

Christianity and the Revolution

Fidel Castro

In October last year in Kingston, Jamaica, at a meeting presided over by the Prime Minister, Mr. Michael Manley, Dr. Fidel Castro, President of Cuba, addressed representatives of the Jamaican churches and answered questions about religion and the Cuban revolution. The following is a slightly abbreviated transcript of what was said.

It was stated here that I'd give a general outline of relations between the Church and the state in Cuba. It seems to me it would be convenient if I were brief in my opening remarks. I'd like to start by saying the following: in our country a very profound revolution took place which brought about a radical change in the relations of production and in social relations.

History shows that whenever such revolutionary events have taken place all sorts of conflicts have arisen, including conflicts between the Church and the state. This happened during the French Revolution, as you know; it happened during the Mexican Revolution, many problems of that nature arose; and it also happened during the Russian Revolution.

Well, also in our case, in Cuba, some conflicts arose in the beginning. Actually, in my opinion, this was due on many occasions to the leadership body of a given religious congregation or to the social group most closely connected with such a religious congregation.

I can indeed assure you that at no time was the Cuban Revolution moved by anti-religious feelings. We were deeply convinced that contradictions didn't have to exist between the social revolution and the religious beliefs of the population. Even during our struggle, there was broad participation in it by all the people, and believers participated as well.

Problems arose mainly with the Catholic Church. And I must be sincere here as I am anywhere else. There's nothing to be gained by our gathering here to create an idyllic image of the world and things. I will not try to fool you, just as I know you will not try to fool us either.

Problems actually arose with the Catholic Church when the nature of the Revolution was revealed as a profound social change, when the first revolutionary laws—the Agrarian Reform Law, the

Urban Reform Law, and several other laws which affected the interests of the rich in Cuba—were enacted.

The Church was served in Cuba by a clergy of foreign origin, most of the clergymen coming from Spain, it being the Church of the rich people. That wasn't the same as in Latin America. In Latin America, in many countries, the Catholic Church exerts a broad influence on popular sectors. In Cuba, the Catholic Church relied mainly on the religious schools to exert its influence. In Cuba, unlike in France, for example, we had no priests who worked with the industrial workers or who went out into the fields and became one of them. That was not the situation that prevailed in Cuba. Suffice to say that in Cuba there wasn't a single Catholic Church in the whole of the countryside. The churches were mainly in the large cities.

In the cities, religious education was given at private schools. Generally, they were expensive schools only within the reach of the moneyed classes. I myself was born into a family of landowners, and I was sent to a private school right from the first grade, although I learned to read in a public school when I was very little.

Cuba was generally considered to be a Catholic country, but I don't agree with that, because there appears to be some confusion. The Catholic Church had baptized many people. Generally speaking, whenever a priest went out into the countryside he did so to baptize people without previous instruction of any kind being imparted.

I believe religion is not a question of imposition. I can only conceive of it as a question of awareness, as a person's own decision. It was customary in our country to baptize a three or four-month old baby. They'd simply baptize him, have his name entered in the church register and thereafter no concern was shown for that child, for that youngster, during the rest of his life.

I was born in the countryside, and I can say that, although nearly everyone had been baptized, a Catholic religious feeling was lacking there. On the other hand, the immense majority of the people in the countryside were believers. Yet what did they believe in? Well, I think it was a kind of cocktail with all beliefs thrown in.

For instance, I recall this very well because my family were also believers. When Lazarus Day came round, a whole series of activities would be held in the countryside in his honour. I had by then a certain notion of the Catholic religion and was aware that St. Lazarus, depicted as a sick man covered by festering sores, was not a saint recognized by the Church, and that truly such adoration of St. Lazarus amounted to what could have officially been termed as superstition: an incorrect practice from the Catholic standpoint, so to speak. Yet everybody lighted a candle to St. Lazarus, prayed to him, offered him sacrifices and so on.

Other times it was the festivities in honour of the Virgin of Charity, whom the Church officially recognized. Many people believed in her, confided in her, made promises to her and so forth.

But really our countryside was characterized, generally speaking, by people living there believing in everything. Some also professed forms of animism, many believed in spirits. In short, there was a definitive atmosphere of that sort, yet no given religion was systematically, officially professed.

The other, non-Catholic religions did not have much influence in our country. However, I for one could see that the persons who claimed that they belonged to such evangelical religions were generally more disciplined and engaged in systematic observance of their standards and beliefs. That much I could see.

In the capital and in the larger cities the main Catholic churches were located in residential areas where the rich people lived. They went to Mass, of course, on Sundays; that was compulsory. But there was no religious practice. That was the situation in our country. It might be hard for you to understand that because your customs are different, your experiences are different.

In the United States, I noticed how a Catholic was a Catholic and how he consistently observed his beliefs. In Cuba it wasn't like that. Many people called themselves Catholics. These rich people went to church but they did not abide in the least by the Church's standards and principles. They led a dissolute, luxurious, carefree existence, and I'd say that they broke all the commandments and committed all the capital sins.

Then a conflict did arise but not between the Revolution and religious beliefs; the conflict was between the Revolution and a social class that tried to use the Church as a weapon to oppose the Revolution. That's what happened.

Notwithstanding my having mentioned the conflicts between revolutions and the Church throughout history, I think that in Cuba such conflicts were reduced to the minimum. And this was due to the fact that before the world, before our people, before other peoples, we took special care in never making the Cuban Revolution seem to be the enemy of religion, because if that had happened we would really have been doing a service to the reactionaries, to the exploiters, not only in Cuba but above all in Latin America.

That's why we acted like that, not only because of the principle involved—and I say this in all frankness, because to us, respect for religious beliefs is a principle—but also for strategic reasons: for reasons of political strategy and tactics because we could not allow . . . above all in Latin America; I'm not talking about Cuba, since in our country religion did not constitute a political force. I'm talking about Mexico or Colombia or Chile or Argentina

or other countries where religion is a political force.

We were not thinking of Cuba; we were thinking above all of Latin America. For we asked ourselves, why do the ideas of social justice have to collide with religious beliefs? Why do they have to collide with Christianity? Why? I know quite a lot about Christian principles and the teachings of Christ. In my opinion, Christ was a great revolutionary. That's my opinion! He was a man whose whole doctrine was in favour of the humble, the poor, and aimed at preventing abuse, injustice, the humiliation of the human being. I'd say that there's a lot in common between the spirit or essence of his teachings and socialism.

Besides, I've said on occasion that He condemned the rich, the merchants and the pharisees with very strong words. He washed the feet of his disciples. What worthier example can one find? I've even said that the miracle of the fish and the bread and turning water to wine is what we socialists also wish to do. I say this very seriously, I say it very seriously because this is what I believe, think and feel.

We've all read the history of the first years of Christendom and we know what it meant to be a Christian in Rome and in many other places. To be a Christian in the era of the emperors was worse than being a Communist in Pinochet's Chile; worse than being a Communist in Brazil or Argentina.

Of course, just as Communists have been much persecuted during the last decades—thousands of Communists were shot during the Paris Commune uprising; Hitler had Communists shot and they were shot in Spain; they were murdered and bombed in Vietnam; everywhere in the world, from the time of the Chicago Martyrs, workers have been murdered and tortured for allegedly being Communists—that too was the history of Christians for many centuries. Why? Because the ruling classes, the slave owners, the ones who ordered the gladiators to kill each other in the circus, the ones who enjoyed all the social privileges, all were the sworn enemies of the Christians because the Christians opposed all that.

Who were the first Christians? The poor, the poorest people, the humblest people, the slaves were the first Christians. And they were persecuted for centuries until at last one emperor became a Christian himself. That's the truth. Christianity's whole first stage reminds me of this stage the fighters for social justice are going through.

In effect, such conflicts did arise in our country but we abided by the principles and ideas I mentioned before. One step we had to take, I guess the strongest step, was when we had to ask the Spanish priests to return to Spain. Yet no church was ever closed down, nobody was persecuted on account of his religious beliefs. Nobody!

There's something more: there were priests who plotted and

acted against the Revolution to the extent that, when the CIA-organised mercenary invasion at Playa Giron was launched from Central America—which cost many Cubans their lives—several priests came with the invaders. And no severe punishment was ever inflicted upon a priest, never was a priest—or any other citizen for that matter—physically mistreated in our country. To us the principle of not laying a finger on a man or subjecting prisoners to mistreatment is a sacred principle that we haven't broken even once. We have a number of severe penalties, including the death sentence for certain crimes, but never was such punishment meted out to a priest.

I'm going to tell you something more. When it became necessary to send some priests to jail for serious counter-revolutionary crimes, they were always set free after a short period of time. We did that deliberately. Such was the attitude adopted by the Revolutionary Government during the initial period of conflict.

The situation improved gradually and progressively as a different spirit began to unfold in the top echelons of the Catholic Church. And I'd say that the Papal Nuncio then appointed—Mon-signor Zacchi, a very intelligent man, very capable, who really worked very intelligently—contributed a lot to that. He really worked to improve relations between the Church and the state, and he also tried to guide the Catholic Church into doing its religious duty instead of engaging in counter-revolutionary activities, because that was not an intelligent thing to do. I'll tell you why. The immense majority of the people supported the Revolution: the peasants, the workers, the poor. The people opposed to the Revolution, very rich people, left for the United States. Nobody threw them out of Cuba; they left voluntarily.

The Revolution carried out extraordinary changes. I will not detail here how millions of persons benefited from the measures adopted by the Revolution—from wiping out illiteracy, eradicating many diseases to bringing about full employment throughout the country; but, above all, the Revolution brought human dignity. Millions of people had felt as if they were inferior beings, for they were humiliated, exploited and despised; blacks were mercilessly discriminated against; women were forced to prostitute themselves since no other employment was available to them; a lot of people pinned their hopes on gambling, a deceitful hope that left them open to exploitation. In addition, drugs were available anywhere in the country.

It was at this juncture that the Revolution wiped out racial discrimination, opened up the doors of society and of life to all the citizens of the country: no more aristocratic clubs where blacks couldn't go, hotels blacks couldn't stay in, beaches blacks couldn't swim at, schools black children were barred from. Who can tell me anything new about all that, after I myself attended schools black

children were barred from for many years? I used to ask, in all innocence—so to speak—at that age, why are there no black children in the school? Mind you, it was a religious school. The answer I got in the religious school was: “No black children can come here because they’re very few and they would feel awful.” That’s the philosophical answer I got to explain why no black children could attend the school.

The Revolution wiped all that away. The Revolution eradicated prostitution, and it did so in a humane way: it trained, fed, clothed and sheltered those women while helping them adapt to another type of activity and another type of work.

There used to be 100,000 prostitutes in Cuba out of a population of six and a half million. I mean straight prostitution, since indirectly prostitution reached even greater figures. Take the case of a man with plenty of money, who perhaps used to go to Mass every Sunday but kept five or six women in five or six different homes and all that sort of thing.

The Revolution wiped out prostitution, gambling, drug addiction, all those things. So millions of people were in agreement with those measures.

To oppose the Revolution was to earn the hatred of the people, and that’s a fact. Both the Nuncio and the Church understood that. Some changes were introduced by the Catholic Church itself, new guidelines were issued by the Church, specifically by John XXIII. Also, stemming from Latin America’s Catholic Church, there emerged progressive currents that accounted for a change which allowed for harmonious relations to develop between the Church and the Cuban State.

I can assure you that no revolutionary process as radical and profound as the Cuban Revolution has had less conflicts, with religion than our Revolution. At present, relations are normal. We hardly ever hear of conflict with the Church now. I’m not denying that there are indeed some conflicts of another type. In the beginning we had conflicts not only with the Catholic Church. We also had them with Jehovah’s Witnesses, this being a religious group very much influenced by the United States—it gets all sorts of support and aid from the United States—and it had a militant attitude against the Revolution. Except for this, I can say that at present relations between the Revolution, between the Cuban State and the churches are really excellent. In our recently enacted Constitution, freedom of worship, freedom of religious belief is expressly and very specially guaranteed.

When I was in Chile in 1972 I had an extensive meeting with Church representatives. I met with progressive Church representatives, a broad movement in Chile at that time, and I took advantage of that occasion to set forth our opinions on how relations between religion and the revolution should be conducted, because to

me it isn't enough to respect each other, we must co-operate with each other in order to change the world. We must co-operate, we must work together. I maintain that the basis for this co-operation must be established before the revolution takes place. Why? Because I believe that revolutions will happen anyway. I believe that socialism will finally succeed in the world, not because I want it so, or because Manley wants it so, or many of you want it so. By now it's not only a question of doctrine, it's not only a question of political theory but a necessity which can be mathematically proved.

For how else can the world solve its present and future problems? We're now 4,000 million. Later we'll be 7,000 million, still later 15,000 million. I don't see how the world's problems can be solved unless everybody behaves like a single family and unless the effort, the talent and the energy of mankind are truly dedicated to solving the world's problems. We can't go on being selfish as nations, we can't go on being selfish as human beings. We must give up individualism, that makes people want to have everything for themselves while others starve. I even think that, unless we have economic development planning on a worldwide scale, we're going to deplete all natural resources and poison the environment, and human beings will end up eating each other. I'm not merely thinking about this very minute or about 30 years from now, I'm not thinking about three centuries from now either. Twenty-three years from now there'll be 7,000 million people in the world. I ask myself, what will man live on?

Observing Jamaica by helicopter or by plane, I've seen rocky, arid, troublesome mountains and I've seen a lot of people scattered all over the country. There are two million Jamaicans, and twenty-three years from now there'll be 3.5 million. I ask, can a single country live by itself? Can Jamaica? Can Cuba? There are other countries, on the other hand, that have enormous natural resources and don't know what to do with all their money.

In actual fact, a day will come when mankind shall live like a single family, making use of all available natural resources. I think that the only solution is socialism on a worldwide scale. Since I believe that these changes must take place, I told the Chilean Church representatives that we had to work together so that when the political idea triumphed, the religious ideas would not be far removed, appearing like an enemy of change. There are no contradictions between the aims of religion and the aims of socialism.

I told the Chileans that we should make an alliance, but not a tactical alliance. I was asked whether it was tactical or strategic, and I said—a strategic alliance between religion and socialism, between religion and the revolution. I said it in all honesty. When we look at history we see evolution. There was a time when the Christian religion, which used to be the religion of slaves, became the

religion of emperors, of the court, the religion of patricians. As we go farther into history, we see how men have made serious mistakes in the name of religion. It was on the basis of such realities that I said we had to fight together to achieve these aims, for I ask where do the contradictions between Christian teachings and socialist teachings lie? Where? We both wish to struggle on behalf of man, for the welfare of man, for the happiness of man.

I could give in addition, an example of our Revolution's spirit as regards religion. As you know, non-Christian beliefs predominate in many African countries; they are very widespread. But has, for instance, the fact that Africans—Angolans, to give an example—have religious beliefs that differ from ours, the fact that they worship living things, animals, objects, etc. been an obstacle to our shedding our blood side by side with the Angolans? I mean, why must religion be an obstacle for achieving the aims of socialism? It can't be. This is my deepest conviction, which I state here in all frankness.

Question: Does freedom of worship in Cuba include access to the media, to press, radio, and television?

Freedom of worship . . . I wouldn't say there's a lot of propaganda spread through the media. This problem did not arise since people must understand the following: we've been facing the United States in a life-or-death struggle on all fronts. Now, the United States isn't just any country. It is a very powerful country which did everything possible to destroy us economically and militarily. It organized acts of sabotage and crimes of every nature and attempted assassinations. And we have given the media over to a political struggle. That's the way it has been. We've been dedicated to shaping political awareness; we've been dedicated to nothing else. I believe that it would be perfectly in line with our Constitution for religion to make use of the media. Yet in actual practice it has not been so. I think when a peaceful climate prevails in our country, when this imperialist war against us is stopped, then these questions can be looked upon with different criteria. We have few newspapers and use very little newsprint. You use up more newsprint per capita than we do in all of our newspapers put together. We use a lot of paper to print books. We have only two dailies, one is the Party paper and the other, the Communist Youth paper. I wouldn't think they are appropriate vehicles for religious teaching. We also have magazines and other things. At any rate, there's no formal religious dissemination.

Upon analysing the wording and the spirit of our Constitution, both presuppose the right to propagate religious beliefs.

Question: What is Dr Castro's attitude to contacts between the Cuban churches and those of other countries and what would he feel about a gift of bibles to Cuba?

I can say offhand that there's no objection on our part, we'd

even be happy. I can add that the Catholics recently asked us to hold some kind of religious event in Cuba—I don't recall what sort of event it was but it was an important one—with representatives from all over Latin America attending. We agreed and authorised them to hold that event. As to the Bibles, I recall that when I visited Chile they took me to a meeting with the Cardinal. I had not requested the meeting, but Allende wanted me to hold that meeting anyway, so I went to have a chat with the Cardinal. He said to me, "Well, you asked for a meeting. What's the purpose of this interview?" I replied, "Well, I don't know because they arranged for an interview to be included on my schedule, but I suppose we could find a few things to talk about." I didn't like that very much. I mean it sincerely. There was no reason for me to object to a meeting with the Cardinal, nor did I feel I had to explain to the rest of my revolutionary comrades why I had met with the Cardinal. Yet the Cardinal needed to inform the reactionaries there that I had requested the meeting. We talked. He raised the question of Bibles, whether he could send 10,000 Bibles to Cuba. I told him, "Yes, send the 10,000 Bibles, for the Bible is a fine book. I hope those Bibles go to the libraries. I like the Bible. It is a sign of culture to read it, and it's one of the best books ever written." This we did agree, and a boat arrived home loaded with Bibles. How could we ever object to your sending Bibles to the Cubans?

Question: What about political prisoners in Cuba?

I will tell you this. First, I disagree with what you said. Nobody is in gaol because of his political views. That's the first thing, point one. Point two: we make a distinction between political prisoners and counter-revolutionary prisoners. According to our concept of penal law, a political prisoner is one who is arrested and sentenced for trying to improve society, for struggling for the good of man and for progress in society. We don't view in the same light those who struggle to make society regress, and we call them counter-revolutionary prisoners. However, they go to gaol concretely for having committed serious crimes.

What were we expected to do with someone who took up arms in the Escambray Mountains at the instigation of the United States? This doesn't happen any more, but it is one of the reasons why there were prisoners. They killed workers, peasants, teachers, people who were teaching others to read and write and committed all kinds of other crimes. Were we supposed to let them go free to do such things?

What were we expected to do with people who organised acts of sabotage, or with the spies of the CIA, or with people who tried to organise the assassination of leaders of the Revolution? What were we expected to do with those who infiltrated weapons and explosives in our country and who actively worked at the service of the United States to overthrow the Revolution in what constituted

flagrant treason punished by all the penal codes in the world? We had no choice but to punish them by sending them to gaol. We had to do this. Those are the reasons why such people are in gaol. There were quite a few of them. At one-time, there were 15,000.

Of course, what was also happening at that time was that those people, the reactionaries, thought that the United States would destroy the Revolution and that they would leave gaol as heroes. Going to gaol sometimes served to further a political career; there are many people in Cuba who did this. Therefore, being a prisoner was frequently a merit.

I don't know if you read the report by the US Senate commission which investigated the plans to assassinate leaders of other states. No? I think it would be good if you did. It is not difficult reading. The commission acknowledged the large number of attempts on the lives of leaders of the Cuban Revolution organised by the US Government. And not all the attempts are listed therein. They organised attempts on my life and on those of several others. I had a pretty good record: I think there were about 80 plots to kill me. But did you know that many of the people who planned those attacks are now free and walking around the streets of Havana? Who got them out of gaol? The CIA and the US Government? No, it was the Revolution.

We do not consider punishment as an act of revenge. We would not be Marxists if we viewed punishment as an act of revenge. That's not our conception of penal law. For man is the product of a certain environment, and his ideology is moulded by a given class society. Thus, to a large extent, he is a product of the society in which he lives. We dream of changing that society. Punishment is simply something the Revolution must do to defend itself. For if some man is capable of carrying out an act of sabotage at a factory and kills 100 workers as a result, we have the right to defend those workers. I remember something that happened soon after the triumph of the Revolution and that people can't seem to forget. It involved a woman who was dear to many people. When the counter-revolutionaries set fire to a large department store with several floors. She was trapped inside and was burned alive. I want you to know that the head of that counter-revolutionary organisation has been released. Sometimes it is not easy for the people to understand this kind of thing.

I'm not saying that all have shared the same fate. There have been extremely serious crimes which we have punished in the severest way possible. Never as an act of revenge, but as a result of the need of the Revolution to defend itself. We ourselves worked out the plans and the programmes by virtue of which those people could be released. We set up work programmes which they could join on a voluntary basis—they were not forced to do so; they could work in and out of gaol. I think ours is the only such case in

the world. Did you know that prisoners who work have the same rights and earn the same salaries as factory workers? So counter-revolutionary and common prisoners in Cuba can work, earn a salary and support their families. Thanks to those programmes, 80 per cent of the people who were in prison for counter-revolutionary crimes are now free. Those who are left—and of course there could be some new cases, I don't deny it—will be released by virtue of this programme, and, in some cases, they will be released when they serve their sentences in full.

We have always resisted foreign pressure in this matter. The United States wanted us to release their people. We did so for other reasons, because of our desire to solve the problem and we really have solved it. Since we have done so under the worst conditions of US hostility, including the blockade, we could be even more lenient in solving the problem in a climate of peace. It is humane and even Christian to be concerned about others. Regardless of their religion, we must be concerned about human beings.

I don't know if there were any believers among the judges who sentenced the war criminals at Nuremberg—there may well have been, and the fact is that they sentenced many of those people to death by hanging and others to life sentences. Some of the war criminals are still in gaol, and the trial was 32 years ago—and they are still in gaol serving life terms.

The Cuban Revolution is younger. It triumphed less than twenty years ago. There were individuals in Cuba who murdered dozens and even hundreds of people, and they tortured them just like they do in Chile today. What is our view? Should those criminals go scot-free? If those who murdered Jews, democrats and Communists in Germany were hanged by the western powers at Nuremberg and others were given life terms, why is it that those who murdered or murder Cubans and committed crimes and tortured people can't be punished. Why?

Last year a Cuban plane carrying the junior fencing team—all of whom were under 20 (and who had won many medals) plus workers, fishermen and air crew members—exploded. A bomb was planted on board, and it exploded when the plane was in flight. The plane went up in flames, and there is not any way of knowing whether or not those on board were burned alive before the plane plunged into the sea.

The death of those people fills me with grief. I feel profound solidarity with the mothers who lost their children, with the children who lost their parents, with the wives who lost their husbands and with the husbands who lost their wives. I feel pain for them. I admit that I think more about them than the people who are in gaol in Cuba for having committed the crimes I mentioned before.

Question: Will churches be built in the new housing estates?

Churches are not included in our construction programmes, We include schools, hospitals and everything else. However, I can assure you that, if a given community were to ask the Revolutionary Government to build a church because the community felt there was a need for one, if they asked us to build it, we would build it.

Question: If the Jamaican Revolution follows the Cuban pattern will it end up in the Soviet bloc?

I think that this business of saying that Cuba is a model for Jamaica and that you are going to do things just like they are done in Cuba is part of the propaganda against Jamaica and against Manley's government. All that is a political device to create confusion. I think that no two processes are exactly alike anywhere. There have been many revolutions and many changes in the world lately, and not a single one has been exactly the same as another. I don't think Manley is interested in looking to Cuba as a model nor are we interested in having Manley look to us as a model.

We may have experience in technical, scientific and agricultural matters and in construction, sports and other areas of use to you, and some of your experience may be of value to us. If Manley sends us a certain kind of grass which is very good for cattle, we won't say, this is capitalist grass, so it must not be planted here. We have grass that was developed in the US. What's more, our best layers—and we have a large-scale programme: the state farms produce 1,750 million eggs every year—come from Canada and the US. Oh, of course, the US would not sell them to us, but it is easier to get an egg out of the US than a locomotive.

There are many ways in which we can help each other and cooperate. Our feeling is that the Jamaicans should act the way they feel they ought to. They will always enjoy our full respect and greatest consideration. This is our view and our duty of reciprocity towards Jamaica. Other countries did not act as Jamaica did. They wanted to overthrow the Revolutionary Government and boycotted it. If a country respects us we respect it; if a government does not respect us, we don't respect it either.

Regarding our membership in what you call the Soviet bloc, I think that is a question of semantics. Would you say that China belongs to the Soviet bloc or not? Is Albania a member of the Soviet bloc? The idea of a bloc is a relative concept. We belong to several blocs. At the UN, we belong to the bloc of Latin-American countries; in the international arena, we belong to the bloc of the non-aligned countries; in the international organisations, we belong to the bloc of the 77, that is, the bloc of the underdeveloped countries; and in the political sphere, we belong to the community of socialist countries, because we have similar political principles and large-scale economic and technical co-operation, etc. Finally, we belong to the bloc of Caribbean countries and to the Jamaica-

Cuba bloc. I can assure you that none of this was deliberate; it was the result of history and life.

Question: The following passage appears in a Cuban school textbook for ten year olds: "About 2000 years ago rumours 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." Please comment.

It is true that we take Marxist-Leninist doctrine as a starting point, but we stress the social aspects really. I think that the fact that at times political processes have stressed the religious aspect has historically been due to the political disputes which developed between the Church and the revolutionary state. I feel that a union, a drawing together or an alliance, would force both sides to take this into account.

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. At the same time, the child can go to church where he's taught something else. The child should be able to decide freely whether or not he accepts religion, and he might or might not be persuaded by a certain view.

In my time, this problem did not exist. I was baptized, they found a godfather for me. I remember when I was about five and still had not been baptized, I felt very bad because people said that I was a Jew. I did not know what being a Jew was, but I imagined it was something bad. They called me a Jew to insult me, and I did not even know there was a people called the Jewish people.

Religion was not really taught me but rather imposed upon me; I had no option, no opportunity to get information that would allow me freedom of choice about religion. I disagreed with many of the things which they taught me. Why? Because I like to be taught to reason things out, to think and to understand. I don't like dogma. They made me pray for hours without my knowing what I was praying about since I prayed in Latin and Greek, and I didn't know what it all meant. I believe that one should have information and freedom to choose as far as religion is concerned.

I think this principle is reasonable, and on this basis there is no need for a conflict between religion and the revolution. I don't mean the state: I'm talking about relations between socialism and religion, between religion and the revolution, rather than between religion and the state.

My thinking is as follows: if socialism stands for the greatest freedom of man, why should it exclude from society the freedom to have religious convictions? We're imposing socialism on no one nor are we imposing Marxist-Leninist ideas on anyone. What kind of revolutionary is the person who must have an idea imposed on him? I was never a good believer because belief was imposed on me. It wasn't due to persuasion nor was it a consequence of my

own reasoning. I think that by the imposition of religion you get bad believers, and by imposing Marxism-Leninism as a dogma you get bad Communists. So now we're going through a new experience. I realise that the point raised is an interesting one. We must think about this questions, and about how we are going to learn to live with these contradictions.

Question: If a Christian body were to ask permission to operate a radio station specifically to disseminate Christian doctrine, would it be granted?

I believe that under the present circumstances, the answer is no. I must be frank with you about it. I can't commit myself on the question of the station; the Bible is different as we already have a policy on that. I don't know whether true religious education can be taught over the radio. I don't think so. Actually, this is the first time this question has been raised in that way. Were I to suggest it to my comrades in the Party and in the Government, I fear they would think you had succeeded in converting me to religion here in Jamaica.

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