

### CUBA IS STILL A LONG WAY FROM THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM OF AUGSBURG

In 1555, in the city of Augsburg, the German Imperial Diet convened and put an end to the thirty years of war that led to the acknowledgement of the principles of the Reform Movement. These agreements are known as the Peace of Augsburg. It is a source of pride to the Western world that political freedom and religious freedom or freedom of conscience came to be at the same time in Augsburg.

Many priests and believers broke away from obedience to the Pope and established protestant churches. The most famous leaders of this odyssey were Martin Luther, its initiator in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, Martin Bucer in France and England, and John Calvin in Switzerland and France. From these pillars, the movement spread to Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and the British Isles.

From within the Protestant Church three creeds came into being: The Lutherans, the Calvinists and the Anglicans. The latter will serve later on as the springboard for the Baptists and the Methodists.

It is precisely religious freedom which signals the beginning of the Modern Age with its transition to the contemporary one. The acknowledgement of that freedom, and later on of the other basic rights, was the result of intense and prolonged struggles. The most important ones were freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. These advancements were consolidated by the triumph of the American Revolution with its brilliant constitutional text which has served as an inspiration and model to numerous constitutions throughout the world. Therefore, modern democracy emerged in Philadelphia, an indisputable daughter of the democracy which had disappeared from the classical Greece of the V Century, B.C.

Following in those models, the Cuban Constituent Assembly of 1902 guaranteed the most absolute freedom of religion. This inalienable right was also assured by our second Law of laws of 1940. All of that judicial order, protector of the citizen, was dismantled in 1959 by a Communist dictatorship that governed by decree for 17 years; a Communist dictatorship that systematically violates its own Constitution of 1976.

It is true that this Fundamental Law of 1976 states that it will protect freedom of religion. But it is a proven fact that the regime persecutes and punishes those who profess any type of religion. And there is sure proof. On June 27<sup>th</sup> of this year, Methodist pastor, Yordi Toranzo, was expelled from his temple and congregation as well as being obligated to evacuate his home along with his wife and young children. All of this took place via order of Ricardo Pereira Diaz, bishop of the Cuban Methodist Convention, who said he acted under orders of the Communist Party of Santa Clara and of the Cuban Government. This bishop told Toranzo that he should follow government orders and that he could no longer offer spiritual guidance to dissidents.

But Pastor Toranzo is not alone. He has the support of his congregation, of the community in general and of the other pastors. This has angered the authorities and Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup>, pastors and believers of other congregations were arrested on their way to church. Some were taken to cells in the headquarters of the Santa Clara Police, others were brutally beaten and many were placed under house arrest.

It is certain that those events do not compare to St. Bartholomew's night on which French Protestants were assassinated, imprisoned and deported by order of King Charles IX. Neither can we compare this with a revocation of the Edict of Nantes by petition of the absolutist King Louis XIV, which sparked off a criminal persecution of the Huguenots. But it is indisputable proof that even though in Cuba we do not have an absolutist monarch in power, we have an absolutist tyrant that reminds us with his actions of the religious persecutions of these French kings.

To add insult to injury, June 26, 2011, more than 20 evangelical Christians were imprisoned along with a Baptist pastor, Mario F. Llonart. We will remember that day as one when the most brutal repression against freedom of conscience has been displayed recently. It is in essence, the Cuban St. Bartholomew night. That is why we are shouting at the top of our lungs that Cuba is still a long way from the spirit of freedom of Augsburg.