

An Open Letter to all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an
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Ephesians 6:24

By: Presbyter Homero Carbonell

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My name is Homero Quintín Carbonell González, a pastor who has been associated with the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba since September 1962, when I began my studies to be a pastor. As of January 14th, 2011, it has been 52 years since I received Jesus Christ as my personal savior and during which I have ministered as a pastor for 48 years and 60 days, first between 1962 and 1974 in the Baptist congregations of Santiago de Las Vegas, Quiebra Hacha, Cabañas, Las Delicias del Cotorro, Loma de Tierra, Santa María del Rosario, Catalina de Güines, Párraga y Calabazar some of which are located in the province of Pinar del Rio and other in the city and province of Havana. At the end of this period I ministered together with my wife and children in the San Antonio de las Vueltas church for almost a decade and based there I also served at different times as an interim pastor at the churches of Taguayabón, Placetas y Camajuani, all of which are in the province of Villa Clara. Finally I accepted the offer to pastor the First Baptist Church “La Trinidad” in Santa Clara, also in Villa Clara. There I worked from 1984 until 2010, for a total of 26 years and 60 days as pastor of that church.

From the beginning of my career as a pastor, my ministry has been forged within the context of the days of euphoria, the triumph of the Cuban revolutionary process, which later became the current communist system (an experience which was no surprise to me; something I will explain later). This event marked me, as far as the decisions I made and the strategies I used to successfully preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in this new social order, something distinct from the Biblical preparation offered by the Association's Seminary at that time. They did not have a curriculum designed to equip us with the necessary tools to confront the ideological challenge that was descending upon us. This was a common experience among all of the religious and non-religious institutions of the country. It was an experience that took everyone off guard, from the most intellectual and prominent leaders in our work down to the least prepared.

As you will well understand, the 14th of January has a double significance for me, as it was that day, in 1940 when my eyes contemplated this world which we live in for the very first time, and after having been active in the Catholic Church from the age of seven. Now, because of firsthand contact with the Bible my life took a new direction as a result of having understood and assimilated the doctrine of the New Birth taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and I enjoyed the true Christian vision of the world, its development and purpose.

Because of this, although I was only 19 years old, a student in the old bacalaureate system (today called pre-university) and although I was outside of the political world and didn't know any details of Marxist-Leninist Doctrine, I had an inkling of the immediate social turn this country would take, because I was part of a family that was committed to the process of rebelling against the old governmental administration.

During those first months, my family encouraged me to join the new prevailing order, to secretly cooperate with the communists, something which I did not accept because I have never felt drawn to political activity. It was also at that moment that I felt the Lord was calling me to commit myself to missionary work and I decided to seek training to take up a pastoral role. As a result of my negative response, there was of course a family conflict because of what I was doing; they couldn't

understand my personal experience and tried to scare me saying that in the future the Christians were going to be persecuted and other things like that. I decided then to legally separate from my family, although my emotional links remained inalterable. In this I am talking about the first half of the year 1959.

Because of these things that happened, I shared my concerns with the man who was my first pastor and who baptized me, but he was also unable to understand my spiritual crisis and the indirect warning, that without me seeking it, the Lord was giving him through our conversation. He himself sympathized with the process of social renewal, although not with communism, to the point that at a certain time he too emigrated to the United States.

As a result of my family's social commitment to the new ruling system, they migrated to the East to get involved in work entrusted to them, so I decided to stay by myself in Havana. I was a simple student. I didn't have work. I didn't have a house in which to live. I didn't know what was going to happen. I moved to Cojimar and the church in Guanabacoa warmly welcomed and nurtured me, they authorized me to live in their educational building until I entered the Seminary. During this period I worked at a plastic factory and later in construction, but I also continued studying the Baccalaureate and took up some responsibilities in the local church.

It was under the influence of these experiences and social circumstances that I received and obeyed the call of the Lord to be a pastor up until this present day. The rest is another part of history.

Obedying God's call, I entered the Baptist Theological Seminary in September 1962, on a course that had been reduced from a previous four years of study to three years, because of the massive exodus of working pastors [out of Cuba].

In June 1965, I graduated along with a team made up of seven colleagues in pastoral ministry, including two missionaries, five pastors and me. The graduation took place outside the normal and traditional schedule under which previous generations of pastors had graduated. It took place at 3:00 pm, hidden in the Seminary's own chapel, we didn't use a robe or a cap, there are no photos left for posterity, even the signatures on the diplomas aren't permanent the ink was such bad quality – this at that time, and by my own interpretation, is representative of the economic crisis that this country has passed through. Some time later I felt I needed to photocopy my diploma, so I would be able to preserve at least one memory of my graduation.

The reason behind this atypical graduation, is that on April 9th of the same year, 1963, pastors and lay leaders had been arrested on one night and accused of being CIA agents (see the newspaper, "Revolución" La Habana, April 9, Friday, 1965, Year IX No. 2849). Those of us who were graduating had a mixture of enthusiasm because we had reached the end of our studies, and at the same time uncertainty because we had no idea what was going to happen. The newspapers at the time talked about some or all of them being put before a firing squad. We really did not know what was going on. We were disoriented, practically all of the [Baptist] Convention's leadership was being put on trial, we didn't know if we ourselves would be arrested, since many of those who had been were our professors. Suddenly, we realised that we formed part of a transitional generation which would be part of a new era in the life of the Baptist churches of Western Cuba.

Those of us among the pastors and lay leaders who remained free had to take up the empty pulpits and continue the work. We couldn't choose churches with comfortable facilities, nor with any financial payback. We had to go where we were needed. It is because of this that I constantly say that the leadership of the Baptist work should recover the Biblical concept of a calling, in which my generation was formed, although of course because we were all human beings we did not all stay faithful. There were no foreigners, as is usual today, we didn't receive gifts or donations, there were no US dollars. It was precisely the influx of dollars and inappropriate decisions that during another era of change some leaders were unable to handle, something which finally led some to prison.

At the beginning of this letter, I made reference to the specific churches in which I ministered as a pastor, but alongside this I also worked with the Baptist Convention of Western Cuba in various different roles, for example: the Public Relations Committee, a member of the Director's Board, Adjunct Secretary, General Secretary, Vice-president of the Convention, Secretary of the Board of Directors, Stewardship Promoter, President of the Legal Affairs Committee, President of the Baptist Principles Committee, Provincial Delegate to the Associations Registry of Villa Clara. As far as the international arena is concerned and in my past in the position of Secretary General, as a member of the Council of the Worldwide Baptist Alliance, the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship, the European Baptist Federation where I represented the Association, just as before other worldwide missionary organisations, for which I have never received any kind of payment.

As a result of my ministerial administration in this church, between 1984 and 2010, we achieved a wide spectrum of international relationships which gave us the possibility to carry out a series of projects for example:

- a) The reconstruction of the temple and the educational building (although we were not able to finish this because of the international economic crisis and the 20% loss on each US dollar that is given to us [taken by the Cuban government]).
- b) The dream to establish an ecological farm which was meant to benefit the entire community, but for which permission was denied by the relevant authorities.
- c) The offer by sister churches to create an air bridge directly from the US to Santa Clara to supply the Infant and Maternity hospitals and other departments of the church, as well as to provide food for the population but which was rejected by the MINVEC [Ministry of Economic Cooperation] of Santa Clara.
- d) The establishment of a Baptist clinic with a yearly budget of US\$100,000 which would have offered more free services to the population and would have facilitated the entry of tons of medicine at no cost into the country, but which didn't work out (this is all documented)

All of these projects failed because of governmental decisions, which made it even more insulting when on the occasion of the death of Reverend Lucius Walker [a US pastor, part of Pastors for Peace, who repeatedly defied the US embargo against Cuba], Cuban television, honouring him and his humanitarian work, said explicitly..."that in order to do humanitarian work, you don't need permission" while at the same time, initiatives by local churches to do the same kinds of things as Cubans, have been blocked over and over, generating a feeling of powerlessness.

At the moment at which I transferred the pastoral role to a new pastor, the church had a total of 850 members, a total of 90 houses of prayer and the following ministries:

- Children's ministry which works with 2207 children from 0-11 years old
- Youth ministry which works with more than 500 people
- Adult ministries which works with a Baptist community of 20,000 congregants and sympathisers in contact with our congregation
- Ministry with the Hearing Impaired which works with 17 people, four of whom are members of the church
- Special Needs Children, which works with 85 children and reaches 89 families
- Ministry for the Elderly – in which 320 people are supported
- Two music groups which minister in and outside of the church's services: Alabanza DC and el Shaday
- The Dr. Luis Manuel González Peña" Baptist Theological Seminary, which currently has 200 enrolled students coming from different Christian congregations in Villa Clara and other provinces and where I will be refocusing my pastoral work and will continue working as Rector, giving holistic training to pastors, missionaries and layworkers who have felt the Lord's call to serve in any area that the churches need.

At this moment, the church treasury has \$34,437.84 in national currency (MN) and \$19,098.51 convertible currency (tied to US dollars) and protected bank accounts and we have a projected budget for the year 2011 of \$455,000 MN for the year 2011 [rate of exchange is roughly 25 MN to US\$1].

The leadership of the church is witness to the fact that the donations given to develop different areas like: construction, programmes, Seminary, ministries, work teams, transport, etc, which has added up to around half a million dollars during my time as pastor, have never been used for anything else outside of the work of the church. At the same time, some leaders also know that even when I have been given donations and authorised to use part of or all of them for our personal or family support, I have never used even one dollar above the \$500.00 MN monthly salary which is equivalent to CUC\$20.83 (CUC is the convertible currency), which is insufficient to support a family and I never had any other financial income apart from this monthly wage. Our apartment was a gift of the Jiménez-García family, deacons in the church. My family's subsistence has come basically from our relatives abroad who have helped us financially, not because we are missionaries in Cuba but because of family reasons and practically the entire church knows this.

At the end of my pastoral work, I give thanks to the Lord for all the blessing that He provided throughout this work, for the experiences that we are living through today – whether they are spiritual or material, that have been made reality. I give thanks to the Lord because the leadership of the church from the very beginning of my pastorship always supported me in every initiative.

Today I am formally turning over the pulpit to a new pastor. I return to the congregation the more than ten votes of confidence bestowed upon me by the church's most dynamic administration, including the account at the International Finance Bank. I also turn over the Lada car, the church's property for the transport of the pastor. I would like to mention by name many brothers and sisters who accompanied me along this long ministerial road, both from this congregation and the others I have mentioned, but I cannot do it for fear of omitting names. Many of them are now with the Lord, others are present here in the struggle for the Gospel.

Unfortunately, on October 31, 2010 when I turned over the pastoral responsibilities with which this congregation entrusted me, I did so under pressure from political and extra-judicial punishment from the Department of Religious Affairs which seemed like it might be extended to the church itself, something that presented me with a dilemma about how to move forward, leaving me with only four options:

1. To not accept retirement for the moment, at least until the problem was resolved and this option is covered by an agreement from the church which give me the power to do this at the time I choose
2. Retire and renounce my membership of the church, so that my presence doesn't impinge on the work of the new pastor, something I have experienced as a pastor myself in similar situations.
3. Retire in silence, which would mean accepting the charges which have been made against me and to assume an attitude and aptitude of a slave, as the meaning of that word is: submission, subjection, vassalage, dependence, oppression, bondage, servitude, oppression, tyranny, injustice, abuse, serf, trafficking, kidnapping, despotism, domination, hegemony, lack of own initiative, etc
4. Accept the process and serve my time, as others in other cases have done.

Although as the pastor of the church I have had to deal with different legal situations with the Department for Religious Affairs, it was not until May 9, 2008 when two executive members of the [Baptist] Convention, in an interview with that Department were confronted with the office's unhappiness with the Prayer Walk organised by the church on May 6, an activity that was promoted by the Missionary Board of our Convention, as part of the 50 days of prayer for the spiritual salvation of Cuba, because of the participation of some members of the church who also belong to the human rights movement and who I cannot and should not impede from participating. My

companions, worried about the situation, told me about the charges which at that point they were pinning on me, which I write below:

1. That I maintain counterrevolutionary links and that this is a matter for Cuban State Security
2. That I maintain links with the Christian Workers Labour Union (a human rights movement)
3. That I am associated with “illegal” house churches
4. That I have something to do with a fine imposed on me for CUC\$1000.00 (US\$1080.00)
5. That my name is linked to illegalities
6. That my name is linked to amateur radio
7. That my name is linked to the Baptist Principles Committee
8. That my name is linked to the Cuban Evangelical Celebration.

In addition, in this meeting they told the members of our executive that, “The biggest political institutional crisis right now in Cuba is with the First Baptist Church, La Trinidad, in Santa Clara.”

Note: On this occasion I said that those charges were a real interference and attack on the leadership I had held for 24 years in this church, and an attempt to create a crisis for me with my congregation and with the Association through the punishments which were communicated to me and which I will now go on to explain.

The penalties are:

1. Foreign Christians who attempt to obtain a religious visa will not be authorised to visit the First Baptist Church of Santa Clara
2. The purchase of a van, for which official permission has been sought by the church, will not be authorized
3. Refusal of permission for me to visit the Czech Republic, where I was to attend the Council of the Worldwide Baptist Alliance in my position as Secretary General of the Convention;
4. Refusal of the protocol established by that office [Religious Affairs] to allow me to leave the country, even though at that time I was the president of the Convention, they made an exception for my wife, the missionary, Migdalia Rodríguez Pérez.
5. They referred to the possibility of cancelling the church’s bank account at the International Finance Bank (BFI) which we have held since 1988.

Faced with this situation, and hoping for a solution to this problem before I transferred the pastorship, I took the following steps:

- First: On May 28, 2008, I requested an interview with the Central Committee [of the Cuban Communist Party] by way of a personal letter.
- Second: On February 18, 2009, the Board of our church sent a request for clarification to the Central Committee, signed by its members, regarding the penalties that had been imposed on our church. Among the arguments expressed were:
 - ...For the previous expressed arguments, we would like to know the reasons for these prohibitions. As we understand it there is no reason to create a schism between our church and the rest of the churches of the Convention, and it would be helpful if we were able to give an explanation to our membership about the repeated negative responses to our requests...
- Third: One year and 45 days went by and there was absolutely no answer to the two letters, I continued living under the stress of possibly being detained any moment and with the burden of my church being punished, which without having any responsibility in all of this.

Even if it was the case that I was “supposedly” linked with the counterrevolution, they should not be blocked in their work nor in their attempts to look for help in other countries, like humanitarian aid for the Cuban community which needs it so much and which would arrive in our country in large quantities.

Taking into account all of the previous government delays and the lack of response to our letters, in a meeting held by the Executive Board of the Convention with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee [of the Cuban Communist Party], (an executive board of which at that moment I was a member), the topic of the First Baptist Church of Santa Clara was introduced onto the agenda. The meeting was scheduled for July 15, 2009 at 9:00 am, but it began at 11:35 am, two hours and 35 minutes later than the agreed upon time, because on our journey to Havana, my wife and I were detained on the San Jose de las Lajas heights and taken to the police station. The reason? That the church car had been stolen on January 22, 2009 in Havana and although it had been officially returned to us, the documents continued circulating (a situation that carried on until October 21, 2010).

The discussion with the officials of the Department was calm but tense. It got to the point where they began to challenge me saying that they had information that since 1993 I had been part of the counterrevolution. I rejected that accusation in both my name and the name of the church and argued the point given my experience as a youth of 18 years old. In those days there were many Cubans fighting against the old regime, for example the BRAC (its initials stand for the Bureau for Anti-Communist Repression) which was a very radical militia group. They burst into my home looking for my relatives, they seized my godfather, leaving four men to wait for me but I arrived home very late and they left. I knew they would come back. I had nowhere to go and what's more there was no reason for me to go anywhere. I went to bed and “slept heavily”. The next day at 6:00 am they came back. They interrogated me, looking for some connection with the rebels – trying to confuse me and looking for any contradiction in my answers. They themselves were convinced that although I lived with a family that transported weapons from the house to the Sierra de los Organos in Pinar del Rio, and that while I was an eyewitness to their presence in my home, I was not involved.

At the end of my presentation I asked them, “Why didn't they also detain me?” There was silence. No one answered me. I answered myself, “Because they wanted to or knew the difference and they went. They didn't lift a single finger against me. Later I understood that the Lord's providence had saved me from a horrible evil. Sometimes I think that Religious Affairs doesn't want to understand the difference with me.” The meeting ended at 2:00 pm. When we discussed the lifting of the penalties against the Santa Clara church, they told me that this depended on two things, 1. The attitude of the pastor who would replace me, even if it ended up being my son, Homero Asbel, who was one of the candidates and 2. The way we treated the members of the church who belong to the human rights movement. I was encouraged to keep in contact with them to keep the dialogue open and the meeting ended.

- Four: The day of my retirement drew closer and hoping that the situation would be resolved before I transferred the role of pastor to someone else, I personally requested, by telephone, a meeting with the Central Committee [of the Cuban Communist Party] to deal with the dispute for the final time. They agreed to meet with me on September 14, 2010 at 3:00 pm.

I requested the presence of the President of the Convention, Dr. Victor Samuel González Grillo and Pbr. Hermes Soto Lugo, a companion in the struggles and who had retired from pastoral duties but who carries on as the director of the Dr. Rafael Alberto Ocaña Baptist Theological Seminary who accompanied in the capacity of observers.

We took up the problem once again. We talked, discussed, once more I presented the situation. The official denied that there was any punishment, I insisted that it be lifted; there was no compromise. I said that this was a political error on the part of Religious Affairs that because of a supposed infraction I had committed as pastor, they were punishing the whole church. I asked them to arrest me and remove the penalties from the church. We finished the meeting without the results I had hoped for. They accompanied us to the elevator and they dismissed us. At the very last minute they said, "Homero, behave yourself."

As background, the Department of Religious Affairs of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba is an adjunct department to the State Council, an extremely powerful political apparatus with a religious image, with huge powers at its disposal. The job of the Department is to regulate all religious activity in the country, through its counterparts at the provincial, municipal, etc levels – and this is not something I have pulled out of thin air, they themselves, in various meetings, have told us about the political nature of their management. I emphasise that it is a Political Department, not Judicial, and this is why the penalties that have been brought against me and against the church are of a political-religious nature and are extrajudicial.

What methods does Religious Affairs implement to carry out its work?

As a result of my service to the church and to the Convention, as well as reading, studying and very similar experiences lived by brothers and sisters in the faith in other parts of the world, I have had the opportunity to see some of the different methods that governments use to obtain control over religious activity for their own ends.

Based on the previous information, it follows that the fundamental work of Religious Affairs is the education of the religious masses in the country, and this can take many forms but I will narrow it down to:

1. Encouragement and punishment (this is through the granting of facilities, which are denied or not denied depending on the attitude of the religious leader in question).
2. Compromises (I will give you "a" and you will give me "b") or (I will suggest this to you and you will carry it out).
3. Dilatory or delaying legal processes (this is a juridical concept that the majority of us have at some point or other experienced).
4. No response to requests (this corresponds to non-response regarding a particular situation).
5. Controlled catharsis (Religious Affairs is the ideal department at which to lodge complaints at the very highest level regarding religious matters. For some leaders this is very important for their self-esteem, they are given to understand that they are important and they leave encouraged that the situation will be resolved).
6. Guilt (guilt is a paralyzing experience. They plant a seed of a feeling of guilt whether or not there is a law to back them up, this has to do with real and invented illegalities).
7. The psychology of rumour which leads to a process of isolation. Once a story is created regarding one's person, whether or not it is true, you begin to see that it has marked you as far as relatives, brothers and sisters in the faith, friends and people in general are concerned. They distance themselves from you because of lack of trust or fear.

Note: I believe that the methods used by Religious Affairs have become an exportable model and a pattern to follow that in time will be seen in other parts of the world, if they are not already in use.

Plea regarding the charges against me:

- I. Under no circumstance do I accept the charge that I am supposedly linked with the counterrevolution. The semantic meaning behind this is terrifying because it is

synonymous with murder, rape, terrorism, threats, blackmail, kidnapping, deceit, seizure, sabotage, ultimatums, violence, coercion, intimidation, assault, etc.

I consider myself to be a born pacifist. I understand that together with my calling to serve the Lord, I have also exercised this gift.

- II. I deny maintaining or having ever maintained ties or a commitment to the dissident movement the Christian Workers Labour Union. I have never belonged to any political party of the right, center, or left, etc. The only institutions to which I have belonged have been the Catholic Church during my earliest youth, the Worldwide Organisation of Boy Scouts- whose card I still keep, and later the Baptist Work.

Now yes, I clarify that the management of every pastor, Biblically speaking is to respect the call of the Lord wherever you are, whether that be in front of a church or before one of its ministries, it must be multi-directional and not unidirectional.

- III. The accusation that I have a link to illegal house churches has no legal backing, but it does have political backing, because the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba in Article 8, Recognises, Respects and Guarantees religious liberty. This constitutes an actual juridical statute regarding all religion in our country. A Law on Worship to regulate religious activity does not exist. We have been waiting for such a law more than fifty years now.

- IV. Regarding my link to a fine handed down to me of \$1000 CUC, equivalent to US\$1080. Apart from the fact that this is excessive in relation to my monthly salary it is also untrue. In reality the fine was technically imposed on a member of the church who did us the favour of hosting a brother pastor from Spain who visited us on a tourist visa. Because they were afraid of losing their house if they did not pay the fine, the responsibility to find the money to pay for the fine fell to me – the fine is not legally attributable to me but it has been linked to me politically. I have documentation that supports this.

- V. In the case that my name is linked to illegalities, I'd argue that this is a very controversial topic in the world, including in my country. I ask, "What is legal? What is illegal? What juridical concept clarifies whether or not an act or an order is legal or illegal?" This is to say that some statutes "are a bag into which anything you want will fit." Time and space do not permit me to give the entire Biblical story but you can find it in Exodus 1:1-22 when Pharaoh, possibly Ramses II, frightened because the people of Israel are growing in numbers tries to control the births of the Hebrews, and gives the order to midwives to kill baby boys and allow the girls to live. This was not obeyed because of the inhumanity of the decree, showing the first act of civil disobedience in the Bible. According to the Biblical narrative, the firm attitude of the Jewish midwives, contributed to the birth and preservation of the life that would some time later, be a great liberator and legislator for the Israeli people. His influence has extended even to our time, and was called by the name MOSES. The source of all genuine law is the truth, whether that is cosmic or moral, spiritual or juridical. All law that emanates from lies, imprecision, inhumanity or violence should not be obeyed.

- VI. Regarding my name being associated with amateur radio, I argue that this was a necessary project to supplement my pastoral work, we had no access to the

normal ways, we tried it only once and we did it through some brothers who had a license for this.

- VII. In relation to the Baptist Principles Committee, I clarify that this came about as an initiative of the Board of Directors of the Convention, to look at doctrinal issues and to promote them, to deal with some irregularities taking place within certain churches and pastors at the hands of state officials who were interfering with their jobs giving spiritual aid to the community. I was the first and only President of this Committee.
- VIII. Regarding my name being linked to the Cuban Evangelical Celebration, I clarify that this is a reference to a document entitled, "Justice will make the Nation Grow", a title inspired by Proverbs 14:34; this was released by the congregation on May 8, 1999 and on the 23rd of the same month, we expressed our disagreement with the operation as it was attempting to take up the leadership of Cuban evangelicals. To generalise and say that all of us participated or were involved in this way, to all of the churches – this does not correspond with reality.

After all that I have already explained, it is very clear that there is a need for a Law of Worship as laid out in the Constitution of the Republic in Chapter 55 where it says, "The law regulates the relationship of the State with religious institutions," something which is still unfinished business.

This long awaited law would not only regulate believers, but would also regulate the government, and would give believers a legal instrument to deal with any legal dispute to support their claims and not leave them subject to political decisions emanating from groups in power, who can take coercive, wrong, or privileged decisions in matters of conscience.

The collateral damage in all legal disputes are not only seen on the battlefield brought about by the confrontation between two or more conventional armies, but also in the battle of ideas which can generate its own damage, as damaging as that caused by the military confrontation. Perhaps there won't be bodies, but in this type of struggle, the purpose is the moral annihilation of the opponent, the destruction of their credibility and their prestige, which is worse than their physical annihilation.

These things damage all involved. The victim suffers the immediate damage. The person who has targeted the victim generally experiences it long term, essentially when they arrive to the end of their life which is when we really place value on all of our actions, good, bad or normal. This is also the time when the conscience has to render account to its creditors, whether or not it believes in its existence.

Given the circumstances which have now been laid out, and as there is no juridical recourse for me to appeal to clarify my situation, and while emphasizing the sovereignty of our Lord, I declare myself before my brothers and sisters in the faith and before public opinion nationally and internationally, to be in a state of Legal Helplessness, and for which reason I call on the Church of Jesus Christ as the final rational recourse to lodge my complaint – asking you to pray, investigate, think, analyse and act on behalf of this and other situations. Unfortunately there are brothers and sisters in the faith and leaders who give more credit to the rumours invented about my person than to the fact that I have given more than half a century of my life to the Work which has affected decisions that have been taken about my leadership at the Conventional level.

As I have already said, on October 31, 2010, when I stepped down from my work as a pastor of the church in which I and my family have served for more than a quarter of a century. I attest: that at the end of my pastoral management, my family and I have finished with no bank account in Cuba nor abroad, no car, no telephone, no internet, and without many other things. They have said and will continue saying all kinds of things against my person, just like the accusations mentioned at the

beginning as well as others, don't believe them. But if they say that I am a sinner, I would add a little more in this aspect, expressing that it was necessary for Christ to come to the world to die for me so that I could experience forgiveness for sins and receive the eternal life that God offers to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

When during the 1980s I was invited by various churches to participate in evangelistic campaigns, one of the first of these was "The First Baptist Church of Panama" and they denied me permission to leave the country for almost ten years, affecting my pastoral management and my personal development as a human being. I did not denounce the officials who one by one limited my right to travel freely. Today I will not do so either.

However, I will ask the government to ask forgiveness from this congregation which has ministered to the community for almost 112 years of Christian life and that the punishment of the church be eliminated, and that they would also allow the church the right to carry out all humanitarian aid initiatives so that this church can manage and carry out its desire to alleviate the economic burden upon our people, in its character as an autonomous church.

Finally, I make a call to my colleagues in Christian ministry all around the world wherever they are working, to the Worldwide Baptist Alliance, to Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and to the international Christian community, that you would take note of this situation and that you would monitor any future developments. There are already other similar cases at the very heart of our Convention, including pastors and churches specifically in Villa Clara who are being subjected to the same thing and in our case, including the non-authorisation for us to receive food donations. It is not my right to give the details of this but rather of those who are directly affected to do so.

If the strategies utilised in the past to eliminate religion in the country had had the hoped for results, at this time there would be no churches in Cuba. For this reason I reject any attempt in the secular or religious world to take credit for the achievements of Jesus Christ's Church in this country; the growth of which in any part of the world is something given by God, it is He who multiplies and no one else (the Bible, Acts 2:47). To claim or give credit for this, something that belongs only to God, is blasphemy. He who has ears to hear let him hear.

Of you all in the deep love of Jesus Christ,

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Translation by Christian Solidarity Worldwide