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Who Says in Cuba in what One Must Believe?

23/05/2016



Believing is a human need. In gods, philosophical concepts, political ideologies, in themselves, in the mixture or conjunction of these and other elements are established the beliefs that encourage man's life.

The Human Rights Convention includes religion and cult freedom because, indeed, believing is a right. Worshiping and practicing the faith each person chooses without discriminations or persecution.

Many affirm that in Cuba this essential human freedom is not respected. Cubasí sought the opinion of several Cubans who practice different religions, denominations or creeds, each one of them told their own experience as testimony of the truth they live.

Clara Urrutia Noriega belongs to one of the most representative families within the Osha Rule in Matanzas. She assists the Town Council of Santa Teresita, as her grandmother did before, with the sweetness of Oshun and Oyá's strong will, she took us in her place to speak with us:

"I have never been discriminated against because of my religion in my integration to society, I was a delegate to the People's Power organization, I was a secretary for the Women Federation of Cuba in La Marina, I am President of the Committee, I have always been a leader here in the neighborhood and religion has never been an issue. Maybe some time ago there was certain tension regarding religious topics, but we can already get affiliated to the Cuban Communist Party, that has changed a lot. I run Matanzas East Zone in my workplace in Community Cleaning Services, I was singer in Tropicana and my religious practice has never been related with my work, it has never been a hindrance for me, believe me when I tell you because I am not the kind of people who withstand discrimination, hit while the iron is hot, but I have not really had any problem and I was ten months old when I received my "santo".

According to Clarita the same believers must sit and revise certain topics like the time for the "Tambores" ceremonies to avoid annoying the neighbors and other behaviors which in her opinion have nothing to do with

religious autonomy:

"As a religious person I understand that children should not attend schools wearing religious items, neither wearing a headscarf, wearing only her uniform. On their return home they can wear them again. You don't have to wear them all day to be religious. Furthermore school is the place where they go to learn, the fact that children cannot wear that in school is no disrespect to religious rights, because I saw many children and grownups as well working in society following this same behavior, I tell my godchildren to do so."

The young Catholic Diana Rosa Piad, Civil Engineering graduate, works at a projects company. She teaches catechism classes in her parish since she was a teenager, although right now she has stopped both functions because of maternity leave like all Cuban mothers.

I studied what I wanted and everyone at school knew I went to church and the truth is I was never discriminated against, neither by professors, nor schoolmates and now at work everybody sees me as a regular person, not as a freak like people sometimes think. I also try to be open-minded, filling gaps between me and others regardless their beliefs. I was just off school and before a couple of years I was promoted to a senior position, so I think there was no problem in that sense... I was visited in my first pregnancy leave, I worked longer than expected to finish several projects and my coworkers came; now my husband works there and he acts as a connection. My child entered the Daycare Center without any problem and I know he is taught there the social, civic, behavioral, ethic rules, although I would like him to attend a Catholic school and that doesn't exist in Cuba...

Abakua religion is another of the variants brought from Africa to join the cultural mixture of Cubans. Hosday Calderón Hernández was sworn in this group in 1989, when he was only 9 years old, he is now Obon Ekue in Uriabon, the oldest game in Matanzas city and Mbacara Niton go in Efo, these they are two of the so-called positions that establish the hierarchies within this belief. Accompanied by a few of his "ekobios" he says:

"Until the 90's we had a few restrictions, because society itself saw us with scorn due to ignorance and we didn't have the same treatment as other religions that received more priority to carry out their rites, but in year 1996 was founded the Abakua Bureau in Cuba we have the attention of people within the government who follow the religious matters at different levels. Even that time when people feared us thinking we were a secret society, now all the people of the communities participate in our activities. All misconception has been gradually eliminated.

Every year, every six months, we meet with the government, we outline our approaches, we exchange, and we have been given the possibility to acquire in state facilities the products we need for our celebrations. On the religious side we are allowed to perform our rites by a river, in the park, anywhere. Neither the government nor anybody censors us; of course, we abide the law and social regulations in general."

Tony's life has been bound to Christian faith from the cradle, his father was shepherd at the Christ's Church and his mother accompanied him in that task. His own house worked as a meeting place since 1992 with the State's authorization. The church that began with only three members has considerably grown and according to Tony, José Antonio Fernández Muñoz, professional musician and current Secretary of that congregation: "We have around 800 members in the city now and we had the full support of the State since day one, in fact the growth of the Church is the best evidence that we have never been limited."

Every year we carry out three national events at Conventions Palace Square America in Varadero, we use all the facilities. The very State is in charge of transportation and lodging. We gather up to 500 people and the Office of Religious Matters and the Ministry of Justice support us in everything. Brothers from all over the country participate and also an important number of guests and foreign lecturers, mostly from the United States, those people come with a religious Visa, which enables them to stay in church facilities or in the houses were we hold the meetings."

Pedro Fernández Pérez is perhaps the most unique case we spoke to. In his house next to the his wife's workplace he tells us: "I am pretty prejudiced because of some negative experiences, after practicing in many churches, and many lodges as well as Afro-Cuban cults, we come up with the idea of founding on January 6, 2009 the Universalist Church bringing together all the good things I had learned in every religion I participated, that is the organization I represent right now, because I am its founder.

"We are already seven years old and have never been bothered. I think we've been looked closely that they have been among us, hearing our classes, but honestly have not been bothered. We, for example, make every Resurrection Sunday a ceremony by the sea at dawn, it's necessary to wear white clothes and coming from

different places wearing all white towards the sea makes people shout many kinds of things at us, but we've kept doing our thing unfazed, almost every year a police car follows us at slow pace, by our side guarding us, some say they are watching over us, but that doesn't matter because they have taken care of us. We have never been interrupted... "

Clarita, Diana, Hiosday, and Tony practice in Cuba the religions inherited from their ancestors or the one they chose out of their free will, Pedro created his as a result of a personal search. None of them hide neither live on the edge of society. Is there any further question regarding the right of cult and religion in Cuba?

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