

DOES FIDEL CASTRO KNOW SOMETHING WE DON'T?

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By Jim
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Remember these things, Jacob,
and Israel; for you are my servant: I have formed you; you are my servant:
Israel, you shall not be forgotten by me. I have blotted out, as a thick
cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return to me; for I have
redeemed you. Isaiah 44:21-22, WEB

This Bible passage sets forth the role of God's people in responding to the gift of their forgiveness by returning Divine forgiveness, mercy, justice, and truth to less-fortunate peoples of the earth. We hear often that this means the sending of missionaries and medical and food aid, but seldom do we hear that it also means deliverance from oppressive political, social, and economic systems that for centuries have inhibited progress and have in fact enslaved entire nations.

With President Obama's recent visit to Cuba still in the news, it might be well for Americans to peruse several comments made by former Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in reply to parts of Obama's speech, as reported by Granma, the official Cuban Communist Party newspaper.

Defending Cuba's ability to make its own way in the world economy, Castro cited Cuba's "noble and generous people," the "spiritual wealth of our educational, scientific and cultural achievements," and their capability of producing what the country needs regarding food and material needs. To this he added the challenge, "We don't need any gifts from the empire." The empire is of course the U.S., the gifts most likely being American material aid in the form of newly established hospitality businesses and development activities like trade agreements, with the very questionable NAFTA being the closest example.

Perhaps Castro remembers all-too-well life under dictator Fulgencio Batista, a former army sergeant and self-anointed colonel who essentially ran the government under a

series of puppets from 1933 until he seized full power in a military coup in 1952. Upon assuming power he began a series of "reforms" consisting of ending political rights guaranteed by the constitution, aligning with wealthy land owners and sugar producers against the people, allowing the economy to stagnate resulting in a wider income gap between rich and poor, allowing the American Mafia to penetrate the Cuban hospitality industry, and cooperating with American-based multinational corporations in lucrative contracts to further despoil the economy. To quiet growing unrest, demonstrations, and riots, Batista censored the media and formed a Bureau for the Repression of Communist Activities that ultimately killed from 1,000 to 20,000 people through violence, torture and public executions. And, perhaps worst of all, until it ended on Jan. 1, 1959, Batista's repressive government received financial, military, and logistical support from the United States (information from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia).

If Castro fears "gifts from the empire," perhaps he should. He no doubt remembers other gifts from the empire during the 1970's and 80's bestowed against their wishes upon the defenseless and innocent people of San Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras by American dominators eager to extract oil and agricultural wealth from indigenous peoples desiring nothing but opportunity to make their way as best they could. The sad history of poor, helpless people being dominated and subjugated by American corporations backed by the military is a sordid memory at best, but deserves retelling as fears of possible new oppressions become known.

We have a dominant culture, evidence by the ease at which American entertainments, materialism, and commercial strategies become adopted upon contact by formerly "backward" societies. Could this also happen in a resurgent Cuba? Will Communist dominators be replaced by global Capitalist dominators? It will be surprising if it doesn't happen.

God's people (and nations) are to be freedom-bearing servants, not oppressive, flinty-eyed dominators. We are to be deliverers, not oppressors. We are to give rather than take. And we are to save rather than destroy. And our responsibility goes further than political deliverance from dictators; it extends to the breaking of social bonds like discrimination and lack of opportunity; and finally to care for the earth, that in some ways has been our greatest failing.

What we should wish for Cuba is not more secular "gifts from the empire," but gifts of the spirit like justice, mercy, righteousness, truth, and sharing.