

THE DISSIDENT PRIEST

Appeal to the Pope: "No human relationship with Castro"

WORLD

26_07_2022



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Tremamunno**



On 12 July, the *online TV ViX*, belonging to the Hispanic-American giant *Televisa Univisión*, published an interview with Pope Francis, conducted by Mexican journalists Valentina Alazraki and María Antonieta Collins, asking for a message for the Cuban people one

year after the 11 July rebellion; at a time when the regime is still holding around a thousand people in prison for political reasons, including minors (as we explained in a [previous article](#)).

The Pontiff surprised everyone with his response, confessing his 'human relationship' with dictator Raúl Castro: "I love the Cuban people very much and I have had good human relationships with Cuban people and I confess, I also have a human relationship with Raúl Castro. I was happy when that minor agreement was reached with the United States, which President Obama wanted at the time and Raúl Castro accepted, and it was a good step forward, I think it has now stopped. Right now they are holding dialogues, if not negotiations, to shorten the distance. Cuba is a symbol, Cuba has a great history. I feel very close, very close, also to the Cuban bishops".

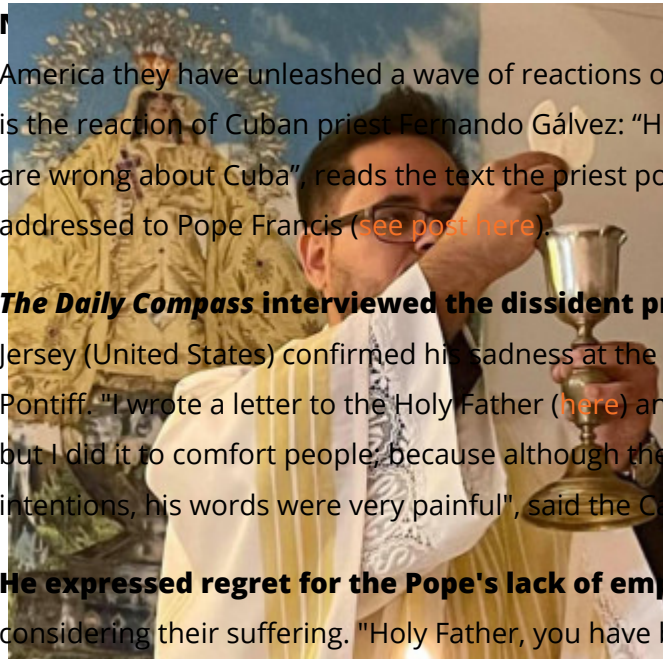
These statements, while in Latin America they have unleashed a wave of reactions of rejection. Prominent among them is the reaction of Cuban priest Fernando Gálvez: "Holy Father, once again, I believe you are wrong about Cuba", reads the text the priest posted on his Facebook page addressed to Pope Francis ([see post here](#)).

The Daily Compass interviewed the dissident priest, who from his exile in New Jersey (United States) confirmed his sadness at the position taken by the Argentine Pontiff. "I wrote a letter to the Holy Father ([here](#)) and I wasn't sure if he would read it, but I did it to comfort people; because although the Pope did it with the best of intentions, his words were very painful", said the Camagüey-born cleric.

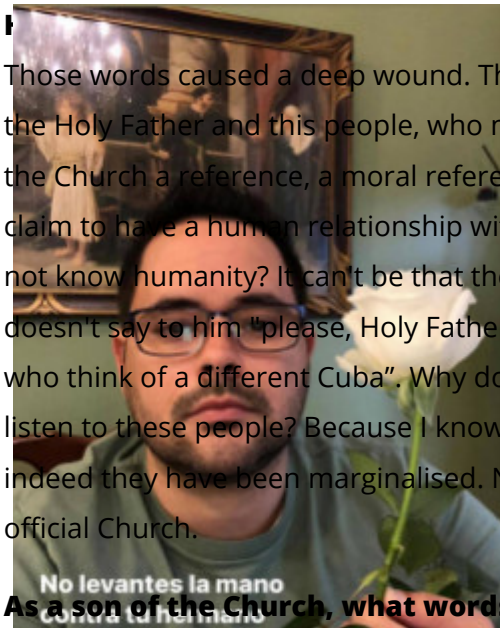
He expressed regret for the Pope's lack of empathy with the Cuban people, not considering their suffering. "Holy Father, you have been asked about the Cubans, a message for the Cubans, how we can feel comfortable when there are young people in prison, when there are underage children in prison, when people are going through terrible situations in all senses".

He stressed that "there is not a single thing in Cuba that works well, the police is the only thing that works well. And the Holy Father merely says that he has a human relationship with a dictator, with a dictator who has been oppressing a population for more than 60 years".

He called these statements 'offensive' and explained that his intention is not to question the pontificate of Pope Francis because he is 'just a poor priest': "I am a son of the Church and obviously I love the successor of Peter, but I also love the people with



whom I have been involved and for whom I have also suffered. I had to leave my homeland, so I cannot remain impassive”.



Pope's words?

Those words caused a deep wound. There was no bond of hope or affection between the Holy Father and this people, who may not be practising Christians, but who saw in the Church a reference, a moral reference. So how is it possible for the Holy Father to claim to have a human relationship with a person who has shown Cubans that he does not know humanity? It can't be that the Pope doesn't know, it can't be that someone doesn't say to him "please, Holy Father, take a good look. Look at the many good people who think of a different Cuba". Why does the Holy Father not receive these people, not listen to these people? Because I know many capable people who have not had access, indeed they have been marginalised. Not only by the government, but also by the official Church.

As a son of the Church, what words did you expect from the Holy Father?

Well, I hoped that the Holy Father would implore the Lord for the prisoners, that he would pray to the Lord that they would be freed soon. I was waiting for some words of comfort for those mothers, those wives, those husbands, and also those children. I hoped that the Pope would be the voice that cries out in the desert, that the Cubans would be able to say that in Rome they have a father who defends them, who understands them, and who knows what they are going through.

Even the Conference of Cuban Religious (CONCUR), a few days before the Pope's words, asked through a statement on Facebook not to forget the hundreds of political prisoners on the island. Is your position against Castro-communism shared by the local Church?

Once a prelate said to me: "You do damage to the Church". "No, Your Excellency," I replied, "your Church already suffers the damage imposed by the Government, not by me, I am simply on your side. If the Government gets angry about it, that's another thing. If I hurt certain people in the Church, that's another thing, but not the Church, I am on the side of the Church that suffers, the people."

Why did they tell you that you were causing harm to the Church?

Because I am simply telling the truth, accompanying people, exposing the truths that many have not dared to say. We were four or five priests all over the island trying to say this and at that moment I was stopped and told not to do it any more. No more because you hurt the Church. What Church? The Church is there in the streets, it is that country that is in prison, that has no food, that has no electricity, that has no water, that has no

transport, that has no freedom, that has no medical security, because even if it is free, there is nothing. What are we talking about? It is a country that cannot even think differently because those who think differently are imprisoned or eliminated.

Have you ever felt in danger in Cuba?

Yes, of course, they have carried out smear campaigns against me. On two occasions they called me and said: "Remember that you are not alone". I don't know what they meant, if it was because I had my parents at home. Of course I didn't answer and hung up. But the government never called me directly, never told me anything, it was always through the Bishop. And this is what I told him: "It hurts me that you're being used, that you're playing their game, that you're simply giving me their message"; he would tell me "shut up", "don't say it again", "be careful", or as he told me last time "you've gone too far". I am out of Cuba precisely because of this choice not to accept silence, I need to be faithful to God with my priesthood, but I also need to be faithful to my conscience and my people. I wish I could have the passivity that others have.

If you had the chance to be heard by the Pope, what would you say?

I would tell him that we need him to be the pastor that Cuba expects. Cuba is in an untenable situation, it is not a symbol of anything good, Holy Father. I do not know what information you have received, but I want you to listen to me and I hope not only to me, who am a poor priest, there are people who are well-informed; I could give him a list of names of people who would be interesting to listen to. This would be my appeal, that he listen to those who think of a Cuba different from what he has heard. Please, Holy Father, accept the mission the Church has given you to be a shepherd and the shepherd faces up to the wolf, which in Cuba is the Communist Party.