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ESPACIO LAICAL:

The commitment to truth

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Espacio Laical

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For more than 30 years, the Catholic Church in Cuba has been carving a proposal for dialogue among all Cubans, as an essential methodology to advance toward greater national concordance.

In those three decades, the Church has thought out this proposal from the viewpoint of a changing country. This is shown by the celebration of the Cuban Ecclesial Reflection, the National Encounter of the Cuban Church, the pastoral letter "Love Hopes Everything," the hundreds of statements by Cuban bishops, the work performed by the lay community in several church publications, the teachings in our country of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the many initiatives of shared discernment throughout our land, and the recent dialogue between the Church's hierarchy and the Cuban government.

It is possible to affirm that no other social actor on the Cuban stage has committed itself so radically to the construction of an overall alternative for positive changes for Cuba.

A key personality on this tense and zigzagging endeavor has been Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana. Aware that this is a long road, and displaying his habitual patience and moderation, the cardinal has devoted himself to drawing a road map that envisions a gradual, peaceful and inclusive change, without traumas for the country.

He has been the artificer of the reconstruction of the pastoral structures and mechanisms of social and political dialogue in the Archdiocese of Havana.

The pastoral reviews and structures have allowed the Archbishop to pursue a broad agenda for dialogue, in constant interaction with many citizens, intellectuals, academicians, groups from the civilian society, other religious denominations, members of the Cuban government and the diplomatic corps accredited in our country, the Holy See, governments of other countries, the Church in Cuba and other parts of the world, as well as social and political actors of Cuban origin who live in exile in Miami and other regions of the world.

All this has given him a position of leadership that has taken him beyond strictly pastoral affairs to proposing an orderly and gradual transformation of the national order.

This effort by Cardinal Ortega has never represented an uncritical acceptance of the missteps taken by some parties in the national spectrum. Sometimes in public, sometimes in private, he has questioned the political actions of the opposition, inside and outside Cuba, that are usually characterized by criticizing, condemning and trying to annihilate, without contributing any clear and universal projects for the fate of the nation.

Because of its indisputable love for a free and sovereign Cuba, the Church cannot go along with projects that are monitored by -- and often coupled with -- agendas dictated outside the island, without a clear, critical distancing from the blockade against our motherland.

On the other hand, citing the principles of the Church's Social Doctrine, Cardinal Ortega was the only voice from the Church that unequivocally condemned the execution by firing squad of Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa and other officers of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of the Interior, the sinking of the tugboat "13 de marzo," Comandante Fidel Castro's attacks against Msgr. Pedro Meurice and the so-called acts of repudiation, among other examples.

In addition, he has been a noted protagonist in the preparation of all the episcopal documents issued regarding the reality in this country, especially in the preparation of the pastoral letter "Love Hopes Everything" accomplishments that many people today want to deny him. Likewise, he has anonymously interceded for the release of thousands of political and common prisoners who are not part of the latest wave of publicly released inmates.

It is necessary to admit that our reality is a complex one, and that simplistic and

unilateral readings of such reality obstruct the acceptance and realization of that path of national understanding. Nevertheless, the Cardinal and many other Cubans, inside and outside the Church, have always foreseen that a definitive solution for Cuba will go through a political methodology marked by encounter, dialogue and consensus.

But this is not accepted by many who, filled with hatred, prejudice and in some cases evidencing scant political intelligence, prefer to overthrow the current government and achieve a triumph that once again excludes all adversaries.

Of course, such a victory could lead us to a political and economic change but not to the necessary national balance inspired by Martí, whereas its promoters often appear intent on excluding all who somehow support or have supported the leadership of the Revolution.

Such intention might create new electoral mechanisms that perhaps will satisfy some political sectors, but these would be lacking in a true democratic and conciliating content. The issue is not only to change politics or even institutions but also to achieve a harmonious solution that can aggrandize Cuba's civic culture.

To that end, certain factions have plotted a strategy whose purpose it is to eliminate the Cardinal and jettison the political line that he has promoted. To do this, a front has been formed to attack the Archbishop of Havana and the projects that, from the Church, try to give shape to this pastoral line, with all its political and social implications.

These are not just personal attacks against the Cardinal. The current maneuver, being carried out for the past several months, is a war against an entire evangelical line that aspires to positive and serene, gradual and inclusive, orderly and peaceful changes that can articulate a renewed sociopolitical model for Cuba.

Amid this national panorama and for the past eight years, the team that produces the magazine *Espacio Laical* has been working to promote encounter, dialogue and consensus among Cubans with dissimilar political stances. Our hope is that the ongoing economic and social reforms will go deeper and we advocate a reform of the national government that allows the people to agree to an inclusive project for the country, where all Cubans have a place.

To achieve this objective, we have opened our pages and our spaces of dialogue to Cubans on the island and in the diaspora, from the left, the center and the right of the

national political spectrum. In that sense, we shall continue to join efforts with national actors and projects to discern, carve and propose political, institutional, economic, judicial and social reforms, among others, capable of achieving true general well-being.

Some people have stayed away because they are incapable of assuming a well-based, serene, propositional and inclusive task and discourse. Those who have not the sufficient maturity to hold these attributes exclude themselves from contributing to the main objective of our project.

We are not -- and won't be -- willing to renounce respect and transparency, dialogue and consensus. That methodology of virtue and piety, based on the message of the Gospel, is the only road that will lead this country out of its current crisis.

There are other political methodologies that opt for confrontation and divisiveness, implemented for decades by both the government and the opposition, but these have amply demonstrated their structural incapacity to transform the country. Likewise, we distance ourselves from the political Messiahs from the government and the opposition, who want to call themselves the only spokesmen of the nation's civilian society and political life.

Thanks to God, Cuba today is more pluralistic and multicentric than ever. This demands from all of us a perspective of greater aperture, humility, intelligence and universality.

On the other hand, we must also point out that nothing can be more favorable to the discredit that some may feel toward this proposal for dialogue and communion among all Cubans than the government's reluctance, particularly among some functionaries in the state-party bureaucracy, to implement necessary changes in mindset that can benefit the entire nation, and enjoy a broad national consensus. The economic and social reforms are insufficient and do not proceed at the proper pace.

In addition, some authorities have publicly expressed that they do not consider the possibility of making political transformations intended to channel the nation's majority. For that reason, they have not supported the due institutionalization of the mechanisms that are necessary to conduct that national dialogue demanded by our distressing crisis.

In that sense, some high-ranking leaders of the political-party bureaucracy are willing

to block the citizen's initiatives that seek to achieve that encounter. We might cite a recent example, linked to the campaign of obstacles raised by the ideological apparatus of the Communist Party against spaces in the Archbishopric of Havana, with the objective of barring the participation in those spaces of many Cuban academicians and intellectuals, spaces that some political oppositionists irresponsibly brand as pro-Government and aligned with official circles.

This reality expresses a national dilemma between a path of changes marked by Martí's moderation, serenity and unbiased inclusiveness for the benefit of the nation and the imposition of rapacious minorities, present in almost all parts of the Cuban political spectrum, which would perpetuate conflicts and revive historical hostilities in their desire to control power.

The latter possibility would certainly lead the nation toward another atrocious polarization that would obstruct justice and freedom in an adequate democracy, the dream that we've been trying to make true ever since Father Felix Varela began the task of founding a virtuous motherland, almost 200 years ago.

We call upon all the patriotic forces in the nation who yearn for a serene and reconciled, just and sovereign, democratic and inclusive, prosperous and balanced Cuba to join efforts to achieve a methodology that will render these aspirations possible.

The staff of Espacio Laical includes the Rev. Yosvany Carvajal Sureda, Roberto Veiga Gonzalez andy Lenier Gonzalez Mederos.