CHRIST AND CUBA:

RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

Matthew Bailey

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Introduction

In 1960, Fidel Castro said that “to betray the poor is to betray Christ.”¹ Why then did Castro’s government take over religious schools, arrest missionaries, and shut down churches? Why did some churches support a man who placed so many restrictions on religion? We can answer these questions using rational choice theory.² Humans try to maximize perceived personal advantage. This paper shows how the behavior of the Cuban government and the behavior of religious denominations shifted according to their own self-interests.

Does rational choice theory apply to religious behavior? Are those who sacrifice money, time, and even their own lives for religion behaving rationally? I argue that they do behave rationally since religious behavior, just like other goods and services, provide satisfaction. In the past thirty years, religious historians have used economic principles to illuminate this otherwise “disorderly landscape.”³ Recently, Anthony Gill applied rational choice theory to both the Catholic Church in Latin America and Latin American governments to religious freedom.⁴ Both political leaders and religious leaders act in their own perceived self-interests. Political leaders

attempt to stay in power, maximize government revenues, increase economic growth, and minimize civil unrest at the lowest cost.Obviously, religious leaders try to stay in power, increase their membership, and advocate for their members. Since religious preferences in society are pluralistic, in order for religions with a majority of the market to maintain their membership, they favor governmental regulations that inhibit minority religions. On the other hand, since persecuting religion costs resources, political leaders prefer to leave religion alone or at least maintain the status quo.

Studies that apply economic theory to the study of religion tend to focus on Europe and the United States. Meanwhile, historians of the Cuban Revolution often minimize the role of religion or ignore it altogether. Aviva Chomsky states that the revolutionary government oppressed Catholicism more than Afro-Cuban religions because Catholicism was associated with the elite. On the other hand, Samuel Farber argues that the racist Cuban government continued to look down on black religions. Theron Corse claims that the bond between the United States and Cuba, while severely diminished at times, was not broken. The purpose of this paper is to

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid. Time, money, and personnel are needed to persecute religion. While it could be argued that taking religious property equals a net gain for the state, this is only in the initial stage of persecution when there are plenty of things to take. During other stages, religious persecution is a net loss for the state when it comes to resources, unless the religion(s) being persecuted threaten the overthrow of the government and/or create a large amount of civil unrest.
explain the actions of the Cuban government toward Baptists and the attitude of Baptists toward the Cuban government. Only Jill I. Goldenziel takes an economic approach to the Cuban government and religion, arguing that Castro “strategically increased religious liberty” after 1991 because “loopholes in U.S. sanctions policies have allowed aid to flow into Cuba from the United States via religious groups.”

Baptists were a small religious firm with little power. They aligned themselves with the Revolution because it increased the standing of their members and thereby the power and influence of the denomination. The Roman Catholic Church was the dominant religious firm with ties to the upper class. The Catholic Church aligned themselves with the counterrevolution to protect the wealth of their members and maintain their privileged position on the island. Fidel Castro, while victorious in 1959, was still in a tenuous position during the first few years of his reign. Rather than fight the Catholic Church directly, he attacked the power of the Church in two ways. First, he seized the wealth and destroyed the power of the upper class. Second, he promoted religious freedom. Since religious preferences in society are pluralistic, religious freedom guaranteed that the Catholic Church would lose members. After the Bay of Pigs in 1961, Castro’s main enemy shifted from the Cuban upper class to the United States. This further intensified after Castro’s embarrassment when the Soviet Union withdrew their nuclear missiles and the Challenge of Castro’s Cuba, 1959-1970,” Cuban Studies 31 (2000): 1-33. Other historians that cover religion and the Cuban Revolution, without taking an economic approach, include the following: Margaret E. Crahan, “Salvation through Christ or Marx: Religion in Revolutionary Cuba,” Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 21, no. 1 (Feb. 1979): 156-184; Marcos Antonio Ramos, Panorama del Protestantismo en Cuba (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Caribe), 525-572; Abel R. Figueroa, Quo Vadis, Cuba?: Religión y Revolución (Bloomington, IN: Palibrio, 2012); Jason M. Yaremko, U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba: From Independence to Castro (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); Michael Lowy and Claudia Pompan, “Marxism and Christianity in Latin America,” Latin American Perspectives 20, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 28-42.

13 Corse does not explain the reasons for the actions of the Cuban government and Protestant denominations during the Cuban Revolution.
from Cuba in 1962. However, the ire of the Cuban government was not focused on all religions equally. Even among Baptists, the Eastern Baptists, with only loose ties to the United States, had an easier time than Western Baptists, who had close ties to the United States.\footnote{Corse, "Eastern Baptists," 28-29, 42-44. During the Cuban Revolution, the further removed a denomination was from the United States the better that denomination fared under the revolutionary government.}

My archival sources come from the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive. The Home Mission Board Cuba Mission Collection contains information about the missionary work and 1965 arrest of two Baptist ministers – Herbert Caudill and David Fite. Specifically, it includes sermons about the Cuban Revolution and newspaper clippings about their arrest and subsequent return to the United States.\footnote{This collection is the size of one archival box. I read the relevant sources and scanned the rest. Some of the material (e.g. architectural drawings of Cuban Baptist churches) were irrelevant. Other material was superfluous (e.g. small newspaper clippings that stated the same basic information about Herbert Caudill’s return to the United States).} I also use the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board Minutes, 1857-1997 Collection to provide dollar amounts that the Home Mission Board was giving to Cuban churches during the 1960s.\footnote{I used three boxes from this collection. The minutes are indexed, and so, I searched for Cuba. This collection includes requests by Herbert Caudill to the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for money for the churches and a few reports on the state of Western Baptists in Cuba during the Cuban Revolution.} This paper also relies on speeches and interview by Fidel Castro, hosted and indexed on the Latin American Network Information Center website.\footnote{I searched Castro’s speeches for the following terms alone and by year “Christianity,” “religion,” “Catholicism,” “Protestantism,” “Baptist(s),” “Catholic(s),” “priest(s),” and “Caudill.”}

**Baptists in Cuba**

Cuban Baptists have always had ties to the United States. The first Baptist church in Cuba was started in 1886 by Albert J. Díaz, a Cuban exile of the Ten Years War (1868-1878) who joined a Baptist church in New York City and returned to Cuba to found a congregation in
Díaz served as the first Cuban missionary for the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. After the United States’ victory in the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States sent numerous missionaries to the island nation.

Cuban Baptists differed regarding how close their ties were to the United States. Cuban Baptists were divided into two groups – Western Baptists, who worked in four western provinces, and Eastern Baptists, who worked in the two eastern provinces – by the Southern Baptists and the American Baptists respectively. By sending denominational funds through Caudill to the Western Baptists, the Southern Baptist Convention ensured that the Western Baptists were led by an American. On the other hand, the American Baptists took more of a hands-off approach to the Eastern Baptists, insisting that missionaries serve “only in advisory and spiritual roles.” This meant that Eastern Baptist churches were run by indigenous pastors and laity. It also meant that when Castro’s Revolution came for the Americans, the Western Baptists had a more difficult time than the Eastern Baptists, who by the 1960s were “entirely Cuban-led.”

**Religious Competition in Cuba**

The religious preferences of any society are pluralistic. All things being equal, people will divide into multiple churches and sects. Consequently, a large religious firm needs coercion by the state to maintain its monopoly. On the other hand, a small religious firm only needs

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20 Ramos, “Cuba (1886),” 295.
24 Ibid., 249.
religious liberty to grow its market share. Roman Catholicism, while not as dominant in Cuba as it was in other parts of Latin America, was the large religious firm. Baptist missionary Herbert Caudill declared that “Cuba is a Catholic country.” Those that did not accept the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church “simply kept quiet and Rome continued unchallenged in Cuban religious life and thought.” Caudill wrote that “practically all the teaching in the country was under their influence” and “every town of any importance has its Catholic church, which is usually situated on the square in the center of town.” On the other hand, the focus of Catholicism and some Protestant denominations on “institution building and elite education rather than pastoral duties” left Baptists an opening to focus on the rural poor.

The Baptist faith was better suited to reach the poor and middle classes than it was the upper class. Baptists offered democratic religion (e.g. congregationalism, the priesthood of believers, believer’s baptism, and an emphasis on laymen reading and interpreting the New Testament). These were more enticing to the marginalized than they were to the upper classes. While Baptists were better suited to reach the lower classes, Catholicism could have reached any of the social classes. Catholicism offered the world’s largest and oldest Christian religion, the

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27 Caudill, Meet the Youth, 54-55.
28 Ibid., 55, 58.
29 Crahan, “Salvation,” 158; Caudill, Meet the Youth, 54-58.
30 Congregationalism is a democratic form of church government. Each church is self-governing and a majority vote by the membership is the final authority. The priesthood of believer’s comes from the Reformation. It is the idea that believer’s do not have to go through a priest to receive the forgiveness of sins. Believer’s baptism is the belief that only professing believers should be baptized, as opposed to infant baptism. The religion offered by Baptists gives individuals more power than the religion offered by Catholicism. This is appealing, especially to poorer classes that otherwise lack power.
sacraments including mass and infant baptism, and social prestige. However, it was impossible for Catholicism to maintain its control over all segments of society, and so the Cuban Catholic hierarchy chose the upper class. Caudill noted the inequality between rich and poor in Cuban Catholicism, writing that “the priest was called in to baptize, to bury, and to marry, if there was money. If there was no money then the people would simply have to do without these benefits.”

Despite being small in number, Baptists were “very aggressive” in their “missionary zeal and evangelistic fervor.” They evangelized and taught in prisons. Some churches met in homes. Baptist were happy to pull poor and middle class individuals away from the Catholic Church. Caudill wrote stories about Catholics who “find” and are “won by the New Testament.” In Caudill’s words, the “young people of Cuba need the gospel…[and] Baptist young people…in every way possible…are seeking to be faithful to the command to give the Gospel to every creature.” He envisioned a “church of young people” and a “temple overflowing with youth.”

The Cuban Revolution and Religion

Since the Cuban upper class was Catholic, the Catholic hierarchy opposed Castro’s Revolution. On the other hand, Baptists, whose membership was primarily from the poor and

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31 Caudill, Meet the Youth, 55.
32 Caudill, Meet the Youth, 55-58; Ramos, Panorama, 531. For example, in 1959, Western Baptists only had 8,775 members and 15,020 students in their religious schools, whereas the total population of Cuba was just fewer than 7 million in 1959.
33 Caudill, Meet the Youth, 107-108.
34 Ibid., 118-119.
35 Ibid., 93, 98.
36 Ibid., 128.
37 Ibid., 115-116.
middle class, supported the Revolution. A small religious firm can do two things to grow its power. It can increase its membership, and it can increase the power of its members. Through the Cuban Revolution, Baptists hoped to do both.

Eastern Baptists “produced the largest number of active players in the rebellion.” Pastor and teacher Frank País was the most famous Eastern Baptist to fight for the Revolution. His father, Francisco País, was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Santiago. His sister, Sara, “was one of the most important evangelical leaders in Cuba,” and his two brothers, Josué and Agustín, were important figures in the Eastern Baptist Convention. País was the head of the Revolutionary Action Movement for the Western Provinces and “provided religious services to rebels.” After sabotaging a hunter’s club and a police station, País was arrested on July 24, 1957. He was freed three days later but then killed by police in Santiago on July 30, 1957.

Baptists served as “chaplains for segments of the Revolutionary forces.” For example, Victor Toranzo, a Baptist seminarian, “was the earliest Protestant chaplain for the guerrilla movement in Sierra Maestra.” These revolutionary pastors were particularly influential in rural and mountainous areas, where “Catholic priests only came once per year.” Free Will Baptists also backed the Revolution.

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38 Ramos, Panorama, 501.
39 Theron Corse, Protestants, 10-11.
41 Ramos, Panorama, 495.
42 Ibid., 495.
43 Juan Antonio Monroy, Frank País: Un Líder Evangélico en la Revolución Cubana (Spain: Editorial CLIE, 2003), 114-15; Corse, Protestants, 11; Leonard, Baptist Ways, 249.
44 Monroy, Frank País, 115.
45 Ramos, Panorama, 498; Leonard, Baptist Ways, 249. Ramos provides a list of Baptist chaplains.
46 Ramos, Panorama, 498; Leonard, Baptist Ways, 249.
47 Ramos, Panorama, 498-499.
missionary Thomas Willey and natives battled Fulgencio Batista’s forces in Pinar del Río. ⁴⁹

As Baptists increased their support for the Revolution, they were resisted by Batista’s government. In 1958, as the overthrow of Batista grew near, the “government increased restrictions on meetings and movements. Attendance, baptisms, and offerings were down.”⁵⁰ Additionally, the government “restricted the importation of literature for use in the churches.”⁵¹ The situation in the entire country was tense.⁵²

On December 31, 1958, Fulgencio Batista announced that he was leaving Cuba. When he left the country early the next morning, “there was little sign that either the missionaries or the Cuban Protestants were sad to see him go.”⁵³ Cuban Baptists leaders, like other Protestants, had supported the Revolution from the beginning and were important activists.⁵⁴ Cuban Baptists described the Revolution as the “most favorable conditions in history.”⁵⁵ Southern Baptist observers agreed that “the overwhelming majority of the people, including Baptists, support the revolution, and food that government favoritism shifted from the top 10 percent to the bottom 90 percent of the people.”⁵⁶ Not only was the “economic situation better,” but now “evangelical

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⁴⁸ Ramos, Panorama, 499. Nearly as soon as Baptists emerged in the 1600s, they divided over predestination. Free Will Baptists are a descendent of Baptists who rejected predestination. Southern Baptists and Western Baptists are the descendants of a mixture of both traditions.
⁴⁹ Ramos, Panorama, 499.
⁵² Ramos, Panorama, 500.
⁵³ Corse, Protestants, 10.
⁵⁴ Ramos, Panorama, 501.
⁵⁶ Ibid.
denominations…are enjoying complete separation of church and state for the first time, and this has given them a more aggressive spirit.”

On the other hand, the Revolution and the religious freedom it brought pressured both the Catholic hierarchy and its upper class members. Religious freedom decreased the membership of the Catholic Church. Economic reforms decreased the wealth and power of its members. The deteriorating relationship between Castro and the Catholic Church led “the majority of the hierarchy” to mount “an ever more defiant anti-Communist and anti-Soviet war of words.” As one Catholic writer put it, “Castro will someday be gone. Then those Protestants who have been assisted by him, who have been aided by him in setting up their missions, will discover the favors are gone. Because they have fawned on him, they'll find people will look on them as a part of his regime.” Castro’s move against the Catholic Church was politically brilliant, and it led to the Church’s isolation.

While the Catholic Church declined in power during the first two years of the Revolution, Baptists grew in membership and power. Eastern Baptist “membership rose slightly…and church attendance was high – in some instances standing room only.” When Western Baptists gathered for their annual convention in Caibarién in March 1961, they reported that in 1960 they

57 Ibid.
58 Corse, “Eastern Baptists,” 32-33, 36.
60 John M. Kirk, Between God and the Party: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Cuba (Tampa: University of South Florida press, 1989), 74-110.
61 Ramos, Panorama, 531; Corse, Protestants, 10; Corse, “Eastern Baptists,” 32-33, 42. Corse writes that for Americanized Protestant churches during the first two years of the Revolution “membership held steady and even grew in some cases.” On the other hand, Corse notes that the Catholic Church “lost 600 to 800 priests in the first three years of the revolution.”
had baptized a record 611 members and raised a record US$205,060.53. They also had 85 churches, 196 missions, and 15,020 students in their religious schools. On Thursday night of the convention, Western Baptists held an evangelistic service with more than 1,500 in attendance and 130 responding to the invitation at the end of the sermon. The mayor of Caibarién attended the service and reportedly listened attentively. All officers promised “aggressive programs of work in evangelism and stewardship.”

Between 1959 and 1986, Dr. Louis M. González Peña was the most prominent Western Baptist in Cuba. In 1961, Dr. Louis M. González Peña was reelected president of the Western Baptist convention and gave a pro-Castro acceptance speech titled “This Is Our Truth, This Is Cuba’s Reality.” His speech had eight parts: the ideology of Castro’s government, the agrarian reform, one case of American companies in Cuba, the problem of communism, the working class, the treaty with the Soviet Union, benefits obtained in the moral of the people, and the plane attacks on Cuba. Peña explained that while Castro’s government leans toward socialism, it was not communist. Peña argued that the agrarian reforms undertaken by Castro were similar to reforms by the United Nations in “Progress in the Matter of Agrarian Reform” and by the United States in Japan and West Germany.

According to Peña, Americans did not understand the Cuban Revolution, and some Americans were sabotaging the revolution. He described American companies as making

64 Ramos, Panorama, 531.
65 Herbert Caudill, “Annual Meeting of Cuban Baptists.” Normally, Baptists give an invitation at the end of the sermon for people to come to the altar at the front of the church to pray to be forgiven of one’s sins, to be prayed for, or to receive counsel from the pastor and/or others.
66 Ibid.
67 Ramos, Panorama, 532; Leonard, Baptist Ways, 249.
68 Luis M. González Peña, “This Is Our Truth,” Home Mission Board Cuba Mission Collection, SBHLA, Nashville, TN.
69 Ibid.
“furious attacks” on the Revolution because of the “expropriation of the vast lands of large foreign companies,” which were bought at “derisive” prices. According to Peña, the American people “have been made to believe that our leaders are communists, or sympathizers.” However, the Communist Party in Cuba had existed since 1923. Where was the protest of the United States against the communists under the Batista regime? Cuba made a treaty with the Soviet Union in order to sell its sugar, not because the Revolution was communist.70

Peña argued that the moral reform undertaken by Castro’s government had seven benefits. First, Castro’s Revolution brought “administrative honesty and integrity.” Now, citizens could be confident that their taxes did not go to “the pockets of some official as has been the case during 57 years of the Republic.” Second, the Revolution eliminated gambling, particularly the cancerous national lottery. Third, taxes restricted alcoholic beverages, and neither “Fidel nor his commanders ever drink.” Fourth, Cuba was no longer the “world center of drugs” as it was under the Batista regime. Fifth, prostitution was under “sanitary control,” and tourists no longer come to “public prostitution centers.” Sixth, the churches have “all the respect and liberty here that they enjoy in the states.” Furthermore, the respect and appreciation of evangelical churches is greater than ever before, with many members in the rebel army and “filling important positions in the government.” Seventh, the Revolution converted barracks and military centers into city and school centers, rather than “flattening the barracks as the soldiers did before.” The army planted trees and constructed country homes. Government salaries were modest, with the Prime Minister receiving only $400 per month.71

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
Home Mission Board officials Arthur Rutledge and Loyd Corder were more reserved than Peña but still optimistic. Despite “severe tensions and uncertainties,” they anticipated a “modest expansion” of Baptist work in Cuba. Their visit to Cuba included an evangelistic crusade in Havana that resulted in 2,192 professions of faith. One Havana pastor, Nemesio Garcia, expected the “best year Cuban Baptists have ever had.” Rutledge and Corder stated that there was a “widespread spiritual hunger” in Cuba. Politically, the situation had calmed since the beginning of the revolution, and they reported that the government did not interfere with Baptist meetings.72

Despite the United States’ suggestion to leave Cuba, some missionaries decided to stay. As the daughter of Herbert Caudill put it, “We have no hindrance of any kind in performing our work which is what we are here for. As long as this situation continues, I cannot conscientiously leave.”73 Similarly, Loren Williams, a Baptist musician who visited Cuba, stated that while there were prominent signs in Cuba that read “Cuba, Yes; Yankees, No,” this was directed at the business and political activities of the United States, not individuals.74 He further stated that “evangelical groups were taking advantage of the lack of religious restrictions. This left Williams confused “because of the apparent conflict between his experience there and his impressions received about Cuba from what he heard in the United States.75

During the first two years of the Revolution, “Baptists had rejoiced with the new freedoms and opportunities of Castro’s regime.”76 Baptisms and donations were at all-time highs. Economically, Baptists, who were mostly “from the working class…and none from the

75 Ibid.
76 Walker L. Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work,” Home Mission Board Cuba Mission Collection, SBHLA, Nashville, TN.
upper class,” were better off.⁷⁷ Eastern Baptist revolutionary martyr Frank País was a national hero.⁷⁸ Even Castro’s sister was a Baptist.⁷⁹ Castro’s government was purging Cuba of its corruption, and returning land previously owned by foreigners to Cubans. The new regime gave Baptists the opportunity to gain a greater share of the religious marketplace. Since Baptists were not part of the upper class, Castro’s reforms economically benefited many of their members.

Things were bright, at least for the moment.

**Fidel Castro and Religion**

Fidel Castro’s upbringing helped to form his religious pragmatism. Castro came from “a religious nation…a religious family… [and] a very religious woman.”⁸⁰ Despite having a religious mother, his family did not attend church. Why? Castro remarks that “there wasn’t any church where I was born, far from any city.”⁸¹ The priest came once a year to baptize. His town had “no religious training.”⁸² He learned how to read and write in public school.

In junior high and high school, he attended a “prestigious upper-class school,” the Colegio de Dolores in Santiago.⁸³ During this time, he had a growing awareness of society’s impact on behavior. He boarded with a businessman’s family. Reflecting on the experience, Castro noted that while they were not “bad people,” even the quest for good grades was due to “pride and vanity.”⁸⁴ According to Castro, society “made people selfish, turned them into people

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⁷⁷ Ramos, “Cuba (1886),” 296.
⁷⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁹ Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
⁸¹ Ibid., 91, 95, 99. Castro (born in 1926) noticed the same religious discrepancy between rich and poor that Herbert Caudill, who first came to Cuba as a missionary in 1929, noticed.
⁸² Ibid., 100.
⁸⁴ Castro and Betto, *Fidel and Religion*, 118-120.
with an ax to grind, who tried to gain something out of every situation.”\(^{85}\) He noticed even that his weekly allowance of 25 cents was “arbitrary and unfair,” rather than based on his present circumstances.\(^{86}\) Similar to his 25 cent allowance, the Jesuit training was “very dogmatic.”\(^{87}\) Castro recalls that

> Everything was very dogmatic – “This is so because it has to be so.” You had to believe it, even if you didn’t understand it. If you didn’t, it was a fault, a sin, something worthy of punishment. I’d say that reasoning played no role. Reasoning and feelings weren’t developed…I could have been open to reason, and I think I was open to developing feelings, but it wasn’t possible to inculcate a solid religious faith in me, because things were explained in an entirely dogmatic way.\(^{88}\)

CASTRO wanted religious faith to be based on reason and the “intrinsic value of their actions.”\(^{89}\)

At the beginning of the Revolution, Castro was conciliatory toward religion that did not interfere with the Revolution’s economic reform. In a speech to the nation on December 15, 1959 he said

> I do not believe there can be a single just measure in human society, not a single good work in the civil society of man, which is not based on a healthy and just religious conscience. If religions are the embodiment of the just and noble feeling, if it is the incarnation of a good idea, an ideal of good, the revolution is the incarnation of the most noble, most just principles of man. This is because the revolution battles the evil in human society, the revolution struggles against all those defects from which people suffer. It is only those who play the farce, only the hypocrites, only those whom Christ called the scribes and the Pharisees who attempt to turn religion into a tool serving egotistical, petty, and inhuman interests.\(^{90}\)

Similarly, on December 21, 1959, Castro declared that revolution and religion “are not contradictory but coincide.”\(^{91}\) Christianity came from the poor and was “opposed by privileged

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 118.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 119.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 123.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 123.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 124.
classes.” Castro believed that true Christianity served the poor. Christian religions that served the rich were Christian in name only.

When Castro claimed in 1959 that the revolution had “excellent relations with Catholic hierarchy,” he meant an idealized hierarchy that did not oppose the revolution. However, as Aviva Chomsky points out, “most of Cuba’s Catholic priests were foreign – Spanish – and conservative. Their churches and their schools served Cuba’s elites.” When Father Germen Lence, a revolutionary priest, was sanctioned by the Catholic Church, Castro remarked that if Lence was excommunicated, “the revolutionary government would have to be excommunicated and with it the Cuban people.” In 1960, Castro remarked that

During those first months [of the revolution]… everyone was a revolutionary… Today the struggle between the interests of the people and those of the enemy of the people is more definite, more clearly seen now… It can be said that the people know everything. The people always put their finger on the festered spot...What did the cardinal care about the theft of millions? He did not write pastorals. He went there to get Judas’ peso from the bloody dictator.

According to Castro, the attacks on the Revolution by the Catholic hierarchy were not the Revolution’s fault. He stated

They have been attacking the communists since the revolution triumphed but the communists have not been attacking them. Why? No one has forbidden them to preach in their churches…everyone’s sincere beliefs, religious and political, should be respected. In what name does the clergy speak if it wants to forbid the communists from preaching their ideas? No one has denied anyone his political or religious beliefs.

92 Ibid.,
93 Ibid.,
94 Chomsky, A History, 151.
97 Ibid.
Despite the Catholic hierarchy’s opposition to the Revolutionary government, during the first two years of the Revolution, Castro “evaded a direct confrontation with the church.”

Freedom of religion was itself an attack on the dominant religion. Redistributing the wealth of the upper class was an attack on the dominant religion to which they paid tithes.

**Fidel Castro and the United States**

Between 1959 and 1962, the Revolution’s greatest opponent shifted from Fulgencio Batista to the United States. While, at first, the United States believed that the Revolution could be “persuaded, or pressured, to maintain a favorable attitude with respect to U.S. investors,” nationalism and socialism destined Cuba to conflict with the United States. Castro angered the United States when he called off the “promised elections” in April 1959, announced that “Cuba did not want U.S. economic assistance,” and in May 1959 “adopted an agrarian reform law that led to the expropriation of U.S.-owned properties on the island.”

The United States shifted from hostility toward the Cuban Revolution to determination to overthrow Castro.

The United States placed multiple embargos on Cuba. In March 1958, after fighting broke out between Fulgencio Batista and the rebels, the United States placed on arms embargo on the island. In June 1960, after foreign-owned companies in Cuba refused to process Soviet crude oil, Castro nationalized them. In response, the United States reduced its yearly quota of sugar from Cuba. Not only did this reduction drive Cuba further into the hands of the Soviet

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103 Purcell, “Cuba,” 37.
Union, who agreed to purchase the sugar, but Castro responded to the United States by nationalizing all U.S. property in Cuba. The United States reacted to nationalization by cutting the remaining “sugar quota for 1960 by 95 percent.” Between August and October 1960, Cuba fired back by nationalizing all “U.S.-owned banks, industrial and agrarian enterprises, and wholesale and retail enterprises.” In response, the United States reduced Cuba’s 1961 sugar quota to zero. In 1961, after Cuba restricted U.S. embassy personnel to eleven, the United States “broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba, and travel by U.S. citizens to Cuba was forbidden shortly thereafter.” Congress prohibited aid to Cuba in September 1961, and, on February 7, 1962, President John F. Kennedy put a complete embargo on the island. Finally, on August 1, 1962, the United States banned foreign aid to any nation that assisted Castro’s government.

In 1961, Cuba defeated the United States in the Bay of Pigs. The United States and President Eisenhower began planning for the Bay of Pigs in 1960. President Kennedy approved the plan after he was elected, and on April 16, the American forces overpowered the local Cuban militia. However, a counter-offensive by the Cubans led the paramilitary troops to surrender on the twentieth of April. Many of the paramilitary troops were publically interrogated and sent back to the U.S. The Bay of Pigs was an embarrassment to the United States. In Cuba, it consolidated and radicalized the revolutionary process. The increased Cuban nationalism drove Cuba to socialism for collective defense and politically toward the Soviet Union.

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104 Ibid., 37-38.
105 Ibid., 38.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Chomsky, A History, 68.
111 Ibid., 91-92.
to the invasion, hundreds of people in Cuba were arrested. Dr. Caudill wrote that, when the Bay of Pigs occurred, men came to search his home. While most of those detained were later released, the movement in Cuba against Castro was “totally dismantled and incapacitated.”

Fidel Castro’s view of the United States soured after the Bay of Pigs. On April 23, 1961, Castro gave a speech that denounced the “direct aggression” that came from the “camps of the North Americans,” that used North American equipment, and “included a convoy by the U.S. Navy and the participation of the U.S. Air Force.” According to Castro, the United States went from nation to nation for “collective action,” but found only the “most corrupt Latin American governments.” Imperialism brought the “world to the brink of war.” It needed to die for the “world to live in peace.”

The Bay of Pigs led to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. This was the closest the United States and the Soviet Union came to nuclear war. In May of 1962, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev proposed placing Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba to deter a U.S. invasion, and the construction of the missile sites began in July of the same year. In October 1962, the United States spotted the sites with “their reconnaissance planes overflying the island.” This began the most intense period of the Cold War. On October 26, Khrushchev sent Kennedy a letter stating that the purpose of the defensive missiles was to prevent another Bay of Pigs invasion, and that he would “happily withdraw them if the United States would agree not to invade the

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112 Herbert Caudill, Freedom’s Edge: 10 Years under Communism in Cuba (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board, 1975), 59.
113 Arboleya, The Cuban Counterrevolution, 91-92.
115 Ibid.,
116 Gott, Cuba, 201.
On October 28, the United States and the Soviet Union reached an agreement. The U.S. agreed to never invade Cuba and dismantle their nuclear weapons in Turkey and Italy. The Soviet Union’s unilaterally agreement with the United States to withdraw their nukes and bombers from Cuba strained Cuban-Soviet relations. The fact that Castro had been a “mere pawn in the chessboard of international politics” damaged his “pride and prestige.” The Soviet Union responded by treating Castro as a “hero during his extended trip to the Soviet Union in April-May 1963.”

The hardline stance by the United States toward Cuba made Castro suspicious of American subversion. On March 4, 1961, Castro remarked that the “basic enemies of the revolution were not national enemies, but foreign enemies.” The main culprit was the CIA. Castro declared that they never cease to provoke and create all sorts of problems, crimes, sabotage, and subversive activities against the Cuban nation.

Why can’t religion coexist with a system in accordance with people's dreams? What do they want? Do they want the people to continue living as slaves, discriminated against and exploited? That is what they want. That is why they never spoke out against those evils. And now they attack the revolution. They use communism as a pretext. Christ was a communist, too. Would they be against Christ?

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117 Ibid., 207.
118 Suchlicki, Cuba, 148-149.
119 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
Baptists: American or Cuban?

The 1961 Bay of Pigs was a turning point for Christian denominations in Cuba with ties to the United States. Three Catholic priests and one Protestant minister were part of Brigade 2506. As Corse points out, “the proclamation by Father Ismael de Lugo declaring the invasion to be a religious crusade against the Communists convinced the state that the influence of religion in Cuban society needed to be reduced.” The Cuban government responded by nationalizing all of the schools on June 6, 1961. By 1962, nearly all of the American missionaries had left the island.

The Eastern Baptists, whose ties were further removed from the United States, fared better than the Western Baptists. As Corse points out, “Protestants across the island confronted many of the same crises…Yet the effect on each denomination of the new revolutionary state depended on their demographics, theology, and external and internal politics.” Eastern Baptist leadership was indigenous and they had a revolutionary history with martyr Frank País. During the Cuban Revolution, Eastern Baptists “sheltered refugees in the final weeks of the fighting,” and Eastern Baptist pastor Augustín Gómez arranged the

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122 Corse, Protestants, 71; Leonard, Baptist Ways, 249.  
123 Figueroa, Quo Vadis, Kindle Edition, Chapter 3, Location 641; Corse, Protestants, 71.  
124 Corse, Protestants, 71.  
125 Figueroa, Quo Vadis, Kindle Edition, Chapter 3, Location 656; Corse, “Eastern Baptists,” 42.  
126 Ramos, Panorama, 529-530; Figueroa, Quo Vadis, Kindle Edition, Chapter 3, Location 611; Chomsky, A History, 151; Corse, “Eastern Baptists,” 41-42.  
128 Corse, “Eastern Baptists,” 27.  
“surrender of Santiago.” After the fall of Batista, Eastern Baptist pastor Augusto Abella “was part of a three-man commission that took charge of the municipality of Palma Soriano.”

During the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, Eastern Baptist minister Raúl Suárez “joined in the defense effort during the exile invasion.” They were also “based in the most rural, poorest, and least white part of Cuba,” which meant that “they were less identified with the demographic group most likely to oppose Castro.”

Western Baptists, supported by the Southern Baptist Convention, had a harder time than the Eastern Baptists. The first Southern Baptist missionary couple to leave the island left in October of 1960. They were followed by a second couple that left in January of 1961. Other American denominations were also abandoning the island, so that by 1963 the Southern Baptists, with six active and one retired missionary, had the “largest mission force from the United States among any Protestant group.” Two of these missionaries were arrested and expelled without reason in July of 1963, leaving only “Doctor and Mrs. Herbert Caudill and Reverend and Mrs. David Fite in Havana, and the retired missionary, Miss Christine Garnett at Matanzas.” Continued pressure by the government forced Garnett to leave in the “latter part of 1964.”

131 Ibid.
132 Chomsky, A History, 151.
133 Corse, “Eastern Baptists,” 43.
134 Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
138 Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
The withdrawal of Soviet nuclear weapons during the Cuban Missile Crisis stimulated the Cuban government to unify and mobilize the country. In 1963, the Cuban “government showed a clear change in tone toward Protestant churches.” Increasingly, the government viewed the “churches as obstacles to mobilization and as potential security threats.” Fidel Castro argued that the imperialists had switched “from using the Catholic Church as a front for counterrevolutionary activities to using instead certain Protestant groups.” In a speech that marked the 6th anniversary of the assault on Batista’s Presidential Palace, Castro remarked that

Imperialism tried to turn the Catholic Church on the revolution, and imperialism was unmasked. Some reactionary sectors of the church tried to use the Churches against the revolution, but they were also unmasked...What did the imperialists do?...They changed tactics and even changed their church....For some time now we have observed an unusual activity in our country—activity never shown by these sects that are directed straight from the United States since they are not directed from Rome. These sects are directed from the United States and they are used as agents of the Central Intelligence Agency, of the State Department and the Yankee policy.

Castro concluded his diatribe against Protestant religions with ties to the United States by stating that “we are going to take drastic measures against these crooked trees.”

In June 1963, Blas Roca echoed Castro by arguing that “the churches provided an ideological alternative to the regime, that they weakened the will of the people to support and defend the Revolution, and that they served as fronts for counterrevolutionary activity.” Ideologically, the churches were dangerous because they “preached resignation in the face of injustice in hope of a better life in the hereafter.” Charity was an “alternative to revolution,”

139 Corse, Protestants, 81-82.
140 Ibid., 73.
141 Ibid., 73.
142 Ibid., 73.
144 Ibid.
145 Corse, Protestants, 75; Figueroa, Quo Vadis, Kindle Edition, Chapter 3, Location 813.
146 Corse, Protestants, 75.
and nonviolence “weakened the will of the people before imperialist aggression.”\textsuperscript{147} Regarding counterrevolutionary activity, he argued that the churches spread “antirevolutionary propaganda” and provided “material support for counterrevolutionary guerillas and for sabotage.”\textsuperscript{148}

Along with expelling missionaries, the Cuban government tightened the noose on religion in a variety of other ways.\textsuperscript{149} They tried to register churches and ministers, confined religious activities to church buildings, banned religious promotion, took school busses, closed the religious schools, seized buildings, restricted building and repair permits, limited preaching on the radio, confiscated bibles, and banned religious publishing.\textsuperscript{150} Missionary Christine Garnett described the situation thus

\begin{quote}
The work is limited practically to what we do inside the churches, having to ask government permission for every extra meeting. The absence of children and youth is due to indoctrinational activities and compulsory military service. Half of our summer camps in 1964 were not held, and when we did get permission, it had this condition: no one under 18 years can attend. Several regional conventions and meetings were suspended because permission was not granted.”\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

As the United States pressured Castro, the Cuban government pressured denominations with ties to the United States. Corse writes that the “failure of import substitution, the weakness displayed by the Soviet Union during the missile crisis, and the escalation of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam convinced the Cuban leadership of the need for a more self-reliant defense posture...all Cubans were expected to prepare for the inevitable U.S. invasion.”\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Walker L. Knight, “The Noose Tightens in Cuba,” \textit{Home Missions}, February 1964, 3. The United States also made it difficult for the missionaries to operate in Cuba since it “restricted the sending of money into Cuba.” The leadership of both countries wanted to silence communication between Americans and Cubans, and so it became increasingly difficult for missionaries to be both American and Cuban.
\textsuperscript{150} Knight, “The Noose Tightens,” 3; Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
\textsuperscript{151} Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
\textsuperscript{152} Corse, \textit{Protestants}, 81-82. Corse argues that the pietistic heritage of Cuban Protestants, which focused on individual development, was not suited for the nationalistic \textit{conciencia} that the Cuban government demanded. Corse writes that “while rarely actively counterrevolutionary, the Protestant churches clearly presented an
Neutrality was not an option for denominations with “deep ties to the United States, the greatest threat to the Revolution. Conflict with the state was inevitable.” Neutrality was not an option for denominations with “deep ties to the United States, the greatest threat to the Revolution. Conflict with the state was inevitable.” Neutrality was not an option for denominations with “deep ties to the United States, the greatest threat to the Revolution. Conflict with the state was inevitable.” 153 The Cuban government wanted to “marginalize the churches and…ensure [that] they could not be used as centers of counterrevolutionary activity.” 154

The Arrest of Western Baptist Leaders

Herbert Caudill was determined to stay in Cuba because of the increased constraints on religion. He “refused to leave the island, even for official business in the United States,” afraid that he “might be refused re-entry and their ministry stopped.” 155 However, a detached retina in Herbert Caudill’s left eye forced the Caudills to travel to Atlanta for surgery in the summer of 1964. 156 On December 12, 1964, the “Cuban security police…arrested a Baptist pastor, charging him with involvement in currency exchange for his own profit and with membership in a counterrevolutionary organization.” 157 The government threatened the life of the pastor, and trying to “save himself, the pastor invented a story implicating Caudill as an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency and head of a spy network made up of Cuban Baptist pastors.” 158 According to this pastor’s story, the Baptist leaders were “supplying information about

gal ideological alternative at a time when the state was prepared to accept none.” With regard to import substitution, Cuba’s domestic production was not enough to replace what was lost from the American embargo against Cuba. 153 Ibid., 82.
154 Ibid., 76.
155 Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work”; “Rechazan Bautistas unas Imputaciones,” El Mundo (Havana), April 9, 1965. Even with the government’s restrictions, Western Baptists still had 84 churches in 1965.
157 Greer, “Baptists,” 69; Caudill, On Freedom’s Edge, 56.
158 Greer, “Baptists,” 69.
geography and weapons to the CIA.”

Rather than block the Caudills’ reentry into Cuba, the government allowed them to enter on December 31, 1964.

The Cuban government’s persecution of Western Baptists reached its climax in April 1965. In the weeks leading up to April 8, 1965, Cuban authorities had arrested “eight other Baptist ministers in the outlying provinces.” On April 8, 1965, at one in the morning, the Cuban security police arrested 53 Baptists, forty pastors and thirteen laymen and women, declaring them to be a “banda de espías.” Caudill noted that the investigation in his home was two hours, and they took “our diaries, personal papers, letters, my passport, and other documents.” He described his interrogation as follows

I was brought before one of the principal officers of the G2. In that interview he said, ‘I suppose you understand where you are. This is commonly known as the G2, the bureau of investigation. It serves the purpose of the FBI and at the same time in some respects like the CIA. You have heard of hot cells, cold cells and torture chambers of various kinds. We have all kinds of devices here.’ I was surprised when the interrogator began to question me about military, political and economic information. He was insistent that I had gathered such material and barraged me with questions… I explained to him that there was no plot on the part of our pastors and missionaries against the government. The reports I received from pastors and churches dealt with the work our churches were doing. They did not in any way affect the economy of the nation.

The Havana newspaper El Mundo stated that they made a mockery of the faith of believers, covering their espionage and subversion under the mantle of religion. It accused Caudill of collecting abundant military, economic, and political information, which he then conveyed to spy

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159 Ibid.
160 Caudill, On Freedom’s Edge, 55-56.
161 Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
162 “Arrestados 53 miembros de una banda de espías,” El Mundo (Havana), April 9, 1965; Caudill, Freedom’s Edge, 58-59; Ramos, Panorama, 532; Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.” According to Knight, editor of Baptist Press, this group included all of the officers of the Western Baptist Convention.
163 Caudill, Freedom’s Edge, 61.
164 Ibid., 62-63.
165 “Arrestados 53 miembros de una banda de espías,” El Mundo (Havana), April 9, 1965.
agencies in the United States. On the day of the arrests, Havana radios broadcast the following message

The American ostensibly head of the Western Baptist convention in Cuba and the other ministers, working under the cloak of religion, organized a counterrevolutionary group for missions of espionage and subversion. Caudill gathered much military information, also information of an economic and political nature which was turned over to the [espionage] agencies of the United States. At the same time he received instructions and support and issued propaganda against the revolution. Other activities of the gang of spies included helping and concealing counterrevolutionaries and trafficking [in] foreign exchange.

The Cuban government interrogated the Baptist pastors for thirty-five days, after which they “brought forty-one of the original fifty-three to trial for conspiracy to overthrow the government.” The Swiss ambassador informed the pastors of the six charges against them. Dr. Caudill wrote that he was charged with

(1) Conspiracy against the security and integrity of the nation. I was accused of being the leader of a band of spies. These spies were my fellow pastors and missionaries. (2) Collaboration with the Central Intelligence Agency. (3) Helping people get out of the country illegally. (4) Ideological diversion. (5) Covering up the activities of others. (6) Illegal currency exchange. I insisted that there was absolutely no basis for charges 1, 2, 3, and 5.

The 12-hour trial of Dr. Caudill, David Fite, and others took place on May 14, 1965. It was open to the press. Baptist lawyer and lay leader Humberto Ferrer gave them a “strong defense,” but the missionaries acknowledged that they had exchanged American and Cuban

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166 “Arrestados 53 miembros de una banda de espías,” El Mundo (Havana), April 9, 1965; “Rechazan Bautistas unas Imputaciones,” El Mundo (Havana), April 9, 1965. Interestingly, Baptist objections were printed in El Mundo. Baptists argued that their “history was clear,” and Dr. Caudill did not take outside support to “grow the work of the Lord in our country, in which he has lived 30 years.”

167 “From Associated Press,” April 8, 1965, quoted in Corse, Protestants, 83. Regarding whether or not Caudill was a spy, Corse writes “The notion that Herbert Caudill was involved in any way with espionage or counterrevolutionary activity is patently absurd. Indeed, the government ultimately dropped these charges. Caudill had been a strong defender of the Revolution in its early years, and if he had sourced on the Revolution, he certainly kept his opinions to himself. Of course, nowhere else in Cuba could one find an American in such a prominent position.”


170 Caudill, On Freedom’s Edge, 74; Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”

171 Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”
currencies. Normally, the exchange of currency “carried a six-month to two-year sentence.”

When the verdicts were announced a week later, “many of the pastors and leaders were stunned” as the sentences ranged from “two years of house arrest to 30 years imprisonment.” The court gave Dr. Caudill a “ten-year sentence rather than the recommended thirty-year term because of his age, and Fite was sentenced to six years in prison.” Southern Baptist leaders tried multiple times to gain the release of Caudill and Fite. However, as Corse notes, “only a personal visit to Cuban authorities by Fite’s father and Caudill’s health problems seem to have made any difference.”

The Home Mission Board continued to pay for Cuban missionaries and printed literature for Cuban churches during the Cuban Revolution. The Home Mission Board budgeted $250,000 in 1959 and $262,500 in 1960 for Cuba. In 1965, Herbert Caudill and his wife were paid $755 per month, and David Fite and his wife were paid $530 per month. The number of religious workers in Cuba on the Southern Baptist Payroll held steady throughout from the beginning of the Revolution up until the point that Caudill was arrested. It appears that there was currency exchange between the Southern Baptists and Cuban missionaries.

172 Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work”; Ramos, Panorama, 532.
173 Greer, “Baptists,” 70.
174 Greer, “Baptists,” 70; Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work”; Ramos, Panorama, 532; Corse, Protestants, 85.
175 Greer, “Baptists,” 70.
176 Corse, Protestants, 85. Corse notes that while “there were private efforts to ransom the prisoners,” these were squelched by the “board, Western Baptist leaders, and the State Department.”
177 Ibid.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1960</th>
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<td>Cuban religious workers</td>
<td>102</td>
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Table 1. Missionaries and other workers in Cuba on the Southern Baptist payroll.

The Cuban government did not arrest the wives of the imprisoned pastors.\(^\text{181}\) These women continued the work of the church, “often doing the preaching themselves.”\(^\text{182}\) They were allowed to meet their husbands once per month and “send food and incidentals twice a month.”\(^\text{183}\) As time went on, Cuban officials restricted the meetings between Herbert Caudill and David Fite and their wives to once every three months.\(^\text{184}\) Lay members took on additional responsibilities, and “many increased their giving to 20 percent of their modest incomes.”\(^\text{185}\) However, no Cuban replaced Herbert Caudill as the liaison between the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Western Baptist Convention.\(^\text{186}\) Before the arrest, the Home Mission Board sent funds in the name of Herbert Caudill rather than in the name of the Western Baptist Convention.\(^\text{187}\) After the arrest, the “board turned to Caudill’s American wife and daughter…rather than to the Cuban leaders of the Convention.”\(^\text{188}\)

The imprisoned Baptist pastors performed manual labor and taught other inmates. Fite noted that they were “moved from prison to prison, ‘principally to meet the needs of the productive labor we had to do.’” He said the prisoners were used to plant sugar cane, sweet

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\(^{182}\) Greer, “Baptists,” 70.

\(^{183}\) Knight, “Cuban Baptist Work.”


\(^{185}\) Greer, “Baptists,” 70.

\(^{186}\) Corse, *Protestants*, 84-85.

\(^{187}\) Ibid.

\(^{188}\) Ibid., 85.
potatoes, and do other seasonal labor.” Additionally, the pastors “taught reading, writing, history, and geography to other prisoners at night” and “held daily religious services.” They were allowed to exchange letters and to send “one telegram a week.” However, they were not allowed to “carry their Bibles with them to prison nor have the women been allowed to carry any printed material except that published by the government.” While in prison, Dr. Caudill’s wife was not allowed to send him medicine for his eye, “but a fellow prisoner… [assisted] in cleaning his eyes each day with salt water.” His wife said that “his good eye seems to be pretty good.” According to Caudill, the efforts of the imprisoned pastors “caused many in the Cuban government to understand the humane quality of the Christians, to realize that, although motivated by different ideologies, the two could work for the good of society.”

Despite surgery in 1964 for a detached retina in his left eye, Dr. Caudill lost sight in that eye, and while in prison, the same problem threatened his right eye. In November 1966, the Cuban government released Dr. Caudill from prison because of blindness in one eye due to “a detached retina.” After his release, Dr. Caudill was still under house arrest in Havana, and his “activities were severely restricted during the next two years. He was neither allowed to participate in Baptist work nor attend any church activities.” He was allowed to write a letter

190 Greer, “Baptists,” 70.
191 John Hurt, “Cuban Cells Becomes Missionaries’ Prayer Room,” Home Mission Board Cuba Mission Collection, SBHLA, Nashville, TN.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
196 Caudill, On Freedom’s Edge, 53-54; Greer, “Baptists,” 71.
to Dick H. Hall Jr., vice president of the Atlanta Baptist College. The letter was positive and uplifting and the “missionary expressed appreciation for the prayers of multitudes of people.”

While Dr. Caudill was on house arrest, two ophthalmologists from the United States went on a “secret trip to Cuba” to perform retinal detachment surgery on Dr. Caudill’s eye. Drs. William S. Hagel and Harry Taylor, with the help of the U.S. Department of State, received their visas through the Czechoslovakian embassy and entered Cuba through Spain.

Dr. and Marjorie Caudill stayed in Cuba until their son-in-law, David Fite, was also released from prison. Fite’s family made numerous attempts to get the Cuban government to release him. Fite was released from prison on December 16, 1968. The release was a surprise to both Dr. Caudill and David Fite. On February 7, 1969, the Caudill’s and the Fite’s left Cuba and travelled to a “Mexican town just across the border from Brownsville, Texas, for questioning before they re-entered the United States.” Both Dr. Caudill and David Fite claimed that they were not “instructed by either U.S. or Cuban authorities about statements they should make on arrival in Atlanta.” Fite remained silent on “political matters…out of consideration for many of my friends who are still in Cuba and some who are in prison.” Dr. Caudill opened up in his book, *On Freedom’s Edge*. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, his

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200 Ibid. It is not surprising that the letter was positive. Would the Cuban government have allowed a negative letter to be sent to the United States? Would Dr. Caudill have written a letter critical of the Cuban government after just having been released from prison?
202 Ibid.
206 Caudill, *On Freedom’s Edge*, 112-113; “Two Missionaries in Tearful Reunion,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, February 9, 1969; Willis, *All According*, 65. According to Willis, after Caudill and Fite left Cuba, it was the “first time in eighty-three years that there were no Southern Baptist missionaries on the island.”
208 Ibid.
reflection shows both the goal of the Cuban government (i.e. to maintain power) and the pragmatic approach it took to reach that goal. Dr. Caudill wrote

Communism has taken freedoms away one by one from the people of Cuba. There is a determined effort to destroy any possible rival to its power. In its zeal to force its beliefs upon the nation every phase of its life, communism sets its forces against religion. They assumed that they could get full control of the country people, perhaps more easily than other groups. They were irked when they observed that Christians of several denominations worked successfully among rural groups. Christian workers in these areas suffered more constant harassment in their evangelistic efforts than did those in the urban communities.

Between 1960 and 1968, Western Baptist membership in Cuba declined from 8,775 to 6,754. The number of Baptist workers fell from 103 to 42, which was mostly the result of emigration. Despite these setbacks and the absence of Dr. Caudill and David Fite, Baptist work in Cuba continued. Within twelve years of the sentences, all of the pastors were released, and many of them “returned to their churches more committed and effective leaders.” Now, like the Eastern Baptists, Western Baptist work was “totally in the hands of Cubans.” Western Baptists were led by Dr. Agustín López Muñoz, Humberto Domínguez, Leonicio Véguilla, Heberto Becerra, and Luis Manuel González Pena. The Western Cuba Baptist Seminary in Havana continued to operate and “prepare new ministers to replace those that died, retired, or left the country.”

Breaking Religious Barriers

Throughout the 1960s, as the Cuban government increasingly opposed religion, it was in the best interests of denominations to cooperate rather than compete. Corse describes this

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210 Ibid.
211 Ramos, Panorama, 532.
212 Greer, “Baptists,” 70-71.
213 Ramos, Panorama, 532.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid., 533.
process. “Church closings tended to break down U.S.-imported denominational identities and promote a rough and ready ecumenism.”\textsuperscript{216} As missionaries left and churches closed, parishioners attended other Protestant churches “in the area…regardless of its affiliation.”\textsuperscript{217} Not only did this occur among evangelical denominations, but it also occurred between Protestants and Catholics. As Catholics moved from the dominant religious firm to another minority firm behind atheist Marxism, members increasingly drifted between Protestant and Catholic churches.\textsuperscript{218}

**Conclusion**

Rational choice theory is a good way to study the behavior of religious groups toward the government and the behavior of the government toward religion. As we have seen, the behavior of religious denominations toward the Cuban Revolution was pragmatic, as was the behavior of Castro toward the denominations. All groups acted for their *perceived* self-interests. A minority religious firm clamored for religious freedom and the economic empowerment of its members. Government officials were primarily concerned with staying in power and growing the economy. As the government’s primary threat shifted, so did its stance toward religious denominations that were attached to that threat. As the behavior of the government toward Baptist became increasingly restrictive, the attitude of Baptists toward the government became increasingly negative. The “two years of euphoria” quickly faded.\textsuperscript{219}

There are still a few questions left unanswered. How does rational choice theory account for “true-believer” government leaders? Perhaps, Fidel Castro easily fits into the theory’s

\textsuperscript{216} Corse, *Protestants*, 79.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 10.
framework, whereas another leader may not. While this is a reasonable objection, the reader should note that it is perceived self-interest, not self-interest alone. A religion does not have to be a threat to a political leader. The political leader only needs to perceive the religion to be a threat. In order to disprove the theory, one would have to find a political leader that suppressed religion and prove that that leader believed that the religion was no threat to his rule.

Another question is do all large religious firms lobby the government to place restrictions on religion? Perhaps, the Catholic Church, with a history of religious intolerance, behaved differently in Latin America than Baptists would have if they had been in power. Perhaps, it is best to think of what would businesses do? Do all big businesses lobby the government equally to place restrictions and red-tape in the way of smaller businesses? No, but most of the large businesses that benefit from lobbying the government do so to a certain extent. Even Baptists, with a history of advocating for the separation of church and state, change their tune when they are in power (e.g. the American South and the religious right).

While there are still areas to test the application of rational choice theory to religious behavior, the theory adequately explains the behavior of the Cuban government toward Baptists and attitudes of Baptists toward the Cuban government during the Cuban Revolution. As the main opponent of the Cuban Revolution shifted from the Cuban upper class to the United States, the revolutionary government shifted its oppression from the Catholic Church, with ties to the Cuban upper class, to Protestant denominations, with ties to the United States. Cuban Baptists, whose membership primarily came from the poor and middle class, initially supported the economic and moral reforms of the Revolution. However, as the Cuban government cracked

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220 For example, see Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Libertas* in 1903.
down on denominations with ties to the United States, Baptists increasingly opposed the Revolution.

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