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## **The Evangelical Celebrations in Cuba**

**By  
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On June 6<sup>th</sup>, about 40,000 people attended the first of three national evangelical celebrations at the Plaza de la Revolution in Holguin, Cuba. The nationally televised event was one of 18 national and regional celebrations. The day before, more than 25,000 people attended a similar event at the Plaza in Santiago de Cuba. The events looked similar to other evangelical gatherings, which take place throughout the world. This time local Cuban pastors gave all the sermons and presentations. Unfortunately, the world press Corp assigned to Cuba was not present at these events.

Within a week after the Holguin and Santiago affairs, similar celebrations took place in Camaguey and Santa Clara; both gatherings drew more than 50,000 persons each. Farm workers from as far away as 100 miles from the event arrived in caravans of buses and trucks while singing religious songs and shouting "Jesus is King" and "God bless Cuba". Members of local protestant churches had, for weeks, been selling homemade candy and conducting other fund-raising functions, to gather enough money to pay the government for the gasoline. The world press Corp housed in Cuba did not see this either.

Event planners were evenly split between leaders from the Cuban Council of Churches, an organization of 24 member-denominations, sponsored by the government, and non-council members representing the historical Protestant denominations in Cuba. In exchange for freedom in the preparation and execution of the programs, which would include dancing, singers and sermons, the churches would pay the government \$1 million for the speakers, platforms, security, etc. needed at each event. Each denomination requested and received substantial help from their sister-denominations in the United States. In total, according to the *Centro Para el Estudio de la Religion en Las Americas*, who conducted a survey of the bishops and heads of the historical Protestant denominations, about 350,000 evangelical Protestants participated in the 17 celebrations preceding the last and biggest affair, scheduled at Havana for June 20<sup>th</sup>. The international media attended none.



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The 17 Evangelical Celebrations that preceded the Havana event gave us a pretty good idea of the previously rumored “religious revival” that was taking place throughout the island. There were members of Baptists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, and many more denominations, holding hands, singing together and shouting religious cheers in the same plazas that, before, except for the Pope’s visit to Cuba in but a few of those same locations, had only seen and heard communist and revolutionary slogans. Too bad that the members of the international press either choused, or were not allowed to attend these events.

Sadly, on June 18<sup>th</sup>, President Fidel Castro called a meeting of protestant leaders and announced that he was changing the game scheduled to be played in Havana two days later. Party officials and Castro himself would attend. Invited would be the Young Communist organization and members of mass organizations. The government would assist the churches in filling Revolution Square by mobilizing the neighborhood Committees for the Revolution to encourage non-believers to also attend the event. As the meeting came to an end, it was also announced that a convoy of anti-embargo U.S. religious friends would be arriving soon with a large donation of medical and educational supplies.

During the event on June 20<sup>th</sup>, as Cabinet members and Castro listened, U.S. Protestants and others took to the podium to give political speeches. Over 100,000 people, many of who were encouraged to be there by their communist neighborhood watch leaders, attended the event. The Baptists, the Methodists and the Seven-Day Adventists officially boycotted the event. Members of the press Corp were all there. The next morning, the reports that appeared in papers around the word said that some of the Cuban Protestant leaders were members of the Communist Party, and that Protestants in general were a divided lot. Go figure.

