

**Presented at the Towards2010 conference, April 2006**

**CHRISTIAN MISSION AND POLITICAL POWER**  
(Edinburgh, April 29, 2006)

Commission VII of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference dealt about "Missions and Governments". The Report contains: 1. A survey of the various situations in the mission fields in response to a questionnaire sent in advance. 2. The findings. 3. Various appendices.

Two main questions guided their discussions: a) what are the true principles of the cooperation between Churches and State? and b) how far were the existing conditions favourable to the missionary enterprise?

I. Presuppositions of the Document.- It is natural and obvious that the thinking of the Conference should reflect their *Zeit Geist*. For me it is very perplexing that at least in the discussions of this commission they did not start by discussing some theological principles which could have guided their proceedings. a) The conference believed candidly that there were Christian governments, and that these were the best, b) that it is a duty of the churches to send foreign missionaries to "pagan" countries. At that time still the churches moved within the "Constantinian era" mentality. Most of the governments of the "First World" protected, and some even helped the churches in their missionary endeavours. The mentality of the *corpus christianum* was prevalent in that the churches felt comfortably in their different societies as genuine realizations of the Kingdom. Missions were still under the *Vasco da Gama* epoch: a joint project of the governments and the churches, and missions seen as a civilizing drive. They had "to learn to appreciate the blessings of Christian civilization" (115,116). One could sense in the document a feeling of triumphalism which was almost "eschatological", an uncritical acceptance of the missionary endeavour, and the participants were unconscious of their underlying ideological presuppositions: a kind of capitalism somehow balanced by a moderate democratic socialism. However the participants affirmed that: "Christianity is a revolutionary moral force, should be conscious also of not permitting its character to be misunderstood, keeping in the forefront the spiritual and personal transformation which Christianity aims at" (93) Europe was considered naively a Christian continent, especially the Protestant nations, and there were other races and countries considered "backward". And yet they could affirm that "the Gospel is for all nations, and not a product of Western thought nor means of advancing Western interests" (94). The "missionaries are doing a civilizing work" (96)

II. Analysis of some aspects of the document.- The participants thought that in some circumstances when some wrong was done to missionaries they could claim for compensation (108). Now is just the opposite, when so many people allege that the missionary societies and churches should pay some form of compensation for the damage done to the original cultures and races. We come across to the word "restitution" (or reparation) which has been so dear to the claim of aborigines and the black population in North America. Thomas Aquinas has dealt with it in his *Summa Theologica* expressing that in an unjust war to appropriate booty is spoliation and has to be restituted (2a2ae, q. 66, art.8, ad 1). What is surprising in B. de las Casas in his *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión*, his insight that the only way to evangelize the Indians was to free them, and to restore to them whatever was taken from them by force. Las Casas refused to give absolution of their sins to the

*encomenderos* and those who participated in wars, and therefore could not participate in the Eucharist.

III. Coming from Latin America, it is for me more clear – as I said above - that in the thinking and the proceedings of the Conference they are not conscious of the ideological presuppositions they shared, like the civilizing and humanizing task of Christian missions according to Western Capitalist standards and the superiority of Christianity. Moreover, they think they are “above” all these political positions. Although at times they may be critical of it: “The Gospel is a Gospel for the nations, and not a product of Western thought nor a means of advancing Western interests” (94).

Valdir Steuernagel, a Lutheran Brazilian missiologist in Missionary Obedience and Historical Practice (B. Aires, Nueva Creación, 1996) referring to a Brazilian Congress for Evangelization convened at Belo Horizonte in 1983 and commenting on the motto of Edinburgh 1910 “The Evangelization of the World in this Generation” says: “At the dawn of the XXth. Century, when the possibilities of the missionary endeavour were considered unlimited, the evangelization of the world was considered at hand: a little more effort and a joint attempt would make a reality the evangelisation of the world. In the evening of this century (He is writing in the 1990s. A.H.) we come to the conclusion that our ancestors at Edinburgh not only were naïve but also did not interpret adequately the signs of the times. They were victims of the deceit of their own epoch. They imagine that colonialism had a future and that it could continue to offer the needed infrastructure for the realization of mission in the different continents. The decades which followed 1910 discovered a different scenario. The colonial structure collapsed, the two world wars awakened the survivors out of their optimistic dream of the beginnings of the century; the struggle for the independence of the nations and the re-appearance of the great non Christian religions emerged as new, irreversible and gigantic facts. The related process of accelerated secularization in the bosom of those European societies which had been seed beds for mission put back on the table the need to re-evangelize Europe itself. In the future the generations which will succeed the Brazilian Congress of Evangelization would conclude that the participants in the Congress were naïve and dreamers in their objective of evangelizing Brazil in that generation. They would say also that there was an inadequate and insufficient interpretation of the possibilities of that epoch, which are clarified only with the ongoing time. This process of establishing objectives and their historical evaluation, would not be part of the inter-relation between generations?. Would it not be, in fact, necessary for each generation to proclaim anew and on each place the need to evangelize the world ‘in this generation’? The missionary task of evangelizing the world has to be fulfilled by each generation and on each place until the night comes and the final and complete reality of the Kingdom of God supersedes our *naïveté* and relativity. This generational circle of obedience and critical re-interpretation of this very obedience indicated that history is not a monotonous repetition of events, in which all happens again, including the errors. And to learn of the missionary practice of our fathers and mothers in faith, is fundamental for us in this hour in which Latin America awakens to its missionary obedience” (109-10)

W.R. Hogg in his well known book Ecumenical Foundations, comments about “Edinburgh’s omissions’ and he mentions women’s work, literature, medicine, and that for many “the most important omission was Latin America”!, because Latin America was not considered Protestant mission territory since the Roman Catholic Church fulfilled the missionary task. The self imposed limitation for the conference subject was “missions to non-Christians”. Hogg comments: “The great difficulty proved to be the fact that Latin America was a ‘border line’ case and in the hectic pressure that was

Edinburgh there was no time to work it out. The whole question was the ‘gravest issue’ with which J.H. Oldham as conference secretary had to cope” (131,132). R.E.Speer, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, led the opponents to this exclusion and organized informal meetings of interested delegates who planned a “Conference on Missions in Latin America” in New York, 1913, and trying to cope with this issue, they created the “Committee on Cooperation in Latin America” which organized the Panama Missions Congress in 1916 and was for many decades until the creation of CLAI (The Latin American Council of Churches) the main ecumenical agency for missions and collaboration in Latin America ( the American way, of course!). Rev. Speer said that because of the exclusion of Latin America from Edinburgh 1910, this sub-continent was included on the missionary map of the world!. Perhaps it would have not been so if Latin America would have been in the Edinburgh agenda. Nevertheless for me the problem persists: that of the relation between Roman Catholic Missions and Protestant missions and the fact that for many Protestant Churches the Roman Catholic Church does not engage in authentic Christian missions is not so simply solved by legitimizing Protestant missions!.

The participants of the Conference were convinced that the program of the missionaries was beyond any suspicion; so that they had the right to demand freedom of action No doubt that they start from respecting the constituted authorities and governments. They are following the rule stated by our Master: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk.12-17). We can share though their conviction that “·Alive as missionaries are to the fact that Christianity is a revolutionary moral force, they are equally alive to the danger of permitting its character to be misunderstood, and to the necessity of keeping in the forefront the spiritual and personal transformation that Christianity aims at” (93).

IV. The history of missions in Latin America, as elsewhere has its shadows and its lights. Roman Catholic missions was done by virtue of the *requerimiento* ,to require the Indians to swear a double loyalty: to the Catholic Church and the Spanish Crown. On the bright side we have to remember missionaries like bishop Antonio de Valdivieso in Nicaragua who was assassinated by an *encomendero* (a person in charge [*encomienda*] of a group of Indians allegedly to educate them in the Christian faith), Antonio de Montesinos, Bartolomé de las Casas, Obispo Toribio de Mogrovejo and others. Bartolomé de las Casas was the first priest to be ordained in the Americas in 1510. He was an *encomendero* also in Santo Domingo, but in 1511 he heard Father Montesinos preaching a sermon against Indian exploitation, and from that time on, he became the most brave and consistent defender of the Indians before the Spanish Crown and a forerunner of the Theology of Liberation. He was able to speak personally to the Emperor Charles the Vth in 1542 and succeeded in making the Consejo de Indias in Valladolid to approve the “Leyes Nuevas de Indias” (1542) by which more freedom was granted to the Indians. For him all this system of *encomiendas* was “unjust, impious, scandalous, irrational and absurd”, not realizing that he in a way shared the same messianic “providencialism” of the Spanish Crown. He was one of the main actors in the first theological and philosophical controversy over the Americas: the issue if the Indians were or not human beings. While Francisco de Vitoria held that the Indians were “animals”, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda along with las Casas protected them as human beings, as the Pope Paul III did, although Sepúlveda defended the Spanish conquest of which las Casas was very disparaging. The ideology of that time made a difference between “lands of peace” and “lands of war”- as today! - in which to inflict all evils in times of war was allowed and justified (the “just war” syndrome). If the Indian territories were considered “lands of war” then evangelization was violent, if “lands of

peace” it was done in great sympathy with the aborigines. And who made the decision? But because of the law of the “Patronato Real” (Royal Patronage) approved by Pope Alexander VI in his bulls *Inter Caetera* (May 3-4, 1493) to the benefit of the Spanish crown, the Catholic Church was under the direct supervision of the Spanish Crown, as it was the case with the Portuguese colonization. Mission meant in our case “hispanization”, as later on at the end of the XIX century with the arrival of US missionaries it meant “americanization”!. Of course the religious beliefs of the Indians were considered idolatrous, superstitious and atheist and had to be eradicated. The Catholic missionary was in the best of cases seen by the Indians as “a more human sorcerer”.

Rivera Pagán observes: “*Novus mundus, nova ecclesia*. The utopian imagination of the late Renaissance, so dramatically expressed in Thomas Moro’s *Utopia*, the fusion of the missionary spirit of the mendicant orders and the inexorable violence of the conquistadores, not only transferred Christianity to the Americas, but also created the conditions for the renewal of the church of the poor, the distinctive characteristic of the apostolic *ekklesia*. It was a complex unification of material and spiritual forces which tried to save the soul of the aborigine, but at the same time made possible the enslavement of his body and sometimes legitimated his annihilation. The avarice and greed of the conquistadores seemed to be a divine paradox through which God calls the indigenous population to redemption” (1995, 28).

No wonder that when the Pope John Paul II visited Salta in Argentina on April, 1987, 2,500 aborigines presented him the following statement:

“Welcome John Paul II to these lands which originally belonged to our ancestors and that we do not possess any more! On their behalf and those of us who survived massacres and genocide, we declare you our guest and brother...But we were free and the land belonged to us. We lived out of what the land gave us generously, and all ate abundantly. We praised our God in our language, with our gestures and dances, with home made musical instruments. Until one day, the European civilization arrived. It planted the sword, language, and the cross, and crucified our peoples. The Indian blood of those made martyrs yesterday because they defended their land, were the seeds of the silent martyrs of today who with slow pace carry our cross of five centuries. In this cross you brought to the Americas you changed the Christ of Judea for the Christ of the indigenous population...May it be that all this blood poured by the ethnocide and genocide which our native nations have suffered, may serve to become the new consciousness of humankind, for the new relations based on justice and fraternity among the peoples” (in Rivera Pagán, 1995, 30-31).

As we all know, one of the best experiments in missions in Latin America were the “Jesuit reductions” or “Missions” in the XVII century, around a hundred of them in Brazil, Argentina and mostly in Paraguay among the *guaraníes*. These *reducciones* were outstanding experiments to put into practice a “utopian” Christianity. (Remember the film “The Mission”, very accurate in regard to historical facts). Paul Lafargue, who was one of K. Marx’s sons-in-law in his *History of Socialism*, recorded them as early socialist experiments. But after a century and a half, several contradictions unfortunately finished them. This outstanding experiment was suffocated by the contradictions with the colonial powers, rivalries with other religious orders, and the oppositions of all the persons who benefited with the oppression of the Indians. But may be the main cause was the failure to have formed an authentic church for the natives.

In Cuba, Protestant missions began during the first intervention from the USA at the end of the Spanish/American/Cuban war in 1898. Before, during the Spanish domination (1498-1898) there was no religious tolerance. In our case we were fortunate that the first missionaries were “missionary patriots” who had become Protestants

during their exile in the USA, where they had fled as exiles, to gather funds for the war of liberation. They also had an ecumenical spirit, since they fostered collaboration among the different Protestant Churches. But unfortunately they soon were replaced by American professional missionaries whose ideology was clearly in favour of the American way of life and ideals. Cuban missions were under Home Mission Boards, which denounced their colonial intentions. The US government and intellectuals at that time spoke of their “Manifest Destiny”: to be the “new chosen people of God” which would implant definitively the Kingdom of God on earth and the “Monroe Doctrine”. (President James Monroe and the US Congress approved in 1823 that the US could intervene in the Americas if necessary to “keep order”). Most of those missionaries came from the South and/or had studied in conservative theological seminaries. However our patriots and founding fathers saw the risks in the position of those Cubans who were in favour of “annexing” Cuba to the USA. The most outstanding was José Martí (1853-1895), our main thinker and patriot who led the independence war from Spain, denounced many times in his writings the ideology of those pastors in the US who were “instruments of the government and in favour of the rich against the poor!”.

I want to just give two examples: E.E. Clements, Methodist Missionary, also the Editor of The Cuban Evangelist wrote in May 1, 1907, an editorial entitled “Americanism and Cuba” in which he said: “The most potent force in American influence in Cuba is to be found in the spirit called Americanism, which grows out of the prevailing sense of freedom, justice, truth and moral obligation ...Today the bulwark of our civilization is our holy religion...Every American that comes to the island becomes a centre of influence and in a sense an interpreter of Americanism...The business man is also called of God whether he heed or not, to practice the gospel, to be a living example, known and read of all men. His obligation is just as sacred as that of the missionary, and his manner of life should such as becometh the gospel of Christ. The message of the Apostle is therefore applicable to all alike: ‘Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong’” . And Bishop W.A. Candler wrote on the issue of Oct. 16, 1907 of the same publication: “The peculiar appeal made to us by our Cuba Mission”: “It is a matter of our interest as well of our duty to give the gospel to the Cuban people. The world knows by the history of the French Revolution what comes to pass when a nation throws off both monarchical government and Christianity at the same time...When the Cubans cast off Spanish rule they threw off in a great measure such Christianity, and their revolution therefore, went to the very foundations of their social, as well as their political system. If faithlessness now prevail among them, so will disorder and faithlessness will prevail among them unless Protestantism shall rescue many of them from the abyss of doubt which opens before them. And disorder in Cuba is damage to America. Our country stands pledged to preserve order there. It is better and cheaper to do this by the power of an enlightened and enlightening faith than by force of arms and acts of statecraft...Many of our own countrymen and kindred have gone to make their homes in Cuba. They have bought land and built houses. They have gone there to stay. We must follow the American colonists with the saving influences of evangelical Christianity....”.(Although both of the examples are from the Methodist Church, all the other Protestant Missions from the USA shared the same ideology). And this very kind of ideology not only prevailed in Cuba for many decades but in all Latin America. The two premises were: a) Protestantism is modern and progressive Christianity which means freedom, while Roman Catholicism (called “Romanism” by them) represented retrograde and reactionary Medieval Christianity. b) The USA has received the commission from God to be the vanguard of Protestantism and the saviours of the world. As late as in 1951, a committee which was preparing a continental

Ecumenical Council, the predecessor of the present CLAI (Latin American Council of Churches) translated and published as preparatory material a book by a French protestant, Frederick Hoffet entitled Protestant Imperialism (imperialism in a positive sense!) which argued that all the Roman Catholic countries were backward and ignorant and should turn Protestant, since these countries were the richest, most civilized and forward going!.

V.-I would like now to refer to the present Latin American situation in general and then to describe the Cuban state of affairs with more detail. (For a good summary of ecumenical and evangelical missionary movements and documents in Latin America see L. Longuini)

In Latin America there has been a strong influence of Liberal governments, some of them were free-thinkers who tried to change the status of the Roman Catholic Church as state church and liberalize the obligations of the Concordats. In most of the Latin American countries relations between churches and state, and therefore missions are affected and regulated by the *Concordats* (short from *Pactum Concordatum*, referring to the legal agreements between governments and the Holy See). However although there are concordats signed, in some countries, separation of church and state and freedom of worship and missions are granted to other Christian denominations and religions.

In Latin America the countries which have signed concordats with the Holy See are: Argentine, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Paraguay, Perú, and Venezuela. Perhaps the most radical situation in early XXth century was that of Mexico. Between July 1859 and December 1860 Benito Juárez promulgated the Reformation Laws: Nationalization of the properties of the Roman Catholic Clergy, the Law on freedom of worship and others. The Roman Catholic Church had been the State Church but from that time onwards, it was separated from the State. The State was the owner of all the Church's property and they could not possess legal capacity. Clergymen were forbidden to participate in politics L. Cárdenas after 1934 took power and revived the revolutionary ideals of the revolution of 1910, put into operation the agrarian reform and other radical laws that were never implemented. In July 1992 several articles of the Constitution were reformed and put into effect, granting the churches the right to own property, to have legal capacity and to teach religion in the schools. In Nicaragua the liberal revolution of 1893 abolished the Concordat, but it is said that the present Head of State is seeking its re-instalment. In Bolivia it is interesting that the art. 3 of its Constitution says: "The state recognizes and supports the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church. It guarantees the public function of any other cult. The relations with the Roman Catholic Church will be regulated according to the concordat and other agreements between the Bolivian state and the Holy See".

A new situation is developing in Latin America, the ever greater participation of Protestant pastors and leaders in politics, both for worse or for good. It goes back to the 1950s in countries like Brazil and Peru. It has been documented that Protestants participated in the Mexican revolution of the 1920s. In Guatemala two Dictator Generals, E. Ríos Montt in 1982 ousted in 1983 by a *coup* and J. Serrano Elías 1991-1993 overthrown by another *coup*, both pastors from the Neo-Pentecostal Churches. Carlos Garcia, a Baptist Ministers was Vice-President in Peru, and Jaime Oriz Hurtado, an Evangelical lawyer and theological educator was member of the Constitutional Assembly in Colombia. Three pastors, a Baptist, a Presbyterian and an Anglican are at present members of the Cuban Parliament. In some other countries they have organized political parties which are from the right or left (Venezuela 1978, Brazil 1986, Peru 1990, Argentina 1991, etc). We should take notice also of the very influential Mega

Churches and movements like the “Universal Church of Kingdom of God” originated in Brazil and extended now in many countries including North America. and churches representatives of the “Prosperity Gospel”. Although in these churches the emphasis is on personal conversion, they create networks of mutual help which help bring moral change in the region. This explosive growth (mainly in Brazil, Chile, Guatemala and Nicaragua) and the phenomenon of “charismatization” and “pentecostalization” of the churches in Latin America, even in some of the “historical churches”, is an outstanding missiological challenge. S. Escobar poses the important question: will this Popular Protestantism become the heir of the XVI century European Reformation? On the Roman Catholic side we should not forget the great contribution of the Theology of Liberation, Base Ecclesiastic Communities and the lives of Father Camilo Torres (who served as a Columbian guerrilla from 1956 to 1966 and was killed in action) and Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero in El Salvador (1917-1980) who took sides with the poor and was assassinated as he was leading mass on March 24, 1980. This whole picture is difficult to grasp, therefore there are different interpretations of it. I like to quote J. Miguez Bonino who gives a good assessment: “The difficulty of characterizing in absolute and unequivocal terms the different groups and churches in Latin America results from an important phenomenon that we must take into account. Some of the more acute tensions and conflicts on the Latin American religious scene have to do with theological interpretations, social commitments, and visions of the mission of Christianity which do not correspond to confessional or denominational divisions but across them. The result is that we have – and I think we will increasingly have – forms of association which will bring together Christians from different churches for common tasks and witness without, in many cases, breaking the ties with their own communities. But this, no doubt, will be potentially conflictive. Or it may introduce a ferment for change, even as it opens up the possibility of new unities” (266, in G Cook).

The situation in Cuba is characterized by the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, which developed quickly into a Marxist-Leninist type of revolution. A brief chronology of events with regard to relations between State and churches follows:

I. “Honey-moon” 1959. The whole population was united against the dictator F Batista who had come to power by a *coup d’etat* on March 1952. The struggle was led by Fidel Castro who attacked unsuccessfully an army garrison in Santiago de Cuba on July 26 1953 which gave the name to his movement. On early December 1956 Castro landed in the south-eastern part of Cuba with a group of followers and started on the mountains of the Sierra Maestra the guerrilla struggle against Batista which finally won over his army. The second leader in importance was Frank Pais, the son of a Baptist pastor. Frank was a very committed Christian. He organized civic resistance and was responsible for the supplies of the guerrilla in the mountains. There were other Christian leaders (Catholic and Protestant) during the insurrection, such as J.A. Echeverria, Esteban Hernandez, Oscar Lucero and others. Batista left power on Jan the 1<sup>st</sup> 1959 and a new revolutionary government was installed with Castro leading. On May the first Agrarian Reform Law was passed nationalizing all the latifundia.

II. Mistrust and confrontation 1960-1968. In 1960 the revolution became more radicalized. All banks, foreign concerns and sugar mills were nationalized. In 1961 the USA broke diplomatic relations with the Cuban government, still in place. The literacy campaign was launched and one of the key figures was a Presbyterian Minister who was then Executive Secretary of the Cuban Council of Churches. On this same year masses of people started to flee to the USA as part of propaganda plan to de-stabilize the revolution. On April 1961 the Bay of Pigs invasion led by a group of anti-Castro mercenaries was defeated sooner; when at the last minute the USA government did not

back it One effect was to proclaim the Socialist (Marxist) character of the Cuban revolution. All education was controlled by the Government and all the private schools were nationalized. Therefore the churches lost all their schools; primary, secondary and universities, losing the most important instrument of evangelization. The Roman Catholic Bishops had started in August 1960 a series of Pastoral Letters in which the Revolution was strongly condemned following the lines of Vatican and Communism. In September 17, 1962, 132 Roman Catholic priests and one Auxiliary Bishop were deported in a Spanish ship. 200 priests remained on the island out of 800 before the revolution. In October 1962 took place the "Missile Crisis" because of the existence of Soviet missiles in Cuba aiming at the USA.

III. Pacific coexistence 1969-1978. The II Vatican Council (1962-1965), and the II General Conference of the Latin American Roman Catholic Bishops (CELAM) held in Medellin, 1968, brought along some renewal in the Cuban Church. An example was that on April 1969 the Bishops' Conference published a Pastoral Letter condemning the US embargo against Cuba.

IV. Rapprochement 1979-1989. In 1983 President Castro attended an ecumenical gathering in memory of M. L. King Jr., with US Presidential Candidate Jesse Jackson. On the same year Pres. Castro meets for the first time with a group of Protestant leaders. In 1985 is published Fidel y la Religion, conversation with the Brazilian Frei Betto. His comments and openings influenced greatly a process of a more positive attitude of the Government and Party *vis-à-vis* THE CHURCHES. In January 85 there is a visit of a delegation of Bishops representing the Conference of US Bishops. In February 1986 the ENEC is held which produced a very important and positive missiological document which I will comment later on.

V. Opening (1990- ). There is not yet a legislation which regulates and which grants legal status to churches in Cuba. Relations are conducted under a *Modus Vivendi* basis which would depend on the particular authorities, and on a very pragmatic basis. Church properties in general were not nationalized, with the exception of schools when all private schools were nationalized in June 1961, regardless of being religious or not. This is more striking since most of the Protestant property is still owned by the USA mission boards. There is no persecution but a tight regulation of religious activities. As a rule after 1959 no new denominations or religious movements have been allowed to enter the country, only those denominations which had legal status before, can function. Of course the existing churches are happy about this arrangement! It has prevented the new religious movements from entering the country. The church does not own public mass media and have not access to it, except on very special occasions, such as the visit of the Pope John Paul II in 1998 with his huge open air masses in the provincial capitals, and in 1999 big Protestant rallies in the largest Cuban cities. In 1976 our first Constitution approved during the revolution was Marxist-Leninist, although freedom of religion was allowed, but in 1992 a new constitution changed the Marxist basis of the state into a non sectarian state which would not support any particular ideology (what we call in Latin countries a "lay state"). The Roman Catholic Church due to their lack of priests has been able to bring in some foreign priests, mostly from Spain and other Latin American countries. On the Protestant side it is difficult for foreign missionaries to serve in Cuba. In 1990 due to the fall of the East European Socialist countries which subsidized Cuba and the disastrous effects of the US embargo against our government, the so called "Special Period" of economic crisis began. This prompted a massive attendance to the churches, particularly of the young people which has resulted in a revival. All the churches are filled with people, giving a new missionary opportunity and thrust to all the churches. Particularly the "charismatic" churches are growing

tremendously, but the aberrations of some extreme cases is compromising the credibility of the Gospel and posing a difficult question for the churches on what position to take. In 1991 the Government authorized the functioning of “house churches”. It is estimated that there are more than 5,000 of them which give an outstanding missionary opportunity. A negative element to account for is the large amount of people who have migrated particularly to the USA because of the “Adjustment Act” which allows automatic political asylum and residence to any Cuban arriving to any US territory. It also feeds the political tensions between the extremists at both ends. In January 2004 Bartolomeu, the Patriarch of Constantinople, visited Cuba to consecrate a new Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Havana. In many aspects his visit was similar to that of the Pope in 1998, he was received by the Cuban Government as a Head of State.

As a consequence of the difficult relations between the governments of Cuba and the USA was that it prompted the Cuban Protestant Churches to become autonomous from their “mother” Churches in the USA. This process was done with their blessings, and it was a natural development in the growth and self identity of the Cuban churches. But this circumstance aggravated by the embargo US imposed on Cuba, created a new situation of isolation and lack of funds which pressed the Cuban Churches to seek relations with the WCC. In 1964 Bishop L. Newbigin was the head of the Missions and Evangelization Section of the WCC who took special interest in the situation and the “Cuba Project” was launched, by which many Protestant Churches received emergency financial help, including those who were not attached to USA Mission Boards. This was the beginning of very fruitful relations which were enlarged to other sections of the WCC to which several Cubans have given expertise throughout the years, such as Israel Batista, Héctor Méndez and Ofelia Ortega, while the contribution of the WCC to the Cuban Ecumenical movement has been enormous.

During the early years after the triumph of the Cuba Revolution, the island represented a haven of revolutionary thinking and praxis. There was a very close relation between the Cuban Communist party and the communist parties of Latin America and some of the guerrilla foci in Latin America. It provided solidarity for Unidad Popular in Chile and Nicaragua. The Socialist government of the Unidad Popular in Chile took power in 1970 by elections, until a *coup d'état* in 1973 ousted and killed Pres. S. Allende. The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua succeeding in overthrowing Dictator Somoza who left the country in 1979 and governed until 1990 when they lost the general elections. More recent developments in Venezuela under President H.Chávez and in Bolivia with President E.Morales point to a new coalition between Cuba and those regimes in opposition to the policies of the USA in the region.

#### VI.- Challenges ahead.-

1. Re-defining mission in Cuba today. In February 17-23 the Roman Catholic Church held in Havana an important Congress mostly for laypeople in order to re-define Catholic missions in the present Cuban situation. The meeting was preceded by a period of preparation and surveys at the parish level in order to analyze better the situation and hear the voice of the laity. The final document is a very important statement which should be analyzed by all Cuban churches, but unfortunately the Protestant churches have not acknowledged its importance. The text begins by making a brief history of Christian evangelization in Cuba, taking good consideration of the lessons the church should learn based on the church's experience. Next there is an examination of the present Cuban situation, followed by a theological answer which included an assessment of the elements of mission, the relations between faith and society, faith and culture, the function of the laity and the ordained clergy and finally the elements for a “*pastoral de conjunto*” (an integrated mission programme): the priorities, and the lines

of action. The priorities are: 1. a church which evangelizes; 2. a praying church; 3. an incarnated church; 4. a church in dialogue; 5. a church united in plurality; 6. a participating and co-responsible church; 7. a church which plans its missions programme and 8. a church which assumes poverty. Among the 'lines of action' that are particularly important at this Cuban hour: 1. renewing the mind of the church, 2. developing incarnation spirituality, 3. fostering the evangelization of the Cuban culture. The Cuban RC Church in February 21-25, 1996 and in February 16-17, 2006 commemorated the 10th and 20<sup>th</sup> of the first gathering launching a new pastoral plan for five years to be initiated in September of this year. Again the hierarchy sponsored a parish survey asking them what the missionary priorities were. Interesting enough the general answer was that spirituality should be the main concern. The Bishops have said: "we need a spirituality centred in the encounter with Jesus in order to illuminate life in all its dimensions, to make possible a committed stile of life, producing hope and coherence...collaborating in the transformation of our reality and making possible a new hope".

On the protestant side the Cuban Council of Churches has organized three international missiological gatherings in Matanzas 1984, Toronto 1988 and again in Matanzas 1999. The final document says: "We need to develop a new mission paradigm, beginning at the national level, revising and re-actualizing our biblical and theological discourse, our ecclesiology, those structures which limit our missionary action, our models of theological education, our tradition and liturgical creations, our theoretical and practical models of the ministry. This new pattern should give the priority to liberating projects which can be multiplied". It encourages supporting programs of South to South, South to North collaboration and the programs of equal dialogue between North and South. To sustain programs of South to South, South to North collaboration and the programs of equal dialogue between North and South. Historical objectivity is necessary for a new type of dialogue between the North and South acknowledging the ideological background of domination – conscious or unconscious – of missionary enterprise. All missionary activity should center on the dynamic elements of economy, ecology and macro-ecumenics. Macro-ecumenism should further projects of justice, human rights advocacy and a common witness for the defence of life. Missionary ethics should be more respectful of the Other avoiding patriarchal legitimations. Missions cannot be separated from *Diakonia*

A negative factor in the country is the lack of an effective Roman Catholic/Protestant ecumenism which is preventing to develop a more integrated mission programme.,

Partnerships in Mission are beginning to develop mostly with churches in North America and in UK and Germany. I think this experience should be encouraged and evaluated.

2. Church and politics – We should avoid not to transform the church into a political alternative to the Revolutionary Government, as it was the case in some of the East European Socialist countries. It is always very difficult, and more so in our Cuban situation, when describing the mission of the church how to discern the best political option. It is not as simple to say that the Roman Catholic Church has chosen the position of confrontation, while the Protestant churches a position of collaboration.

3. Missiological ecumenical training.- There are not at present missiology courses in the Evangelical Seminary in Matanzas which could help our churches in the difficult road of defining its mission in present day Cuba. It is my hope that the Seminary and the Cuban Council of Churches could encourage the fostering of missiological studies in

Cuba and hope that eventually the Roman Catholic Church can also participate in this joint action for Mission.

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