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---FEATURES

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Cuban Churches Thrive Despite Persecution

FORT WORTH (BP)--Food is rationed in Cuba. Freedom is a memory. But Christianity is stronger than ever.

"Before Castro, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board supported the church work in Cuba," says Bibiano Molina, who for more than 50 years was a Baptist pastor in his country.

"Then Castro stopped that. He wouldn't let Americans send any more money to the churches in Cuba. When this happened, the ministers and the lay people reacted by supporting themselves. They have assumed the whole financial responsibility.

"Church members are stronger in their faith, and the churches are self supporting, but the situation remains serious," Molina said in an interview. "They are barely keeping the standards they had when Castro assumed control.

"However, the church is still very much alive," he continued. "And in Cuba today, it is a miracle, but churches are filled with young people--in spite of strong government opposition."

He described the opposition: "The government blocks off both ends of the streets when churches are in session. The streets are used for baseball, soccer and track. And the games are conducted while church is in session. Still the young people come."

Preaching is allowed only inside the church, none outside. "And special permits must be obtained to conduct a revival service, although revival services are well attended and people respond to them."

Molina doesn't see persecution of Christian people as all bad. "God has often used persecution to strengthen the faith of Christians. Some fail, but many grow stronger.

He said, "About 90 Baptist churches operate in Cuba now, not including the missions. The Cuban Baptist Convention is doing everything to avoid friction with the government, which is always looking for an excuse to close a church. The churches are prospering because they live close to God."

Molina, 66, began preaching at 15, before Herbert Caudill, veteran Southern Baptist home missionary, arrived for his 40 years of service in Cuba. He was still preaching when Caudill, now retired, was released from a Cuban prison more than four years ago to return to the United States.

"There are many preachers in jail," he said. "They are there not for preaching but because they got tangled in the political struggle."

Once, he recalled, a stranger came to his neighborhood to inquire about him. One man, not a church member, told the stranger, "all Molina preaches is the gospel." After that Molina wasn't bothered by the government.

"Before Castro took over the people had all kinds of freedom. Many ministers backed Castro in his early days because they felt he would be good for the country. But after a year, preachers were told not to preach anything about the government. Those who disobeyed were sent to jail and their churches closed."

The Molinas ran into problems when they decided to come to the United States to live with their daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Elias Acosta of Fort Worth. The time allotted for them to leave the country had expired.

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So, they moved into a Baptist home for the aged in Havana and waited for four years. Finally, after receiving a letter from their daughter, the government officials summoned the Molinas and told them they could leave. A week later they were on their way to the U.S. via Spain.

"We could take very few clothes and nothing else," said Molina. "They took our watches off our arms."

The lack of original documents caused problems when the Molinas arrived in Spain and tried to leave there for the United States.

"We explained that we had to leave everything in Cuba," Molina said. "But the Spanish government told us we couldn't leave their country without those documents."

For three more months the Molinas lived in the home of Cuban Baptist friends in Madrid. Then Hugo Ruiz, Spanish language editor for the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, and pastor of the Baptist church where the Acostas attend, learned about the situation.

Ruiz, a naturalized American citizen, fired off a letter to his congressman. When Texas Senator John Tower received the letter he wrote the American embassy in Madrid.

Within days the Molinas were in the United States. "We came here because our two sons in Cuba, one a minister and the other a machinist, felt that if anything happened to me, my wife should be with our daughter," said Molina.

Ruiz has definite plans for Molina. "He's already preached six messages for 'Control-Central' which the Radio-TV Commission produces and distributes in Spanish," he said. "And he will be invaluable as assistant pastor and counselor at Iglesia Bautista Central (Central Baptist Church) where his son-in-law is a deacon."

"I have been through some bad times," Molina admitted, "but the worst time would be if I were unable to preach Jesus Christ."

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BP PHOTO mailed to Baptist state paper editors.

Home Mission Board Volunteer,
Son, Killed in Auto Accident

6/22/73

GREENWOOD, S.C. (BP)--Macie Humphrey, a Christian Service Corps volunteer for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, and her college-age son were killed in an automobile accident near here.

Mrs. Humphrey was en route to the Charlotte, N.C. airport, destined for a three-week CSC assignment in Holyoke, Mass. Her son John, 18, was accompanying her to the airport.

A resident of Greenwood, Mrs. Humphrey was employed by the Connie Maxwell Children's Home, where she served as a cottage mother.

This was Mrs. Humphrey's first year as a volunteer CSC worker. She was to have worked in a week-day ministries program under the sponsorship of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Holyoke.

CSC is a Home Mission Board-sponsored program for short term volunteers, who give their time and money to serve in mission projects.

John has completed his freshman year at Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

Reports on the multi-car accident indicate the car was hit while trying to avoid another crack-up, then hit a second time as Mrs. Humphrey and John were attempting to leave the wrecked vehicle.

Mrs. Humphrey was killed instantly; John was dead on arrival at Self Memorial Hospital, Greenwood.

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