

Antillian College, Cuba (1940–1967)

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Antillian College (Colegio de las Antillas) was the main educational institution of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cuba from 1940 to 1967. This campus also became the main center of higher education for the Inter-American Division. It was there that workers were trained from and for Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, as well as for the other unions in this division's territory.

Overview

The college trained young people who then led out in the Adventist work on the island and in other Hispanic nations. In addition, several graduates became the leaders of their own local fields, of the work in their countries, and of the work throughout the Inter-American Division. The college experienced twenty years of continual growth in its structure, its industries, and its academic programs. Then, in the last eight years of its operation, it went through a process of gradual closing, and at the end it was taken over by the Cuban government.

When the first official Adventist missionaries arrived in Cuba in 1904, they began the work of church-sponsored education on the island. Until 1913 the schools were all self-supporting. In that year the Cuban Mission began a five-year preliminary and temporary trial of a school operating under the supervision of the mission. It wasn't until 1922 that the first school was established for the training of Adventist workers. Its name was Colegio de Bartle. It extended its services to students from all across the Antillian Union Mission. Later, in light of the challenges and limitations the school faced because of its geographic location, the leadership of the church decided to move it to the center of Cuba. There in 1940, as the successor of Colegio de Bartle, Colegio de las Antillas (later Antillian College) opened its doors. It was here that many young men and women from all across the division were educated. Here the academic offerings were more diverse, offering classes at different academic levels and in different areas of education. It was on this campus that the Inter-American Division would begin to offer the full 16 grades; that is to say, the college would become an institution of higher education.

Unfortunately, the social changes that swept across Cuba in the late 1950's gradually brought about the closing of Antillian College. Generally speaking, there were four phases to the closing, each one of them marked by

specific acts of intervention, with specific participants, and having specific effects. At the end, in 1967, the Adventist Church definitively lost control of the college, and until now, in spite of promises made by the authorities, the situation remains the same.

Origin and Growth of Antillian College

After the 1850's, the Adventist pioneers demonstrated an understanding of the role of Christian education in the growth of the church. Health work and the printed page were important, but education was vital! This three-prong model of missionary endeavor was carried into the Caribbean, and the Adventist work done in Cuba showed this influence. From the very beginning, with the arrival of the first missionaries to the island, colporteur, medical missionary work, and the development of schools were the key strategy for the growth of the church.² All of these were accompanied by the preaching of the Word of God.

From the very beginning it was evident that the church needed a center of preparation for missionaries and pastors. Providentially, several educators who had studied at the school in Madison, Tennessee, heeded the divine call and moved to Cuba to carry out the work of Adventist education. It is worthwhile to look at the context of Adventist education in Cuba from the year 1904 until the closing of Antillian College in 1967.

Pastor W. A. Spicer visited the island at some point between 1902 and 1903. As a result of his visit, he recommended emphatically that the work begins in this country. In response to his suggestion, in May of 1904 the Mission Board sent the Moores as the first missionaries to Cuba. They were self-supporting workers, nurses by profession. At the end of November of that same year, another couple, the Darts, were sent under the same circumstances. Even before this there was a small group of Adventist Americans scattered throughout the country. They were mostly in the west and the central parts of the island, and they were helpful to the work with their willingness to colporteur. One of them was Brother J. Clarke.

At the beginning of 1905, Isaiah E. Moore wrote about the necessity of having at least two Adventist pastors in Cuba. One of them should speak Spanish fluently, and the other could learn Spanish as he worked. Moore added that the leader of another Protestant denomination on the island was willing to help the new Adventist pastor as he started his work. Given the needs of the new field, the request for help came to the General Conference. As a result, Pastor E. W. Snyder was sent to Cuba as an evangelist and colporteur in September of 1905. That year the Cuban Mission was organized, and Pastor Snyder became its first superintendent.

After that, and for almost two decades, a few overseas pastors were the ones carrying out the work of Adventism as leaders of the Cuban Mission. Their work grew, but it wasn't until January of 1921 that the church ordained Pedro Cruz as the first Cuban Adventist pastor. Then, in 1927, another Cuban, Manuel Avila, was also ordained as a pastor.³ It became more and more obvious during these first fifteen years of Adventism in Cuba that there was a need for pastors and that schools were needed to train them, as practical experience in ministerial work was not enough.

The schools that were developed on the island between 1905 and 1922 had distinctive characteristics. First, they were influenced by the school in Madison,⁴ Tennessee, USA, and indirectly by the school in Avondale, Australia, which was the model established by God for the Adventist people through His messenger, Ellen G. White. Second, some of these schools were established by private individuals. The teachers at these schools were also the administrators and raised funds for the institution (the schools at Nuevitas and Omaja). Third, these schools were not directly administered by church leaders, although they were established and developed with the active participation of the leaders of the urban mission (the schools of Santa Lucía, Las Tunas, and San Claudio). These schools were focused on creating missionaries and were a good help for the colporteur branch. Fourth, there were schools that arose from an intense desire on the part of pastors, teachers, and missionaries to start schools where teachers could be trained. These schools were not supervised by the Cuban Mission administration, although the school at Santa Clara was an exception. Finally, many schools were intermittent schools. Some of these were started by Americans, and when the Americans left, the schools closed, or sometimes there would be a change of plans within the church because of some crisis in the work. In summary, during this time, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cuba, as an institution, did not supervise or administer the schools that arose on the island. Nevertheless, it was evident that there was a need for an education that would train pastors and teach the skills for colporturing. For this reason it was imperative to establish a permanent center of education, one that was designed on a larger scale.

One of the early requests had been for the training of the self-supporting American teachers. E. A. Southerland reported on a visit in 1910 that President E. W. Snyder, as well as the teachers in the country, had long felt “the necessity of a small training school in which the American teachers could take a short course upon entry to the island.”⁵ This feeling was unanimous, including Southerland himself, and his comments recognized the importance of a formal preparation for educational work.⁶ However, the need went beyond the necessary training for the foreigners in the realities of Cuban life when they came to work there. There was also the desire for the church in Cuba to have a school to prepare members to do the work of the gospel. In 1914, N. Z. Town put into words the feelings of the Adventist people in this way: “The brethren in Cuba are very desirous of having a mission training school established on the island. This matter was carefully considered during the meeting...”⁷ Basically, Town was echoing what the pastors and workers in the Cuban Mission were saying. Also, at the fifth conference of the Cuban Mission Conference held in January of 1921, Pastor Charles Thompson wrote that “one of the seeming needs in the development of the work in Cuba is a training school for native believers.”⁸ Obviously, there was a need for a center for the preparation of gospel ministers. Conscious of this need, the administrative leaders of the mission had already taken the first steps in this matter.

The church first conducted a pilot school and then the first school with boarding facilities in Santa Clara—first at the Loma de Camacho site, and then in front of the Railway Station. Unlike the self-supporting schools, this one was under the administration of the Cuban Mission. It operated for five years--from 1913 to 1917--and had about twenty students who worked to pay for their tuition by doing work on the campus or by selling books. The

teachers placed a strong emphasis on the training of colporteurs, and the culminating project was a specific course of colporteur preparation. It is important to point out that the Santa Clara school was thought of as a temporary one and was seen as a school with a limited number of courses all focused on the preparation of workers.⁹ It was the precursor to a dream that would continue to grow.

In 1922 the Cuban Mission Conference established its first school for advanced training, where students could live, study, and work. This was the Bartle School in Las Tunas, which functioned from 1922 to 1940. During this period the institution was administered by three different entities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and because of this, went by different names. The first school year started in the summer of 1922 under the name Colegio Adventista and was administered by the Cuban Mission Conference. Later, in 1931, the school took the name Colegio Adventista Antillano and was under the administration of the Antillian Union Mission. This was because the school in Aibonito in Puerto Rico had been destroyed by a hurricane in 1928, and the Inter-American Division decided to relocate it to Cuba. Then, in 1937, the campus was renamed Colegio Adventista de Cuba and was under the administration of the Cuba Conference, as it was difficult for Hispanic students from other countries to enter Cuba easily.¹⁰ It is understandable that the church placed a greater or lesser emphasis on the Bartle school according to the demands of the circumstances. Although the school changed names and sponsoring entities, its goal was always to better fulfill Christ's mission. The way it carried out its work makes this evident.

The Bartle school operated as closely as possible to the standards God set for Christian education. In the first place, the basic tasks at the school were performed by the students. They alternated their studies with manual work. Those who did not have sufficient funds to pay the school for their tuition paid for it and for the cost of room and board with their own work. Fortunately, the school had sufficient property on which to develop the industries that were so important to its development. For example, there was a farm that provided a large number of jobs. A brick factory was created, and it supplied the building needs of the school and of the local community. A small broom factory was started. A print shop was established to provide for the needs of staff and students, although it had limited equipment. In addition, the print shop did work for the local sugar companies, as well as those in the neighboring province of Camaguey. The print shop became one of the most dependable sources of support for the students and for the school in general. There was also a sawmill where the students could work their assigned hours, and in that way help pay their bills.¹¹

Another way in which the school followed the divine pattern was in accepting non-Adventist students. In 1929 Helen Suche, a teacher, wrote that she was teaching the first five grades and that they were composed by mostly non-Adventist children from homes in town. She said to pray for the seeds of truth to be lodged in at least some of the children's hearts and bear fruit "to the Master's glory."¹² Her words show that the school was winning souls through the work of education. So, the school did not limit itself to foreign students, nor to Adventist Cuban students, but also sought to reach the local citizens with the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, the school staff was composed mainly of non-Cuban teachers.

Third, and not least important, the school in Bartle promoted the missionary spirit. The students colporteured, tended to the Sabbath Schools that were started, participated in the planting of a church, and helped in the cycle of evangelistic meetings. However, one of the greatest impacts of the school was the character of the students and teachers. The local people perceived them as courteous and happy, living in a joyous, spiritual atmosphere.¹³ In everything that happened there, they tried to give the glory to God and strove to follow their principles.

The Bartle school always had a defined purpose, and it sought to adapt to the changing needs of the work of the church. In the early years of its existence, the school was making an effort to adequately prepare the young people in the field for efficient service.¹⁴ In this way, from 1922 to 1931 the school took on the task of preparing Cuban missionaries who would share Christ on the island. In fact, the school was the center of preparation for workers for the Cuban Mission. Later, in 1931, its work was broadened; Bartle became the school for the training of other Hispanic workers, such as the members from Puerto Rico. The school opened itself to include students from other countries who also needed prepared workers; so, the school became international in its student body. But its objective remained the same: to prepare a people for the return of Jesus Christ and providing those people with spiritual leaders to guide them. In 1939 the division and the Antillian Union decided to move the college to the center of the island where the conditions were better for its desired development.¹⁵

The Adventist Church in Cuba began the Colegio de las Antillas in Santa Clara as the continuation of the Bartle school. The new campus operated from 1940 until 1967 under the administration of the Antillian Union, and it became an educational model, not only for the church but also for the national authorities. The history of this school can be divided into two main periods. During the first, from 1940 to 1961, the school became a junior college with the theology major reaching college-degree level. During these years the administration of the school was in hands of American teachers, and the school met the needs of the Antillian Union. The second period was from 1961 to 1967. During these years the school offerings were limited to the ministerial course only, and this in a limited fashion. During this period the social changes in the country required that the administrators of the school be Cuban. But from 1940 to 1960, the Colegio de las Antillas was the signature Adventist educational institution in Cuba and in the Inter-American Division.

Like the school in Bartle, this one also operated under various names. In the beginning the name of the Bartle school was carried over to the campus in Santa Clara: Colegio Adventista de Cuba. Toward the end of 1942, the name was changed to Colegio Adventista de las Antillas for two reasons. On one hand, the Cuba Conference split into two: the West Cuba Conference and the East Cuba Conference. On the other hand, the school began to enroll students from other countries. In 1946 the English name for the school changed to Antillian Junior College because it began to offer classes at the college sophomore level. However, the name in Spanish did not change. In 1956 the school took the English name of Antillian College, while in Spanish it became Colegio de las Antillas. These changes occurred because the level of classes offered in the theology major included grade 16. Finally, in 1961, because of the restrictions and stated intentions of the new Cuban government to take over the school,

the Antillian Union moved the school to Puerto Rico. What had been Antillian College in Cuba was now called the Cuban Adventist Seminary.¹⁶ This all shows how the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a movement; it adapts itself to the circumstances and to the demands of the mission field, preparing the fields for the return of Christ.

The school located in Santa Clara, in its 28 years of operation, went through academic changes. When it opened its doors on May 12, 1940, it offered only the levels up through 12th grade.¹⁷ Starting in the school year 1946–1947, it also offered the first two years of college. From 1955 on, the academic offerings grew. The Antillian Union decided to extend the ministerial course to 16 grades and offer the degree “Bachelor of Arts.” Later, in 1959–1960, the education department also began to offer higher education degrees in other areas, such as degrees in elementary and secondary teaching.¹⁸

Unfortunately, in 1961 the Cuban government limited enrollment to one hundred students, allowed only Cuban teachers, and declared that their teaching would be supervised and controlled by its own officers.¹⁹ Because of these government restrictions, the General Conference voted to transfer Antillian College from Cuba to Puerto Rico.²⁰ The higher education level in the Cuban school was officially reduced to two years, although in reality, until 1967 the courses taught would be the equivalent of three years of higher education. It should be pointed out that the academic level of the school continued to expand until 1961. When it could offer 16 grades, the high level of contextualization of the courses made it a better place to prepare Latin American workers than the Adventist colleges in the United States. Also, extension programs were started at the colleges in Costa Rica, Mexico, Colombia, and in the Dominican Republic, the latter extension program in process at the time of the transfer to Puerto Rico.²¹ Unfortunately, after 1961 academic progress declined, and the school disappeared for a time.

The Colegio de las Antillas advanced, not only academically but also in its industries. Among the sources for student work was the school farm. Several times a week fresh garden products were taken into the city of Santa Clara to be sold. Along with this, there were cattle and a dairy, with its high-quality products in great demand; among these were milk, butter, yogurt, and cheese. There was also a canning factory—Conservas Antilco—which became one of the most productive industries for the school. Another industry that prospered was the carpenter shop. There furniture was made and was sold in local areas. There was also a broom factory, making brooms for daily use in homes. In addition, the print shop was modernized and improved, trying to maintain and grow the success that it had had in Bartle. At one point there was an effort to start a business that manufactured items made from seashells. It is evident that the school placed a high priority on the development of these industries. They provided the resources that students needed to pay for their studies and at the same time brought income to the school.²²

The academic progress, the gradual construction of buildings, and the development of industries were only means to lead people to Christ. The greatest work of this institution was its impact within and without the denomination. The Colegio de las Antillas became a base for activities of the Antillian Union. Large ministerial

events, conventions, training sessions, and worship gatherings were carried out on this campus. In the same way, the Inter-American Division began to use the campus for meetings and special events. Within the Adventist world in the Antilles and within the unions of the Inter-American Division, the school attracted a great deal of activity. In addition, the non-Adventist communities were impacted by the triple purpose of educating hand, mind, and heart, with teachers in the public schools being witness to a functioning model of fully integrated education. Many visits were made to the school to observe the way it functioned, including visits from the Minister of Education and the Provincial Director of Education. Surprisingly, the school also became a reference point for tourists. This school became one of the institutions of major social impact for the nation.²³ It was a place that everyone was aware of, and both Adventists and non-Adventists wanted to send their children there to be educated. But behind the apparent human wisdom was the wisdom of God. The school was following the divine plan for education, and more than educated sinners, it sought to create sinners who were saved.

In conclusion, from the very arrival of Adventism in Cuba at the beginning of the 20th century, the church needed a place to train missionaries and pastors. At first the work was carried out by American missionaries, but it was necessary to develop a team of national workers who, knowing the culture, could be more effective in bringing the gospel to their people. While self-supporting schools were a good start, an educational center under the leadership of the denomination was indispensable. The schools at Santa Clara and Bartle in Las Tunas were founded for this purpose, the latter operating from 1922 to 1940, then moving to Santa Clara where it became the Colegio de la Antillas. This institution educated many who became leaders of the work in the Inter-American Division and in Cuba itself and was the culmination of Adventist education on the island. It had an influence on Christians and non-Christians, revealing the character of God to their world, and reached many souls with the message of salvation. God provided, and the church was able to create educational centers to train gospel workers. But this dream did not have a happy ending.

The Phases of the Closing of Antillian College in Cuba

The government intervention in Antillian College in Cuba had four consecutive phases. First, there was the phase of recognition by the new official authorities (December of 1958–beginning of 1961); secondly, a phase of disintegration (beginning of 1961–December of 1961); third was the phase of decline (December of 1961–February of 1967; and fourth, the phase of absence (February of 1967–1969). In each phase the Adventist church leaders and the school leaders did their best to keep the school running. However, the closing of Antillian College was gradual and seemed inevitable, and it deprived the Adventist Church in Inter-America of its main educational institution.

The first phase began toward the end of December in 1958 and lasted until the beginnings of 1961. During this short period, the new government respected the school, which led to the growth of the school. At the beginning of this period of time, the president of the college was Dr. Walton J. Brown, who was president from 1955 until

1960. When he was called to the Inter-American Division as head of the department of education, Pastor Alfredo Aeschlimann took his place as president; until that time, Pastor Aeschlimann had served as a professor of theology at the school. Aeschlimann headed the institution for about a year, from 1960 to 1961. He was the last foreigner to be in charge of the school, and he encountered many uncomfortable situations toward the end of his service. But the school did not cease its operation. The school years 1958, 1959, 1959, 1960, and the first part of 1960, 1961 ran their course without major problems. In 1960 a third generation student graduated at the four-year college level.²⁴ In addition to the stability and growth of the school, the school's industries also prospered during this phase. In 1960 the canning factory grew as never before. Several tons of its canned products were sent to the country's capital, and the factory acquired new equipment. This contributed to an even greater growth, efficiency, and productivity. So, during this first phase, the school and its industries ran well, and the institution had a good reputation.

Also, during this era, the new Cuban government held Antillian College in high esteem. The governor of the Province of Las Villas, the province in which the school was located, visited the institution on his own initiative and out of gratitude. During the last days of December 1958 and early 1959, the help given by the school to the rebel troops was definitive. The now governor had been one of those troops who had received food and other help from the teachers and the students on campus. When he took his job as governor, he made sure his first official visit was to Antillian College, and he spoke to the young people on campus. On another occasion, when the president of the Inter-American Division, A. H. Roth, and the secretary-treasurer of the Antillian Union, C. L. Powers, visited Cuba in 1959, they had an encouraging experience at the airport. When they came before the customs official and identified themselves as Adventist leaders, the official answered, "Oh yes, we know the Seventh-day Adventists. We ate at Antillian College during the battle of Santa Clara."²⁵ In addition, on a visit of the Prime Minister of Cuba, Fidel Castro, came to the Central University to speak at a special ceremony, Antillian College provided a musical number sung by its choir. Several times Castro visited the college and ate at the college cafeteria. At the end of the meal, the country's leader told college administrators, "This is exactly the kind of school that I want for my new Cuba."²⁶ The following day, after another performance by the choir by request of the rebel leader, he again said to the college president, "I repeat what I said last night. Your school is the kind of school that I want for my new Cuba, and I want to become better acquainted with your program. Would it be all right if I send some representatives to get more information from you?"²⁷ Later Castro mentioned that the college was "a model for all educational institutions on the secondary and college level."²⁸ The college operated according to the divine plan, and as a result, both local and national leaders had a favorable opinion of it.

The empathy was reciprocal, as some days later the college wanted to create a corner dedicated to José Martí. For this they needed a bust of Martí and a garden of white roses, but the school did not have the financial resources to carry out the project. As a part of the fundraising, the college choir planned a concert in the biggest theater in Santa Clara, The Teatro Cloris. The school administrators invited Ernesto Guevara (Ché) to speak at the occasion. He came. In his speech he thanked Adventists because an Adventist family had received and

protected him at a time when he and his group were almost dead after disembarking from the yacht Granma on the east end of the island at the beginning of the revolution. He also made public mention of the school's choir saying, "it is my desire that there be many more choirs like this in the country."²⁹ The college was able to raise the money it needed to complete the project.

The second phase was marked by suspicion of the government regarding the personnel of the institution. This phase extended all through 1961 and could be labeled the phase of disintegration because the college as such had to be moved to another country in the Antillian Union, and only the major in theology remained in Cuba. During the first quarter of 1961, Pastor Alfredo Aeschlimann continued as the college president, as he had administrative experience and had served the church for a long time. Nevertheless, after the attack at Bay of Pigs in April of that year, the attitude of the government toward foreign residents in the country changed drastically. Already, since the beginning of 1961, even though relations with the authorities seemed to be good, there was evidence of a growing distrust. The government officials were making inquiries regarding campus buildings, the program of study, and the facilities at the cafeteria. The situation became critical when four teachers and fourteen students—including women—were taken at gunpoint to the university, which was just across the road from the college. There they were interrogated individually, and no reason was ever given for this act.³⁰ Eventually they were released. Then, due to a governmental decree, Pastor Aeschlimann was relieved of his position and remained only as a professor of theology.³¹ In his place Manuel Carballal became the director of the school. In addition, because of the worsening situation in the country, some of the students and teachers from other countries decided to leave.³² The Cuban leaders of the church and the director of the school were no longer allowed to leave the country to attend meetings. Because of all these circumstances and because of the limits on enrollment, teachers, and academic levels set by the government, the school was moved to the Adventist academy campus in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. The General Conference gave the financial backing for this emergency move. As can be seen, the year of 1961 marked the instability and disintegration of the Antillian College in Cuba. The academic dream began to fade.

The breaking up of the school in 1961 resulted in a new name for the educational institution in Cuba. Because the college offerings were reduced to the first two years and because the focus became essentially the theology major, the school took the name Cuban Adventist Seminary.³³ Since 1922 the name of the Adventist school had changed many times to meet the changing needs of the work, but now it changed because of government intervention. Many of the aspirations for the school died, but God made sure other torches were lit and that his kingdom was strengthened in the midst of opposition. In Cuba as in the rest of the Inter-American Division, the work continued to advance.

The third phase in the closing of the school was defined by increasing instability. Happenings during this phase were scattered throughout the period from December of 1961 to February of 1967. The best label for this phase is phase of decline. There was some balance and some progress, but generally the school declined given the restrictions imposed by the government. During the first days of this phase, Manuel Carballal served as

president of the seminary. In 1962, Vicente Rodríguez, who until then had been the vice-director, became director and remained in that position until 1967. It should be pointed out that during this phase as during the previous one, there was a change of school leadership, both leaders being Cuban, but this time it was a decision made by the denomination. And there was another crisis and more challenges to come.

Fortunately, in March, classes started up again, but under certain limitations. First, the school could only accept Adventist students, a fact that limited the missionary outreach of the school. Second, the students had to be 16 years of age or older. This meant closing the elementary and secondary schools. But there was a “pre-seminary” four-year course, and then the three years of the theology major. In addition, there were some areas of specialization such as Bible instructor, secretarial, and business. The third restriction was enrollment, which was limited to 75 students, although later it was allowed to increase this number for some years.³⁴ Without a doubt, the seminary continued to advance in spite of the obstacles. There was a mission to fulfill, while being wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16).

The fourth and last phase lasted from February 1967 to 1969. Since the beginning of this phase, the school has never again been in possession of the Seventh-day Adventist church even though the legal documents of ownership are filed in the offices of the Cuban Union. The leaders of the church throughout the years have repeatedly sought to retake possession of the campus, but always in vain. The help that the school gave to the social change in its early days, the contributions made to the community, and the educational model provided for the whole country were all forgotten, though not by God’s people. It fell to Pastor Vicente Rodríguez, director of the seminary at that time, to deal with the painful process of closing the campus. In addition, Pastor Israel González, then president of the West Cuba Conference, wrote a letter to the authorities asking for a new place in which to establish the seminary. He asked, if possible, that the institution be able to remain in the province of Las Villas, where the authorities understood the function of the school.³⁵ This request was never answered in concrete form; there was only silence.

Later, in 1969, the leaders of the church again requested a place for the seminary. The official of the government in charge of religious affairs, as an improvisation, suggested they could use the old offices of the Antillian Union in Rancho Boyeros. Finally, permission to open the seminary was given, and classes began in 1970, but with the fear that the institution could be closed at any moment.³⁶ Permission to open the seminary was granted to the church as a crumb. The contributions of the Colegio de las Antillas and the promises for a new location for the seminary were all forgotten.

In summary, it is evident that the closing of the Colegio de Las Antillas (Cuba) was gradual and that it deprived the Adventist church in Inter-America of its main educational institution. The school experienced empathy, suspicion, decline, and was then forgotten. During the passing of these phases, there were changes in leadership, the academic offerings were lessened, the enrollment was limited, and the development of industries was reduced to nothing. Today the graduates of the school weep when they visit its ruins. The

buildings are in bad condition and some are destroyed. Only the photographs and the memories remain of all that once was.

Definite Moments of Intervention

During the four phases of outside intervention in the Adventist school, there were specific events. Each phase had its particular happenings. On occasion the institution was prospering and advancing, while at other times it was held back or reduced in function. It is worthwhile to note four events of outside intervention in the years between 1958 and 1967. The first was December of 1958 to January of 1959; the second, May 2-7 of 1961; the third, December 15 of 1961 to March of 1962; the fourth was on February 2 of 1967. These specific events led to the taking over of the Colegio de las Antillas (Cuba) by the Cuban government. It is worthwhile to examine these events in their context, their happenings, and the results.

The first outside intervention began the empathy phase. It began at dawn on December 28, 1958, and lasted until the following Sabbath, January 3, 1959. Until that moment the rumors of war were limited to the eastern end of the island hundreds of kilometers from the school. But suddenly the conflict came to the central provinces and caused the destruction of bridges, the presence of bearded militia, the taking over of cities, the cutting of telephone lines, and interruption of public transport, whether buses, trains or airplanes.³⁷ On the last Sunday of 1958, very early in the morning, two armed men guarded the administration building at the college. Later, reports H. B. Lundquist, "the school facilities were basically taken over by the revolutionary forces during the last weeks of the struggle and served as the base for the final push against Batista."³⁸ The last days of 1958 found the school, its teachers, and its students involved in a war.

During those intense days, the Colegio de Las Antillas gave help to their occupying force. They did this out of the principle of helping to preserve lives.³⁹ The school allowed some jeeps and trucks from the rebel army to park under some trees at a distance from the school buildings. It also made meals for the doctors and nurses who took care of the wounded on the campus of the university across the road. In addition, hundreds of soldiers throughout the day would come to the school cafeteria for food. The teachers and students shared sheets, pillows, bandages, and gave blood and items of a medical nature to help the doctors. In fact, some students who were certified in first aid helped care for the wounded.⁴⁰ The actions of those at the college at that time was one that reflected the presence of Christ among them. They loved their neighbors as themselves (Matthew 22:39), gave without measure (Matthew 5:42), and risked their own lives.

The faculty at the college also took risks as they were helping the rebel army. In the first place, the leaders of the school refused, even in the face of the force of arms, to go against their consciences. The military asked the school print shop to print propaganda pamphlets to be distributed in the city of Santa Clara. The administrators refused, stating that this was a Christian print shop. In the same way that they would not print advertisements for tobacco or alcohol, they also could not print pamphlets that would involve the school in taking part in

politics.⁴¹ In the second place, the school suffered an air attack with bombs and machine-gun fire. On December 31 of 1958, about 3:00 p.m., a bomb was dropped on the campus of the institution, and for about an hour and a quarter, the campus was strafed by machine-gun fire. Persons who were out in the fields with the cattle or working in the school agricultural fields or even praying in a secluded place were attacked by airplanes. Fortunately, none of them died. But all around them was the evidence of the gunfire, with cartridges scattered throughout the campus along with fragments from the bomb. These last days of 1958 were the days of the first outside intervention in the college. It should be pointed out that it was not the intention of the rebel army to take over the school; they just needed to make use of its facilities.

The second intervention from outside came to the school during the phase of suspicion. It lasted from May 2 to May 7 of 1961. Toward the end of April, a group of teachers and students on campus had been arrested for no reason. Less than a week later, on the evening of May 1, the leader of the revolution announced that the government was about to pass a law that would nationalize all private schools that had several teachers. He added that private schools that did not oppose the new government would be exempted.⁴² Just as he had said, on June 6, 1961, the Ministry Committee published the “Ley de Nacionalización General y Gratuita de la Enseñanza” (law nationalizing education) in the *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*. There it stated that centers of education would be appropriated by the Cuban state through the department of education. This would be the entity that would determine which institutions met the criteria for exemption.⁴³ As a result, the foreign students and teachers at the college left the country, courses were limited to the theology major, the college itself was moved to Puerto Rico, and the local institution remained under the name Cuban Adventist Seminary.⁴⁴ Of course, the announcement made during Castro’s speech on that day was a trigger for those who wanted to take over the facilities and property of Antillian College.

A few hours after the leader of the revolution’s speech, the intervention happened. In the early hours of the morning on May 2, 1961, “the militia of the School of Agriculture at the University (who had long desired to take over the college) took it over.”⁴⁵ The person in charge gathered the teachers and students in the school’s auditorium and announced that the college was under control of the government and that there would be no more worships nor any religious education there. The news was met with a profound silence. The next day three young men and three young women traveled to Havana to ask for an interview with the leader of the nation but were not granted one. Their request for return of control of the college was left with a secretary. A few days after the young people returned from Havana, they received a message from Fidel Castro through his assistant: “When I spoke of taking over private schools, it was never my intention that the Colegio de las Antillas should be included in that group.”⁴⁶ The local authorities notified the college president and the military leader who had taken over, and the soldiers left the campus.⁴⁷ This second intervention seems to have been a misunderstanding. Nevertheless, it was clear what the local authorities wanted. That college was too desirable for those who did not own it.

The third intervention event started the phase of decline. This event extended from December 1961 to March 1962—more than two and a half months. The government took over the Adventist Seminary on December 15, 1961, and gave a two-week notice for all personnel to leave. “However, permission was given for the school to operate as a Seminary in any place that could be found for it.” As it was not possible to find another place for classes, industries, and dormitories, on March 5, 1962, as an answer to prayer, the government authorized the Seminary to continue its operation on the same campus.⁴⁸ This time the event did not arise from a misunderstanding but rather came from the definite intention of canceling out the presence of the Adventist school in its location. The plan was not carried out completely at that time, but neither was it canceled. It was only a matter of time.

The fourth intervention in the Adventist institution started the phase of absence. This time the nationalization was definitive and happened on February 2, 1967. It was the culmination of a period of increasing pressure until the Ministry of Education managed to take control of the campus. On January 19 four officers of the provincial department of education notified the director that they were there to start the purchase of the institution together with all its facilities and industries. They stated that their objective was to expand the Central University.⁴⁹ On February 2, on a surprise visit, the vice-minister of education came to the Adventist Seminary and announced in its auditorium that as of that day, the school was taken over. Classes were suspended, the students were to return to their homes, and the dormitories should be turned over to the government by February 8. The presidents of both Cuban conferences went to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of the Interior offices in Havana, but their visits did not have positive results.⁵⁰ On Thursday, February 16, a group of soldiers arrived, and two days later another fifty came with their officers. The president of the college, Vicente Rodriguez, turned over the keys to his office to the military officer. Once again the authorities assured the college that this was not a confiscation but that the church would be paid for the property, something that has not occurred to this day. At that time some Adventist families remained living on campus, and Pastor Virgilio Zaldivar became their spiritual leader.⁵¹ Many of them left with the passage of time, and the buildings deteriorated. Currently the Cuban Union retains the documents of ownership for four of the houses on the old college campus. In addition, the authorities promised the church verbally that they would return the old chapel of the college.⁵² As can be noted, during the month of February 1967, the operation of this institution of education gradually ceased. For several decades the Adventist Church has wanted to reclaim the place, but this matter continues to be on hold.

The final act of intervention in the Cuban Adventist Seminary, then located on the former site of Antillian College Cuba, had immediate and harmful effects for the church. Many houses of both students and professors were lost. The freedom to worship in their chapel was lost, and the chapel was tainted with cigarette smoke and coffee. The whole school campus was lost except for a very few houses, the academic records, and most of the books in the library. Overall, it is estimated that the loss ran to the equivalent of one million pesos.⁵³ In a word, the church in Cuba lost its center for higher education.

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