical speculation is not necessary as the events unfolded on the global stage. Creswell's assertion supports this notion: "Some qualitative studies do not explicitly include a theory and instead present descriptive research of the central phenomenon."²⁶ It can rightfully be asked if the takeover of numerous educational institutions and land from the people of Cuba negate the need for reader speculation. The reforms themselves, publicly announced to the world, provide the answer to whether there are any theories about what transpired in the face of documented facts.

Procedures

The research study procedures employ the historical approach, in which researchers elucidate individuals' experiences by articulating the lived practices that shape the historical events under investigation. The Communist takeover of Cuba resulted in persecution against the Christian church, leading to the closure of numerous facilities and the implementation of a law prohibiting home fellowships. Fidel Castro sought to sever the church's ties with the United States and convince the Cuban people that there were no contradictions between Christianity and

²⁶ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, J. David, *Research Design*, 72.

Marx-Lenin ideology. *Phenomenological research* is a methodology rooted in philosophy and psychology that entails the researcher describing the lived experiences of individuals regarding Fidel Castro's Revolution, as recounted by the research documentation.

The constructivist worldview is a methodological procedure that seeks to understand and actively interact with the world. Researchers aim to interpret their experiences and concentrate on specific objects or historical events based on their observations of the people of Cuba. These diverse and complex interpretations lead scholars to explore a range of perspectives rather than simplifying them into narrow categories or concepts. The researchers' goal is to rely heavily on the viewpoints of the people of Cuba regarding the experiences of the Christian church.

Researcher Positionality

As a Cuban-American who has visited the country and witnessed the consequences of the Revolution's aftermath, a firm belief that Fidel Castro's actions were responsible for the suffering of the Cuban people is present in the researcher. The approach to this subject is with a perspective informed by a shared faith in Jesus Christ revealed in the Holy Scriptures, which is wisdom that surpasses human understanding. Under the Communist regime, the Christian church was forced to comply or face imprisonment or exile, prompting the question of how a church could flourish under such circumstances. The Scriptures caution against the intentions of a dictatorship forcefully overtaking a society. Genesis 15:13 describes descendants as strangers in a land not their own and being afflicted for four hundred years. As a born-again Christian, the Bible states that while physical persecution may be endured, the soul remains untouched, as stated in Matthew: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28, NKJV). Regardless of any circumstance in life, the Scriptures point to God being the One in control of life.

Fidel Castro established a Communist and Marxist-Leninist regime that profoundly influenced Cuba's way of life. Under Castro's rule, Cuba became a one-party state that imprisoned, executed, or exiled anyone who opposed the new dictatorship. Throughout history, the Scriptures indicate that Israel was subject to dictatorship in places like Egypt, Babylon, and Rome. During these periods, the nation of Israel suffered under the rule of the land's leaders, and God intervened to save His people. Just as God used critical figures like Joseph, David, and Daniel, God used individuals like Caudill, White, and Pastor Alexander in Cuba to understand what was happening. Regardless of the Cuban people's beliefs about the changes, they found themselves constrained in a country where the government controlled every aspect of life, including abolishing private education. Castro stated, "There is no place for private education in a communist state."²⁷ He understood that it was crucial to re-educate the population from a very young age to transform a country.

Since the rise of Communism, Fidel and the Cuban Communist Government explicitly rejected the concept of God and has stood in direct opposition to the teachings of the Holy Bible. Communism has envisioned a society where the people enjoy equal status in a harmonious and idealistic community, but as discovered, it is always under dictatorship rule. Fidel Castro and his associates established Communism as the ruling ideology and declared Cuba to be an atheist state, explicitly denying the existence of God. In addition, Fidel implemented a new educational framework that propagated the belief that Jesus Christ never existed. The so-called communal living was only feasible for those who conformed to the government's mandates, eventually solidifying itself as the prevailing ideology through generations of re-education for the youth of Cuba.

²⁷ Herbert Caudill, *On Freedom's Edge*, 24.

The challenges faced by the Christian church in Cuba were made worse by a new theology embraced by individuals who did not have a personal conversion in Christ and who supported the Communist regime. Church leaders like Sergio Arce promoted a new theology that aligned with the changes in socialism in Cuba. Arce openly admitted that he identified as a Christian simply because his parents were Christians, which raised concerns about his salvation and leadership in the church. In his own words, he said, "I am a Christian because my parents were Christians."²⁸ Arce's basis for being a Christian fit within Marxist ideology.

Arce explained that his Christianity did not rely on established church structures but emphasized that an entire home could be where God's presence is always evident. The Bible, however, teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in believers by personal choice, not the home in which they live. Parents or place of upbringing do not determine a person's Christian faith; as stated in the Scriptures, Jesus said to him [Thomas], "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, NKJV). Repentant faith in Jesus Christ leads to eternal life, not the achievements or goals of a theological view. The Holy Bible states, a person's salvation is a gift from God, not determined by their surroundings or upbringing.

Fidel Castro's support for Santería, an African-based witchcraft, compounded more of the challenges the Christian church faced. As Wirtz states, "its referent— those cultural practices originally linked to Afro-Cubans of Lucumí (Yoruba) origin— was not delimited in the way familiar today but was part of a different enunciative order of marginalized social practices that were most often labeled brujería (witchcraft)."²⁹ Anyone interested in becoming a santero,

²⁸ Sergio Arce, "The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context" *Horizons* 14, no. 1 (1987): 186–87. (New York, NY: Circus, 1986), 3.

²⁹ Kristina Wirtz, *Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World*, (Gainesville, FL: UPF, 2007), 25.

meaning a practitioner, must first be baptized within the Catholic church. Over time, the people would not frequent the Catholic church to see the Virgin Mary but a goddess of the sea. “There are very few people in Cuba who go to the Catholic Church to see the Virgin Mary. They go to see Yamaya, the Yoruba goddess of the sea.”³⁰ The Bible explicitly addresses the worship of false gods and the misplacement of devotion.

Summary

The research in this work illustrates the struggles encountered by the Christian church during Fidel Castro's Communist rule in Cuba. Drawing from literary sources and firsthand testimonies, it vividly depicts the challenges faced. The research narrative delves into the collective experiences, offering insights into this new Communist regime. Throughout Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution, the population faced persecution or sought refuge from the oppressive rule. It took the Communist regime of Cuba two decades to completely transform the mindset of not only the general population but also that of the Christian church by conforming theology with this new philosophical ideology of Marx-Lenin, Communism, and Socialism.

The phenomenological approach utilized in this study has shed light on findings regarding an entire country, drawing from interviews with Fidel Castro, the works of Cuban theologians, imprisoned pastors, and eyewitness accounts from those directly affected. Various forms of persecution were employed to dismantle the foundation of the Christian church. These actions significantly impacted the country's landscape, particularly the Christian church, which was suppressed by the stringent laws of Castro's Communist Government. The new foundational

³⁰ Maha Marouan, “Santería in Cuba, 59.

elements of the government included Atheism, Communism, Marxism-Leninism, Socialism, and theological conformity to the new societal norms.

Employing a constructivist approach, the researchers advocate for interpretations of their experiences that focus on specific objects or historical research based on their observations of the people of Cuba. The Christian church in Cuba encountered intense, diverse, and intricate situations, prompting researchers to explore various perspectives instead of classifying them into biased categories or concepts. The research heavily relies on the participants' viewpoints regarding the situation under study. The constructivist perspective provides a comprehensive “philosophical and epistemological” view of the involvement of Castro's Communist regime, which plays a vital role in the background and provides the information needed to understand the effects the Christian church endured.

The educational initiatives implemented by Cuba's Communist regime, led by Castro, were deeply rooted in the ideologies of Communism, Socialism, and Marxist-Leninist philosophies. This educational approach emphasizes that individuals build knowledge by reflecting on their experiences and interactions within their social and cultural surroundings. The Cuban educational system was intentionally crafted to influence society by establishing a fundamental set of educational principles through assimilation. As Boyle states, "Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of the state."³¹ The Cuban Government dictated a singular direction for the country, producing a totalitarian state.

Researchers are highly valued for their painstaking examination of the Communist Government in qualitative research, as revealed in cases such as Santería. The systematic approach involves identifying and analyzing prevalent cultural elements that help identify

³¹ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief*, 125.

aspects of certain religions' effects on the Christian church. Through observational skills and alacritous analysis, ethnographers gain profound insights into the culture and its influence on the day-to-day lives of the people of Cuba. To truly comprehend the impact of the revolution spearheaded by Fidel Castro, one must delve into the historical background of the individuals involved, the ideologies espoused, and the profound transformation of societal norms.

The embrace of a belief system that rejects the presence of God presents a lamentable opportunity to investigate the behavior and mindsets of a specific culture, particularly that of the Cuban people. The narrative of Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution in Cuba provides valuable insights into the current state of the Cuban populace. The Revolution brought significant changes, including land reforms and a deconstructive educational system against the Word of God, however, it also resulted in the persecution of the Christian church and imposed restrictions on the spread of the gospel beyond the church's confines.

Living under a Marxist Communist regime deprives individuals of their God-given talents, sacrificing them for the collective good. People are also denied the opportunity for creativity, business ownership, and public religious freedom. In Cuba, young members of various Protestant churches explored ways to reconcile biblical doctrine and theology with certain aspects of the Communist government. Cuba's strategy of re-educating the population led to some Christian churches with viewpoints not rooted with a biblical world view. Additionally, religious gatherings and associations remained significantly restricted under the Communist regime.

The research discloses that a person cannot be a follower of Jesus Christ simply by living in a Christian home. Arce was forthright when he admitted that his Christianity was based on growing up with his parents, who were supposed, Christians. To be a follower of Jesus Christ,

one must realize the revelation of the Scriptures that point to Jesus Christ, leading to repentance and, finally, redemption. Salvation is unmerited and only given as a gift by God to those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. If a person tries to inherit salvation any other way, as Paul states, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21, NKJV). Salvation is not acquired by growing up in a Christian home, doing good works, or self-sacrificing for the greater good.

Chapter Four: Compiled Research

In chapter four, the profound challenges the Christian church encounters under a Communist regime are presented. It is essential to understand that these challenges were not just numbers on a page but deeply personal to those affected. The impact was felt by church leaders, their families, and congregants. The statistics presented are not just numbers but events of real people forced into conformity, exile, or imprisonment.

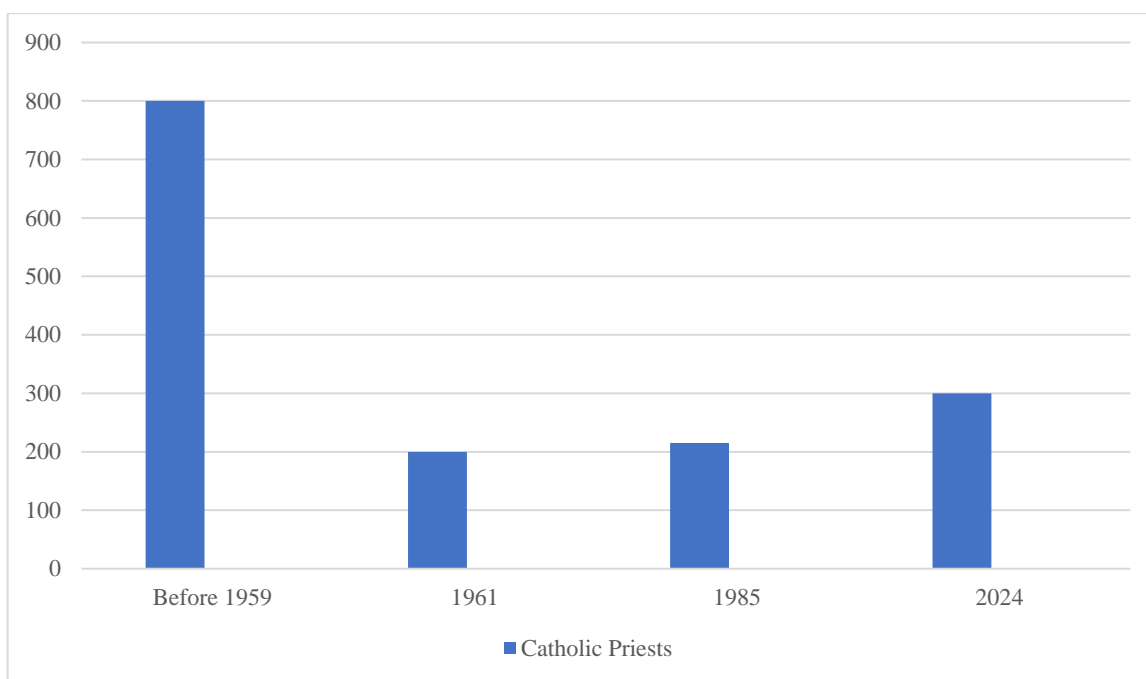
Denomination and Church Leadership Statistics: Figures 1 - 4

Table 1. Denomination Statistics

Figure 1. Catholic Priests.	Figure 5. Pastorate by Denomination, 1956-1970.
Figure 2. Catholic Nuns.	Figure 6. Pastorate lost to exile (minimum).
Figure 3. Protestant Church.	Figure 7. Various Protestant Church Numbers.
Figure 4. Membership by Denomination.	Figure 8. Persecution of the Christian Church

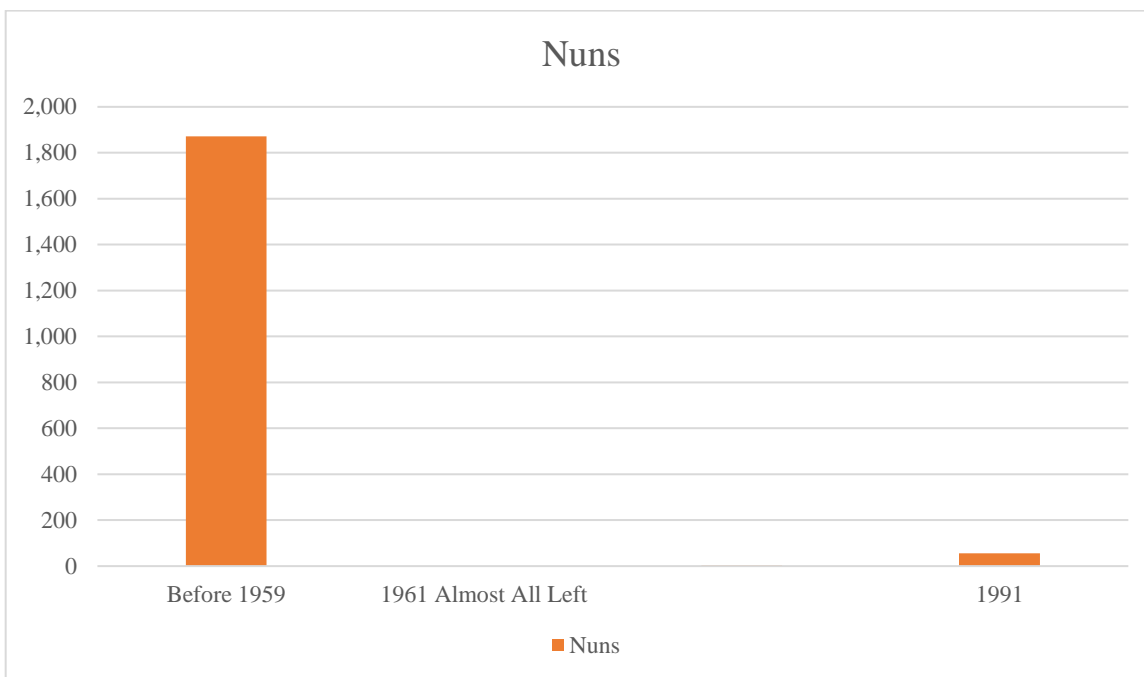
The following figures demonstrate the effects the Communist Revolution had on the Christian church in Cuba. The Revolution produced a country under a rise of Communist Marxist-Leninist ideologies that directly impacted the leaders within the various Christian denominations. The church suffered tremendous loss not only in the houses of worship that were taken or shut down but also in the leaders of those ministries. The proposed list of the denominations was partly due to the lack of research information on the Evangelical and protestant churches. Included are churches that are works-oriented salvation versus other denominations that are firm in salvation.

Church Leadership: Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Catholic Priests.

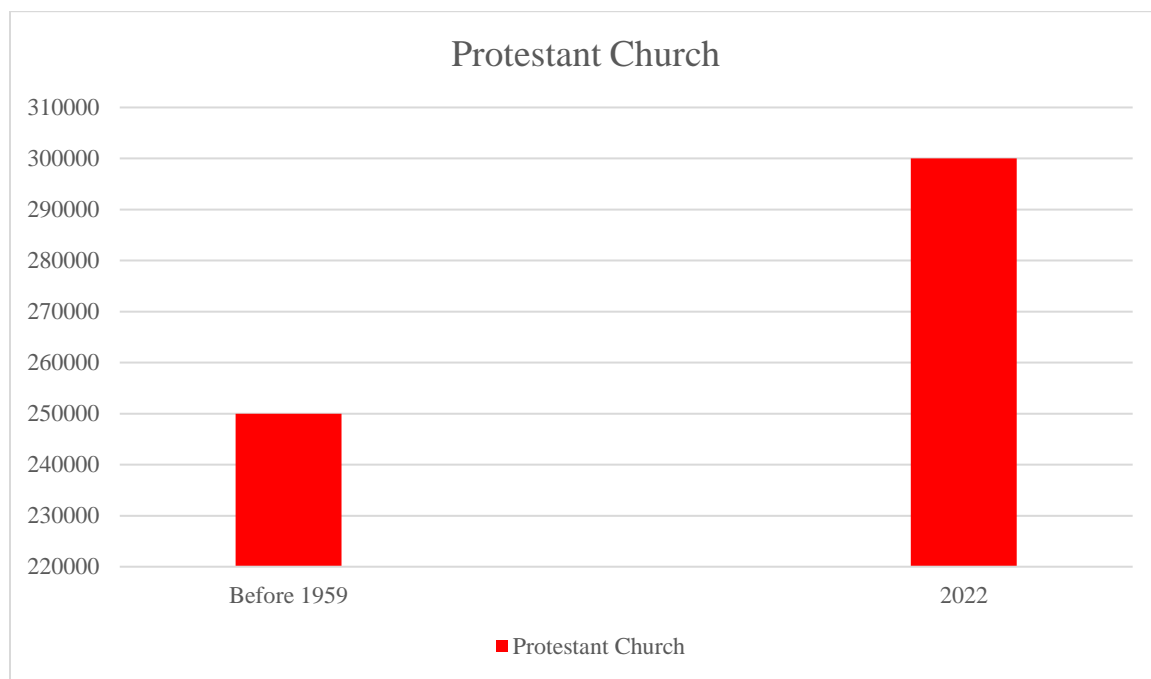
In Figure 1, official Church statistics indicate that Cuba's nominal Catholic population stood at roughly 75% before the Revolution but experienced a significant decline afterward. The government's complete control of the mass media and its decision to remove religious holidays from the national calendar weakened the church's influence. According to The Library of Congress, Cuba, A Country Study Series, "September 1961, the government deported 130 priests, bringing the total number left in the country to about 200, from about 800 three years earlier."¹ An estimated 300 Catholic priests are practicing in the country, representing a slight increase from the numbers in 1961.

¹ Rex A. Hudson, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Cuba: a country study / Federal Research Division, Library of Congress; edited by Rex A Hudson - 4th ed, 133.

Figure 2. Catholic Nuns.

The historical tensions between the Roman Catholic Church and Communism were significant. Although many Roman Catholics sympathized with the goals of the revolution, support for the church eroded due to the increasing emigration of the upper and middle classes, as well as the departure of many priests and nuns. Hudson notes that "many of the more than 2,000 nuns in the country in 1960 also departed. Cuba officially became an atheistic state in 1962."² Tensions, however, between the government and the Roman Catholic Church gradually eased in the following decades, and several factors contributed to their reconciliation.

² Rex A. Hudson, Library of Congress, 133.

Figure 3. Protestant Church.

Prior to the Communist Revolution, Cuba witnessed the emergence of a small yet growing community of Protestants. Goldenziel notes that “in 1958, Protestants claimed 150,000 to 250,000 adherents, or about 6% of the population.”³ These Cuban Protestant groups had established strong ties with their counterparts in the United States and depended on them for vital financial support. The revolutionary government was wary of the escalating influence of Protestantism in Latin America and its reliance on the U.S., perceiving it as a potential source of opposition that necessitated either assimilation or dismantling. Although there is an increase among the protestant churches of about 50,000, this is hardly growth when placed over 63 years.

³ Jill I. Goldenziel, *Sanctioning Faith: Religion, State, and U.S.-Cuban Relations* (2009). *Journal of Law and Politics*, Vol. 25, p. 179, 2009, 184.

Figure 4. Membership by Denomination.⁴

Denomination	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	
AOG Assemblies of God	2,600	-	-	2,746	-	-	-	-	
COG-C Church of God Cleveland	-	322	366	-	411	-	411	-	
COG-P Church of God Prophecy	230	-	-	350	338	341	65	-	
Eastern Baptist	6,297	6,537	6,889	7,003	7,244	7,203	7,104	7,202	
Episcopalian	9,475	9,546	9,454	8,896	8,525	4,096	-	-	
IPH - International Pentecostal Holiness Church	197	237	278	-	345	-	397	-	
Lutheran	543	494	537	-	403	-	483	-	
Methodist	9,149	9,209	9,283	-	9,009	9,010	8,744	-	
Nazarene	-	277	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Presbyterian	-	4,293	4,429	4,435	-	-	-	-	
Quaker	-	-	505	-	-	-	-	-	
SDA – East Seventh Day Adventist	2,655	2,695	2,754	2,814	2,868	2,948	3,218	2,903	
SDA – West Seventh Day Adventist	2,604	2,769	2,934	3,047	3,121	3,226	3,513	3,614	
SDA – Union Seventh Day Adventist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Western Baptist	8,738	8,561	8,750	8,889	-	-	-	9,790	
Continued	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972		
AOG Assemblies of God	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
COG-C Church of God Cleveland	-	-	530	-	-	-	-		
COG-P Church of God Prophecy	-	74	74	72	-	-	-		
Eastern Baptist	-	6,229	-	-	6,000+	-	-		
Episcopalian	-	-	3,712	-	-	-	-		
IPH - International Pentecostal Holiness Church	448	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Lutheran	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		

⁴ Theron Corse, *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*. Gainesville: UPF, 2007. Accessed June 17, 2024, 92-93.

Methodist	-	7,092	2,696	2,700	2,702	2,678	2,629		
Nazarene	-	-	300	-	-	-	-		
Presbyterian	-	3,082	-	-	-	-	-		
Quaker	-	315	-	-	-	248	-		
SDA – East Seventh Day Adventist	2,959	3,000	-	-	-	-	-		
SDA – West Seventh Day Adventist	3,655	3,500	-	-	-	-	-		
SDA – Union Seventh Day Adventist	-	-	6,818	6,810	7,245	7,550	8,077		
Western Baptist	8,781	-	-	-	-	-	6,960		
Denomination	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	
Eastern Baptist	6,107	-	7,000	-	6,200	-	6,164	-	
SDA – Union Seventh Day Adventist	8,798	8,646	8,861	9,226	9,876	9,292	9,392	8,902	
Western Baptist	7,116	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Methodist	-	2,478	-	2,235	2,188	-	-	-	
Nazarene	-	300	-	-	-	-	1,105	-	
Presbyterian	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,289	-	
Quakers	-	325	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Continued	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Eastern Baptist	5,563	-	-	-	-	6,003	-	-	6,907
SDA – Union Seventh Day Adventist	8,899	8,910	9,358	8,903	8,857	9,225	9,702	9,991	9,789
Western Baptist	6,495	-	-	-	-	6,155	6,150	-	-
Methodist	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nazarene	-	770	-	825	550	575	667	-	-
Presbyterian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Quakers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source used by permission of the author: Theron Corse, "Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond." (2000), 92-93.⁵

⁵ Theron Corse, *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*, 92-93.

Before 1959, the Christian church in Cuba was closely linked to the United States, however, Fidel Castro and his Revolution significantly impacted the church in Cuba. The new Communist Government worked tirelessly to cut off all connections between the Christian church and the Government of the United States. According to Theron, "The Protestant vision of modernization was rejected by the new regime, and the increasingly radical nationalist program of the Revolution would leave Cuban Protestants isolated and vulnerable."⁶ Theron's statement supports the activities in figures one through eight in church membership, the presence of pastors in the church, and the number of pastors forced to leave the country.

The church saw a surge in new members during the Revolution's early years. A significant number, however, joined in protest against the Government, as they held views contrary to the Marxist-Leninist ideology. Membership in the Christian Church began to stagnate and decline as many adherents embraced Marxism. According to Theron Corse, "Several pastors reported that members were leaving to 'join the Marxists' because they felt that their church membership was incompatible with their revolutionary fervor."⁷

Additionally, mandatory volunteer work, relocation to urban areas for employment, and government scholarship programs contributed to the decrease in church membership. Moreover, church members feared persecution and peer pressure as the new Communist Government took root. J. Mario Casanella, the executive secretary of the Eastern Baptists, noted a significant "Drop in peripheral membership within the Eastern Convention in 1963."⁸ Figure 4 illustrates the church's decline and stagnation after the Revolution's initial years.

⁶ Theron Corse, "Presbyterians in the Revolution: An American Missionary Church and the Challenge of Castro's Cuba, 1959–1970." *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000), 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Upon closer examination of several denominations, it became evident that the Christian church is experienced decline or stagnation. In 1958, the Assemblies of God congregation had 2,600 members, which was not substantial nationally. From 1958 to 1961, the numbers remained the same, with only a meager increase of 146 members, leaving the numbers stagnant. This lack of growth was attributed to the new Communist regime. In 1958, the Eastern Baptist denomination had 6,297 congregants, which increased to about 7,000 by 1970 but decreased to just over 6,000. By 1989, there was a final increase to 6,600. The Church of God Cleveland experienced a significant increase of 300 members, while there was some irony in the fact that the Church of God Prophecy declined to the size of a black box theater by 1969.

The denomination that underwent significant change were the Episcopalian Church, Methodist Church, and Baptist Church. In 1958, Episcopal Churches started with 9,475 members, but by 1963, the number had decreased to 3,712 and remained stagnant. The Methodist denomination also experienced a decline, starting with 9,949 members in 1958 and dropping to 2,629 in 1972, with no change up to 1989. Finally, the Western Baptist denomination lost approximately 3,000 members, beginning with 8,738 in 1958 and declining to 6,650. The church was gradually weakened within the Communist regime.

The only denomination that had a noteworthy increase in membership from 1958 through 1989 was when the Seventh Day Adventists merged themselves with the East and West denominations. In 1967, when the merger took place, combined, they had six thousand five hundred, which translated to an increase to six thousand eight hundred eighteen. By 1989, the Seventh Day Adventist Union denomination was the only church that showed any significant increase by two thousand five hundred. The growth experienced by other denominations could

have been more minimal, especially considering that a new educational system and cultural mindset influenced new members.

Figure 5. Pastorate by Denomination, 1956-1970.⁹

Denomination	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
Christian Reformed	-	6	8	-	-	7	6	5	6	6	7	-	-	-	-
Eastern Baptist	-	-	53	53	-	-	64	58	59	-	-	56	-	-	59
Episcopalian	28	-	-	-	30	30	27	27	26	-	-	-	-	-	15
Lutheran	-	-	3	3	3	2	5	4	4	5	5	4	2	2	-
Methodist	48	-	-	72	49	-	-	-	50	-	-	-	51	-	-
Nazarene	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	16	21	-	23
Presbyterian	-	-	-	46	47	49	-	48	45	40	34	22	-	-	-
Quaker	-	-	9	8	7	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
SDA - East	10	10	10	8	11	11	12	12	17	18	16	14	-	-	-
SDA - West	11	12	14	15	14	14	16	17	22	21	21	21	-	-	-
SDA - Union	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	60	60	60
Western Baptist	85+	-	-	91	-	-	90	85	-	93	57	44	-	-	-

Source used by permission by the author: Theron Corse, "Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond." (2000), 96.

The pastorate within denominations suffered loss, stagnation, or slight increase over two decades. The Christian Reformed Church, since 1957, started with almost a handful of six pastors and ended with seven. One would hardly call any real presence by the Reformed church in Cuba that barely rose above a trend line. The Eastern Baptists were second in line with the best start in 1958, only to end with a meager increase in the denomination after losing six in 1962. The Lutherans, Quakers, and Reformed church virtually had no presence in Cuba, with single-digit pastors in the entirety of Cuba.

⁹ Theron Corse, *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*, 96.

Between 1956 and 1967, the number of pastors in the Western Baptist denomination decreased by half and remained unchanged. Similarly, the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches experienced a 50% decrease in pastors by 1970. Specifically, the Episcopalians started with twenty-eight pastors in 1956 but ended with fifteen, while the Presbyterians started with forty-six in 1959 and ended with twenty-two by 1967. After the Seventh Day Adventist churches merged, however, they were the only denomination that experienced an increase, gaining twenty-five pastors by 1970.

The Communist Revolution led by Fidel Castro in Cuba successfully diminished the influence of the Christian church, particularly the Catholic Church. According to Theron, "The Catholic Church, with by far the largest pastorate of any denomination in Cuba, lost six hundred of its eight hundred priests in the first three years of the Revolution."¹⁰ At the time, the Catholic Church had a significant influence on many church facilities and private schools, and approximately 73% of the Cuban population identified as Catholics, whether they practiced their faith or not. "While 72.5 percent of Cubans identified themselves as Catholic and 91 percent of Cuban children were baptized as Catholics, only 24 percent of the population reported attending mass regularly."¹¹ Following the Bay of Pigs, Fidel Castro took swift action to expel, imprison, and revoke the licenses of Christian church leaders. While the expulsions did not affect Protestant denominations as heavily, many pastors ultimately left Cuba due to their opposition to the Revolution. Theron notes that, "similar to Catholic priests, several Protestant pastors departed from Cuba due to their objections to the Castro regime."¹²

¹⁰ Theron Corse, *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*, 96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 99.

Figure 6. Pastorate lost to exile (minimum).¹³

Denomination	Pastors Lost	Percentage Lost	Time Period
Christian Reformed	2	24	1959 - 1971
Eastern Baptist	11	20	1959 - 1972
Episcopalian	2	7	1959 - 1963
Free Will Baptist	n.a.	50	1959 - 1968
Methodist	63	81	1959 - 1978
Nazarene	1	n.a.	1950 - 1967
Quaker	1	13	1959 - 1963
Presbyterian	19	41	1959 - 1969
Western Baptist	15	13	1959 - 1965

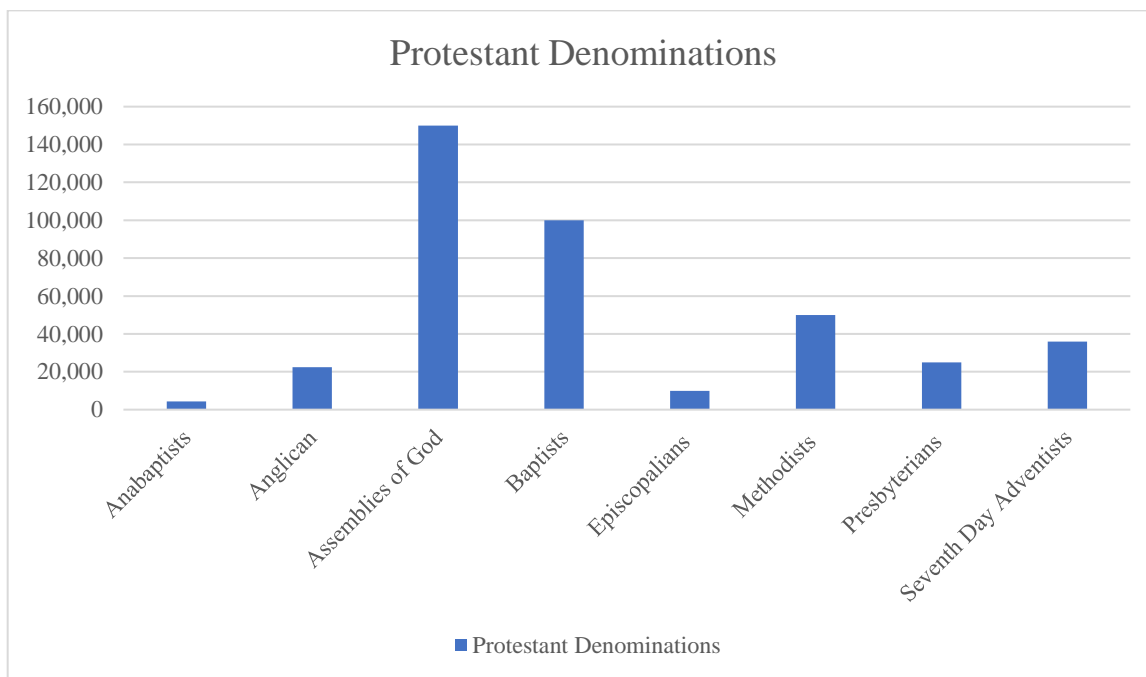
Source used by permission by the author: Theron Corse, "Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond." (2000), 98.

The impact of the attack on the Christian church in Cuba becomes even more apparent when Figure 6 is analyzed, which shows the number of pastors lost due to exile. A close examination of the data reveals that Fidel Castro and his Communist regime took two decades to dismantle the Christian church. They achieved this through educational assimilation, acquiring church land, and implementing land reforms that required mandatory military service or labor camp work. These actions directly affected church leaders and their families. Pastors and church leaders were removed from their homes at short notice and forced to serve the government, leaving many wives to lead the ministries. For example, one author notes that "internal politics could also devastate a pastorate. Presbyterian pastors split over how to deal with Castro's

¹³ Theron Corse, *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*, 98.

government. One group, including several top leaders, sought to accommodate the government, or in some cases even actively supported it."¹⁴ Internal divisions also played a role in the downfall of ministries, prompting some to leave the country entirely.

Figure 7. Various Protestant Church Numbers.



“The 2022 International Religious Freedom Report for Cuba indicated that Pentecostals and Baptists are the two largest Protestant denominations with a presence in Cuba.”¹⁵ Below is a breakdown of the Protestant denominations in Cuba.

Religious Demography:

The U.S. government estimates the population to reach 11 million by mid-2022.¹⁶ There is yet to be an independent, authoritative source on religious groups' overall size or composition. The

¹⁴ Theron Corse, *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*, 99.

¹⁵ Cuba 2022 International Religious Freedom Report, International Religious Freedom Report for 2022 United States Department of State • Office of International Religious Freedom, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Catholic Church asserts that it comprises a majority of the Cuban population. However, it is essential to note that not all self-identified Catholics are active practitioners; many are involved in Santería. “Interestingly enough, Santería, practiced by most, is what preserves Cubans’ link to Catholicism.”¹⁷ The Christian church encountered similar opposing theological views that continued to impact the congregations and leadership.

Persecution Incidents Against the Christian church in Cuba

Figure 8. Persecution of the Christian Church¹⁸

Cuba	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Churches or Christian Facilities Eradication Efforts	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	0
Churches or Christian Facilities Closures	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Arrest Made Against Christians	1	0	0	0	0	245	55	245
Prison Sentence of Christians	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Additional Forms of Attack Such as Mental and Physical	1	1	11	0	0	0	67	1
Christian Homes Attacked	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1
Forced to Leave Cuba	0	20	4	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (2019). Violent Incidents Database, www.violentincidents.com.

The number of reported incidents of persecution appears to be small, but one should question how many reports have gone silent for fear of retaliation. The Christian Cuban voice is silenced by a Cuban Dictatorship that denies the existence of God while maintaining a tyrannical hold over the people. The Cuban Government will stifle any such religious organization that may

¹⁷ Maha Marouan, “Santería in Cuba, 59.

¹⁸ Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (2019). Violent Incidents Database.

pose any threat to the regime's ideologies. According to Dennis P. Petri and Teresa Flores Chiscul, "In this context, religion is seen as an authority 'in competition,' in which religion affirms an authority that transcends that of the Cuban regime, representing a danger to its legitimacy, stability, and perpetuation in power."¹⁹

Christian leadership, such as Reverend Leonart, posed a significant threat because the Christian teachings could directly influence the Cuban population against the Cuban revolution. "Religious leaders or Christian human rights activists, such as Reverend Leonart, are categorized as those who profess "anti-political" teachings or who can discourage citizens' commitment to the "greatness of the Cuban revolution."²⁰ The fear that Cuban people, especially those of the Christian church, live underfoot and are afraid to voice their denunciations of the Communist regime publicly. Petri states, "On many occasions, for fear of reprisals or for not having anyone to turn to—due to the corruption of the authorities or their loyalty to the regime—many Christians have no way of making public or denouncing the threats that they and their families are victims of."²¹ Despite enduring numerous threats and challenges in Cuba, Christians attempted to confront the Communist regime, advocating for improved human rights amidst the enduring dominance of the Cuban government since 1959.

Summary

The impact of Fidel Castro's Revolution led to a significant decline of the Christian church in Cuba over 63 years. It can be inferred that the Communist Marxist-Leninist ideologies strategically reeducated the population, resulting in a decrease in church members and replacing

¹⁹ Dennis P. Petri and Theresa Flores Chiscul, "Country Overviews and Case Studies of Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba." June 18, 2019, 16.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

leaders with individuals who aligned with the new government's ideology. Many Protestant church leaders were either imprisoned, coerced to conform, or forced to leave the country. This enabled the Cuban Government to fill leadership positions with those who conformed and sympathized with the Revolution.

The emergence of new leaders like Arce, who introduced a new theology aligned with the Communist government, was influenced by philosophers who challenged the infallibility and authority of the Scriptures. Data analysis suggests that the church has endured 63 years of oppression and is still facing suppression today, underscoring the ongoing relevance of this research. The next step involves examining the pastors' sermons to assess how Marxist-Leninist ideology has permeated the Christian church in Cuba. Doing so would unveil the extent of Fidel and his Communist Government's success in implementing a mandated education system and laws that reshaped the trajectory of the Christian church.

Chapter Five: Conclusion/Discussion

The effects of Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution included the dismantling of the church through the nationalization of land, church buildings, and, in some cases, the homes of the Christian church's leadership. One of the central themes of the Communist takeover was the two-decade-long process of re-assimilating the population through education. Fidel Castro recognized the importance of infiltrating the education system to bring about the government's desired changes. Addressing university students in the United States was one of his tactics for infiltration when he realized that his popularity was declining.

One of the first actions Fidel undertook was to stir up action within the Cuban University by engaging the students to rise against Tierney, only to be replaced with another tyrannical government. These actions, which he excelled in from a young age, were a testament to his skills in manipulation and instigating opposition against ruling powers. As Brian Latell aptly puts it, painting a vivid picture of Fidel's character, "for Fidel, intelligence was a natural calling. He was a born conspirator. Even as a child, he deceived and manipulated others with exceptional ease."¹ Fidel, when losing popularity among the American people, made plans to travel to the United States. One author explains it this way: "in April 1959, concerned that American public opinion was turning against him, Fidel traveled to Washington, Princeton, New York, and Boston to try to win back favor."² It is perplexing that a dictator like Fidel was given a platform at universities in the United States to regain favor amidst increasing opposition.

Fidel Castro knew it was essential to influence the education system to start societal changes. In 1948, he orchestrated anti-American protests as the "University of Havana

¹ Brian Latell, *Will Absolve Me: Fidel Castro*. New York: RosettaBooks, 2016. Accessed June 18, 2024, 11.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

Committee" leader for the "Liberation of Puerto Rico." His extensive travels in the United States focused on engaging university students with his ideologies. As Latrell notes, "The intense fervor he displayed as a university student regarding Puerto Rico's status proved to be a reliable predictor of his future actions."³ The participants of the revolution in Cuba reveal a startling mindset by disassociating themselves from the prior dictatorship.

Fidel Castro's dedication to Marxism-Leninism was unwavering throughout his life. He famously stated, "I am a Marxist-Leninist and will be until the day I die."⁴ As a dictator, he worked tirelessly to ensure that the Cuban population embraced Marxism through education, viewing those who opposed the ideology as a threat. This was imposed on the people, as one author notes: "now, to be safely 'within the revolution,' it was necessary for Cubans to study and profess Marxism. To avoid that obligation would be dangerously counterrevolutionary."⁵ Embracing Marxism was essential for Cubans to be loyal to the revolution, while resistance was dangerously counterrevolutionary. Additionally, since his university days, Castro looked up to Lenin as his role model, placing him in direct opposition to America and the Christian church.

Summary of Study

The Christian church in Cuba remains under foot of the Communist regime and has not changed its tactics of keeping a stronghold over the people. Even with the death of Fidel Castro on November 25, 2016, his brother Raul took over with no change and, later, passed the torch of Communism to Miguel Diaz-Canel in April 2018. The Christian church still faces much of the

³ Brian Latell, *Will Absolve Me*, 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵ *Ibid.*

same: limited resources, prohibition from sharing the gospel outside of the church walls, and infiltration by those assimilated by the Communist regime by the education system.

There have been minimal changes in the ruling power structure of Cuba, as it continues to be governed by the Communist regime with close ties to research indicates that Communism denies the existence of God, making it challenging to practice worship outside of private homes or churches openly. The Christian church in Cuba is subject to close surveillance and persecution. It is considered a threat due to its adherence to biblical principles contradicting those of Socialism and Communism.

The Christian church in Cuba faces additional challenges in that Cubans now face education campaigns from newly formed groups such as the LGBT community. One author states, “educational campaigns on LGBT issues have been spearheaded by the National Center for Sex Education, headed by Mariela Castro Espín, a member of the Cuban Parliament and President Raúl Castro’s daughter.”⁶ These campaigns introduce ideological views that are not aligned with the beliefs outlined in the Bible. “In May 2017, a transgender pastor held a mass in Matanzas city for the first time. It reflected the change in homophobic attitudes that has occurred in Cuba over the last decade (Marsh and Rios 2017).”⁷ The Christian church is contending with persecution from various angles as it is pressured to embrace enforced ideological views.

People who have suffered under regimes that enforce a specific ideology understand the situation very well. Any religious group that has faced oppression and had their faith dismantled can quickly identify the objectives of Communist regimes. It can be challenging for those who have not experienced such oppression to fully comprehend the situation unless they have been

⁶ Teresa García Castro, “Cuba 2017: The End of an Era,” 274.

⁷ Ibid.

part of a similar experience. Religious freedom is only permitted under close scrutiny and through the Cuban Council of Churches in Cuba. Following Fidel Castro's rise to power in 1959, the Communist government seized control of all media, private schools, and land. This seizure further eroded the influence of the Christian church as it lost the means to communicate the message of Jesus Christ to the people of Cuba.

Summary of Findings and Prior Research

The research indicates that one dictator replaced another in Cuba, creating a significant division between the new Cuban government, the Christian church, and the United States. Fidel Castro took deliberate steps to sever the ties between the Christian church and the United States. The enduring impact of Fidel's Communist Revolution on the Christian church is still evident today, posing a threat in the form of conformity, imprisonment, or forced exile. Fidel implemented a strategy to compel Christian leaders to conform or leave the country, ultimately making it easier to introduce a new Marxist-Leninist ideology to the Christian population.

Pastor Obed, an adjunct professor in Miami, exemplifies the quandary of pastors in Cuba who were forced to leave their homes and ministries. As one author notes, he was “imprisoned for *proselytism* and endured two years and seven months of hard labor in a ‘concentration camp’ in eastern Cuba, where he worked on government-confiscated sugar cane fields.”⁸ Yet Fidel blamed the leaders within the church for the conflicts that arose when the Revolution took over naming them as the root problems the church faced. Fidel was a master at controlling and manipulating the thoughts of the Cuban population.

⁸ Marilyn Stewart, “*Imprisoned Under Castro, Cuban Pastor Obed Millan Shares Message of Hope*,” September 17, 2018.

The implementation of Marxist-Leninist ideologies by Fidel Castro transformed the landscape of Cuba, gradually overshadowing the Word of God and guiding a new generation away from the gospel message. The new ideology also influenced educational materials, with children being taught that science had discredited the existence of Jesus Christ, reflecting the influence of Marxist-Leninist beliefs. Leaders within the Christian church found themselves in conflict with the Revolutionary movement, often resulting in imprisonment or forced departure.

The persecution of the Cuban church was a systematic effort by Fidel's new regime to eliminate as much leadership as possible. Following the Bay of Pigs incident, the government swiftly retaliated against the Christian church, accusing it of supporting the failed invasion. To bolster the dictatorship, Swaren notes that "Castro went on to announce retaliatory measures against the church's opposition, the first of which was the nationalizing of all private schools, which were mainly Catholic. Spanish priests were expelled, and many Cuban priests decided to leave."⁹ The Catholic church lost over six hundred priests, leaving them with around two hundred in Cuba.

Despite Fidel's attempts to eradicate the church in Cuba, his efforts failed, and the Communist government today will also fail. Jesus said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18, NKJV). If the gates of Hades will not prevail, neither will any regime that opposes Christ's church. Religious freedom was limited under the Communist regime, and any church that operated outside of those boundaries was quickly met with repercussions such as seized churches, imprisoned pastors, or exile. Swaren again notes that "legal church buildings are

⁹ Beverly Swaren, 211.

seized, and no new ones have been legally built in the country since the revolution.”¹⁰ Christians clandestinely met in their homes while being aware that their gatherings were against Cuban law. Sharing religious materials outside church premises was illegal and could lead to an arrest if caught exercising their so-called religious freedom.

Individuals and nations observe others to learn from their mistakes and avoid repeating them, although this often is not the case. Jose Martí, in his observations of the United States, expressed the view that "It is necessary to study the way this nation sins, the way it errs, the way it founders, so as not to founder as it does."¹¹ Martí's error and approach, however, reveal his faith in human morality rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. The ultimate redemption for human failure will only be achieved on the day of the Lord when He restores all things. Until then, humans will continue to cause death, sorrow, and pain, being incapable of restoring things to perfection.

Communism is against God and usurps the authority of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. God is the only One who can create a society free from error with perfection but reserved for only those who become children of God. Fidel Castro with all of his tactics, fell short of eradicating the influence of the Word of God from the country. The initial step was to target the education system, as it serves as a strategic means to shape the minds of children.

Fidel's intellectual journey began with his self-study of the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, a significant step that preceded his renowned Moncada Barracks attack in 1953. The nation could expect would be the outcome of Cuba's Revolutionary takeover when Fidel had already admitted "we bought our first books on Marxism-Leninism at the Communist Party

¹⁰ Beverly Swaren, 211.

¹¹ Carlos Ripoll, *Jose Marti*, 2.

bookstore. The core group of us who organized the 26th of July Movement acquired our books from that store."¹² The ideology of Marxism, with its aim to empower the working class and eliminate capitalism, sought to establish communism: a society without social classes characterized by material abundance and self-governance. Pateman and Pateman note that, "following that, the workers' state will abolish capitalism, build socialism, and eventually establish communism, a classless society of material abundance and stateless self-administration."¹³ Establishing Communism was the aim of taking away from citizens rights to own businesses, land, and the Word of God in the public education system.

Theologian Sergio Arce, through his individual actions, developed a new theology that aligned with the new Revolution, leading to his eventual dismissal from the Presbyterian church. Sergio Arce's removal was partly due to the influence of socialist ideology within the church. Theron Corse states, "Socialism and Christianity was widely accepted in the Presbyterian Church, and in 1985, Arce was ousted by more moderate leaders, socialist in outlook but more critical of the Revolution."¹⁴ It only takes one to ignite the fire of devotion to the dismantling of the Christian church in Cuba and abroad.

Many Cubans within the Catholic church found themselves deeply involved in the African religion of Santería, which gained widespread popularity with Fidel's endorsement. The scriptures are clear that those who engage in such practices will face destruction: "He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 22:20,

¹² Joe Pateman and John Pateman, "Why Has Marxism-Leninism Succeeded in Cuba?" *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 15, no. 2 (December 2023): 240.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁴ Theron Corse, "Presbyterians in the Revolution: An American Missionary Church and the Challenge of Castro's Cuba, 1959–1970." *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000): 115.

NKJV). The foundation of Cuba under Fidel's rule supported the wickedness of practicing witchcraft and sacrificing animals to other gods. Even today, Santería priests continue to sacrifice small animals to deities like Yoruba, a sea goddess. While many Cubans associate Santería with socialist principles due to communal sharing, it is essential to remember that sinners could also share with those they love. As Jesus stated, "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32, NKJV).

Efforts to conform to the Word of God to Communism are temporarily fruitless as they often reflect the motivations of those attempting to manipulate others to suit their agendas. The Cuban Council of Churches fell under the influence of the Communist Cuban regime, presenting a troubling paradox where a government that rejects the existence of God sought to dictate religious acceptability. The regime closely monitored and regulated Christian churches not aligned with the Cuban Council of Churches. According to Caraway, "Religious individuals became increasingly marginalized in the early 1960s; some were denied entrance to university or other jobs."¹⁵ The youth of Cuba within Protestant churches argued for aligning Christian doctrine to that of the Communist Government. The youth focused on what they called the positives of the Revolution with that of social justice, which contradicts the Scriptures. Nothing good can come out of a church that was under the influence of the Communist regime that denies the existence of God.

Limitations

The challenges faced during this research relate to uncovering sensitive information held exclusively by the Cuban Communist regime. Finding individuals willing to speak out against

¹⁵ Rose T. Caraway, "Religion, Sustainability Movements, and Ecumenism," 446.

the regime and publishing materials that shed light on its policies is difficult. Fidel and his Revolution imprisoned or exiled Christian church leaders, making it harder to access crucial works that reveal the regime's harsh treatment of the church. Furthermore, communication in Cuba is tightly controlled by the Communist Party, which dominates every aspect of life, including food distribution, media, and public discourse. Preaching the gospel and distributing religious literature in public is illegal in Cuba and can lead to imprisonment for Christians.

Regrettably, this research design study did not allow direct interviews with individuals affected by Fidel's Revolution, thus limiting the availability of input from eyewitness accounts. The Watch List, described as a "Christian Nongovernmental Organization (NGO)," publishes an annual report that notes an uptick in attacks by the Cuban government on Christian leaders. According to the US Department of State, "Christian Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Open Doors reported the government intensified its repressive tactics against Christian leaders and activists opposing CCP ideology through arrests, exile, arbitrary fines, surveillance, denials of licenses and religious visas, and physical and mental abuse."¹⁶ This information is sourced from a report on state.gov.

A previous report by Christian Solidarity Worldwide revealed that leaders were arrested and imprisoned for their involvement in the "July 2021 protests, the government increased its use of forced exile against critics, including religious leaders."¹⁷ For instance, the government conveyed to Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo's family that he had been sentenced. According to the state.gov report, "In May, the government informed Pastor Lorenzo Rosales Fajardo's family that a court had sentenced him to seven years in prison on charges of disrespect, assault, criminal

¹⁶ US Department of State, "2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Cuba."

¹⁷ Ibid.

incitement, and public disorder."¹⁸ The study is limited by the inability to interview Pastor Lorenzo, which would have provided valuable firsthand accounts of his experiences at the time of his arrest, during his imprisonment, and in the present.

Lastly, personal videos from a visit to Cuba were not included due to the nature of a qualitative research study. The firsthand information in the possession depicts the situation and demise of the people of Cuba. A significant number of Cubans are not in support of the Communist regime, but fear of imprisonment or worse, as already stated in a previous manner, keeps many individuals from voicing their disapproval. Not having the opportunity to include such personal experiences heightens the burden to continue revealing what has and continues to dismantle the Christian church in Cuba, namely the Cuban Communist Party. This underscores the importance of this research study in shedding light on these crucial issues.

Recommendations for Future Study

Future research studies could compare the actions and language used in Cuba with those in other countries experiencing similar social transformations. For instance, in Cuba, all holidays, including Christmas, were replaced by the 26th of July Movement. Similarly, there have been discussions in the United States about replacing the Fourth of July with the new Juneteenth Independence Day movement. While these are just rumors, exploring these similarities is crucial. Additionally, research could delve into the assimilation of young children in public schools. In the United States, the removal of prayer from public schools in 1962, followed by the removal of the Bible in 1963, has created challenges for Christian children facing opposition to their

¹⁸ US Department of State.

religious beliefs, particularly with the teaching of evolution, which aligns with the atheistic beliefs of Communism.

In future studies, it would be beneficial for researchers to directly engage with individuals currently living in these situations to understand the intricacies of navigating Communist influence on the decline of the Christian church in Cuba. When embarking on qualitative research, it is essential to investigate the historical events of Fidel Castro's Revolution. As aptly put by Creswell, "Qualitative research delves into the ongoing process and its eventual outcomes."¹⁹ Upholding the principles of conventional research necessitates the researcher to maintain objectivity and clarity, irrespective of the findings. By upholding these standards, the researcher will earn credibility in their pursuit of knowledge, analyzing the outcomes with reason and perception, embodying an unwavering commitment to validating their discoveries.

Implications for Practice

The Christian church in Cuba enjoyed much freedom to preach the gospel before Fidel Castro's rise to power. After he took control, however, Fidel seized land, buildings, and educational facilities, significantly reducing the church's influence in the community. Fidel quickly arrested, exiled or persecuted those who opposed the new regime, which led to many church leaders either leaving the country, conforming to the new rules, or being imprisoned for up to two decades. According to Babbitt, this was the case for a couple of missionaries: "There have been, languishing in the prisons of Cuba, two of our greatest missionaries for several years

¹⁹ Creswell, 204.

now, Herbert Caudill and David Fite.”²⁰ Imprisonment was just one way Fidel limited the church's influence.

Cuba played a significant role in serving as a prototype for other countries to follow. With a population of over eleven million, Cuba posed the most influential test for how a country can exert control over its people. Fidel left an indelible mark with his uncompromising implementation of strict measures, including mandatory public-school education and policies that made any actions outside the church walls illegal. The hypothesis is that a government that takes complete control of the education system can create a new society aligned with the ideology of the ruling regime; it led to a Communist, Socialist, and Marxist-Leninist ideological society for Cuba. Once the society was assimilated into the new ideology, one can hypothesize that the Marxist-Leninist ideology infiltrated the Christian church.

Summary

The research study on Cuba serves as a warning to countries to identify potential uprisings within states and cities, mainly through individuals or groups who mobilize others for causes such as Communism. Without a strategic plan, understanding how to pre-empt individuals or organizations seeking to usurp the Word of God will yield similar outcomes. It is conceivable that governments may nationalize land, businesses, and churches by creating such profound economic strains that individuals and organizations can no longer sustain their roles. This gradual process can take years but ultimately replaces individuals with those with the same ideology a government wishes.

²⁰ Colton Babbitt, "*Caudill Under El Caudillo: Southern Baptists, Cuba, and the Origins of Conservatism, 1959-1979.*" (Florida Atlantic University, 2019), 62.

The education field is the primary place of attack because it gives power to any government to reassimilate an entire nation state by state, city by city, and community by community. The people of Cuba had no choice but to send their children to the public school system of Cuba; they face imprisonment otherwise. The United States finds itself in a similar predicament: the education system has been reassimilating children from a very early age. Many parents similarly find themselves in the same position because both parents state that working is essential; providing food on the table is a hard struggle otherwise. The United States government is adamant about offering free prekindergarten within the public education system. A child's most fragile and vital years are birth to age five. Latrell's statement regarding those in the Revolution, "Zealous revolutionaries demanded that the education ministry and the school system, all the way up to the University of Havana, be cleansed of everything associated with the old order."²¹ Cuba created a plan for what the finished product should look like at the university level, rooted from the beginning of a child's life.

The research reveals that no country is exempt from the rise of Communism, which results in censoring individuals, controlling media, and enforcing a new education program that aligns with the final product in mind. It will serve researchers with a springboard to further expand on this study and create a strategic plan to enact because more books within themselves to fill a gap in the literature are not enough. Jesus commanded, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, NKJV). Making disciples requires a plan to reach people, starting from the communities where one resides, then broadening to cities, states, and eventually the whole world. In speaking to the Christian church, unity in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is

²¹ Latrell, *Ibid.*, 35.

essential for this mission. Jesus said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, NKJV). The Christian church in Cuba has the potential to transcend any persecution and oppression if the Word of God takes precedence over Cuba's communist rule.

Appendix A: Permissions

Daniel Orama's permission request.

Dear Dr. Theron,

I hope you are having a lovely summer. *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond* is a jewel for thesis/dissertation research. I am grateful I found it and gleaned immensely from your study.

I sent an email to [] seeking permission to use the tables you authored in the *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond* publication. I intend to include these tables in my master's thesis, *The Phenomenological Effects of Fidel Castro's Communist Revolution on the Christian Church in Cuba*.

Table 5.1 Membership by denomination, 1958–1989 Pages 92-93, corresponds to Figure 4. Membership by Denomination.

Table 5.2 Pastorate by denomination, 1956–1970 Page 96, corresponds to Figure 5. Pastorate by Denomination, 1956-1970.

Table 5.3 Pastorate lost to exile (minimum) Page 98, corresponds to Figure 6. Pastorate lost to exile (minimum).

Your work would greatly benefit my research. I wanted to confirm I have followed the proper channels when seeking permission.

Sincerely,

Daniel Orama
LUO MA: Music and Worship/Songwriting Cognate

Dr. Theron's response.

Daniel:

Of course you may use them. I don't think that there are any permissions needed for a master's th

Theron Corse

Coordinator, Interdisciplinary Studies

Associate Professor of History

Appendix B: Thesis Proposal Approval

1

Thesis Defense Decision Form Master of Arts Worship Studies Thesis Defense Decision

The thesis Advisor and Reader have rendered the following decision concerning the defense for

Daniel Orama
on the Thesis

The Phenomenological Effects of Castro's Revolution on Evangelical Churches in Cuba in the 21st Century

as submitted on
02/01/2024

 X

Full approval to proceed with no proposal revisions.

The document should be prepared for submission to the Jerry Falwell Library.

 Provisional approval pending cited revisions.

The student must resubmit the thesis with cited revisions according to the established timeline.

 Redirection of thesis.

The student is being redirected to take WRSP 689 again, as minor revisions will not meet the expectations for the thesis.

Jerry L. Newman

02/13/2024

Print Name of Advisor

Signature

Date

Thomas A. Seel

02/13/2024

Print Name of Reader

Signature

Date

Bibliography

- 2010 Report on International Religious Freedom - Cuba | Refworld.
<https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/usdos/2010/en/76607>
- Alexander, Noble and Rizzo, Kay D.. *I Will Die Free*. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing, 1991. <https://books.google.com/books?id=tIEEAAAACAAJ>
- Alonso, Aurelio. "Religion in Cuba's Socialist Transition." *Socialism and Democracy* Volume 24, Issue 1: Cuban Perspectives on Cuban Socialism (2010): 147-159 2010.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300903533010>
- Arce, Sergio, "The Church and Socialism: Reflections from a Cuban Context." New York: Circus, 1986. *Horizons* 14, no. 1 (1987): 186–87.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900037592>.
- Babbitt, Colton. "Caudill Under El Caudillo: Southern Baptists, Cuba, and the Origins of Conservatism, 1959-1979." Order No. 13859728, Florida Atlantic University, 2019. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global,
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/caudill-under-el-caudillo-southern-baptists-cuba/docview/2244490441/se-2>.
- Boyle, Kevin, and Sheen, Juliet, eds. *Freedom of Religion and Belief: a World Report: A World Report*. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997. Accessed February 16, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Caraway, Rose T. "Religion, Sustainability Movements, and Ecumenism." *Journal for the study of religion, nature and culture*. 12, no. 4 (2019): 438–465.
- Castro, Fidel. "Christianity and the Revolution." *New Blackfriars* 59, no. 695 (1978): 152–65.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43246854>.
- Castro, Fidel, and Betto. *Fidel and Religion: Castro Talks on Revolution and Religion with Frei Betto*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.
<https://archive.org/details/fidelreligionfid0000cast/page/n5/mode/2up>
- Corse, Theron. "Presbyterians in the Revolution: An American Missionary Church and the Challenge of Castro's Cuba, 1959–1970." *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000): 1–33.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24486165>.
- Corse, Theron. *Protestants, Revolution, and the Cuba-U.S. Bond*. Gainesville: UPF, 2007. Accessed June 17, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Cox, Baroness, and Rogers, Benedict. *Very Stones Cry Out: The Persecuted Church: Pain, Passion and Praise*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011. Accessed January 24, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.

- Crahan, Margaret E. "Cuba: Religion and Revolutionary Institutionalization." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985): 319–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/156825>.
- Creswell, John W. and Creswell, J. David. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches 5th Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- Cuba 2022 International Religious Freedom Report, International Religious Freedom Report for 2022 United States Department of State • Office of International Religious Freedom. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/441219-CUBA-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>
- Derrick, J.C. "Taken by Raul: Castro Regime Steps up Persecution of the Church in Eastern Cuba." *World* 30, no. 11 (May 30, 2015): 18. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=19831&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Evans, Dylan. "Atheism and religion." In *All That Matters: Atheism*, by. Hodder & Stoughton, 2014. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.credorefer>
- Gardner, Iain. *The Founder of Manichaeism: Rethinking the Life of Mani*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Goldenziel, Jill I., Sanctioning Faith: Religion, State, and U.S.-Cuban Relations (2009). *Journal of Law and Politics*, Vol. 25, p. 179, 2009, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1562014>
- Ham, Carlos Emilio. 2017. "Missional Formation at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas, Cuba." *International Review of Mission* 106 (1): 80–88. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAIBCB17063001314&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Hudson, Rex A., *Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Cuba: a country study / Federal Research Division, Library of Congress*; edited by Rex A Hudson - 4th ed.
- Janz, Denis R.. *World Christianity and Marxism*. Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1998. Accessed May 23, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Kennedy, John W. "Cuba's next revolution: how Christians are reshaping Castro's communist stronghold." *Christianity Today*, January 12, 1998, 18+. *Gale In Context: Biography* https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A20305331/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=10588610.
- Kozameh, Sara. "Agrarian Reform and the Radicalization of Revolutionary Cuba, 1959–1962." *Cuban Studies* 51 (2022): 28-46.

- Latell, Brian. *History Will Absolve Me: Fidel Castro*. New York: RosettaBooks, 2016. Accessed June 18, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Lawton, Kim A. "The Suffering Church." *Christianity Today*, 1996 Jul 15, 1996/07/15/. 54. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/suffering-church/docview/212016669/se-2>.
- Lecuona, Rafael A. "Jose Marti And Fidel Castro." *International Journal on World Peace* 8, no. 1 (1991 Mar 01, 1991/03/01/): 45, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/jose-marti-fidel-castro/docview/1311297382/se-2>.
- Lefever, Harry G. "When the Saints Go Riding in: Santería in Cuba and the United States." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 3 (1996): 318–30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386562>.
- Lemass, Peter. "Fidel Castro's Cuba." *The Furrow* 36, no. 6 (1985): 365–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27678080>.
- Lopez, Lena. CUBA: Draconian new restrictions on "home religious meetings" *Christian Solidarity Worldwide*. September 15, 2005, <http://www.csw.org.uk>.
- Marouan, Maha. "Santería in Cuba: Contested Issues at a Time of Transition." *Transition*, no. 125 (2018): 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.125.1.09>.
- Marshall, Paul A., and Lela. Gilbert. *Their Blood Cries out: The Untold Story of Persecution against Christians in the Modern World*. Dallas: Word Pub., 1997.
- Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich. *The Communist Manifesto*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. Accessed March 7, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Miller, Ivor Lynn. "Belief and Power in Contemporary Cuba: The Dialogue between Santería Practitioners and Revolutionary Leaders." Order No. 9614798, Northwestern University, 1995. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/belief-power-contemporary-cuba-dialogue-between/docview/304248646/se-2>.
- Monal, Isabel. "Cuban Foundational Marxist Thought." *International Journal of Political Economy* 34, no. 4 (2004): 11–23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40470911>.
- National Archives, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, January 5, 1967: Inaugural Address (Public Ceremony). <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/january-5-1967-inaugural-address-public-ceremony>
- Oden, Thomas C. "The church Castro couldn't kill." *Christianity Today*, April 25, 1994, 18+.

Gale In Context: Biography

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A15388081/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=71b22350.

- Pateman, Joe, and John Pateman. "Why Has Marxism-Leninism Succeeded in Cuba?" *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 15, no. 2 (December 2023): 235–60. doi:10.13169/intejcubastud.15.2.0235.
- Petri, Dennis P. 2021. "Christians in Cuba: Dealing with Subtle Forms of Repression." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45 (4): 326–40. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIACO211213000450&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Petri, Dennis P. and Chiscul, Teresa Flores. "Country Overviews and Case Studies of Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba." June 18, 2019. www.olire.org.
- Ripoll, Carlos. *Jose Marti, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban* (1st ed. 1984). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203787885>.
- Segesvary, Louis. *In a Place Without a Soul: The Testimony of Former Cuban Political Prisoners*. Edited by Howard Cincotta. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Information Agency, 1985.
- Stewart, Marilyn. Imprisoned Under Castro, Cuban Pastor Obed Millan Shares Message of Hope. <https://www.nobts.edu/news/articles/2018/PrisonertoPrisonChaplain.html>
- Suárez, Margarita M. W. "Renewal in the Cuban Evangelical Church: The Perspective of Two Feminist Pastors." *CrossCurrents* 64, no. 2 (2014): 236–61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24462413>.
- Swaren, Beverly. "The Church in Today's Cuba." *America* 119, no. 8 (September 21, 1968): 211–13. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=35956551&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Tetro, Raúl Gómez. *The Church and Socialism in Cuba*. Edited and translated by Phillip Berryman. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Uhl, Xina M., and Link, Theodore. *Communism*. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 2019. Accessed April 13, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- University of South Florida Digital Commons, Cuban Thinkers & Intellectual Leaders, https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/CUBAN_THINKERS.
- Voice of the Martyrs
https://www.persecution.com/globalprayerguide/cuba/?_source_code=WHPB20C

White, Tom, and Don Tanner. *The Spiritual Battle for Cuba: Pulling the Devil's Tail*. Middlebury, Ind: Living Sacrifice Books, 1989.

Wirtz, Kristina. *Ritual, Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World*. Gainesville: UPF, 2007. Accessed May 16, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.