

FRANK PAÍS

FRANK PAÍS
ARCHITECT OF CUBA'S
BETRAYED REVOLUTION

José Álvarez, PH.D.



Universal-Publishers
Boca Raton

Frank País: Architect of Cuba's Betrayed Revolution

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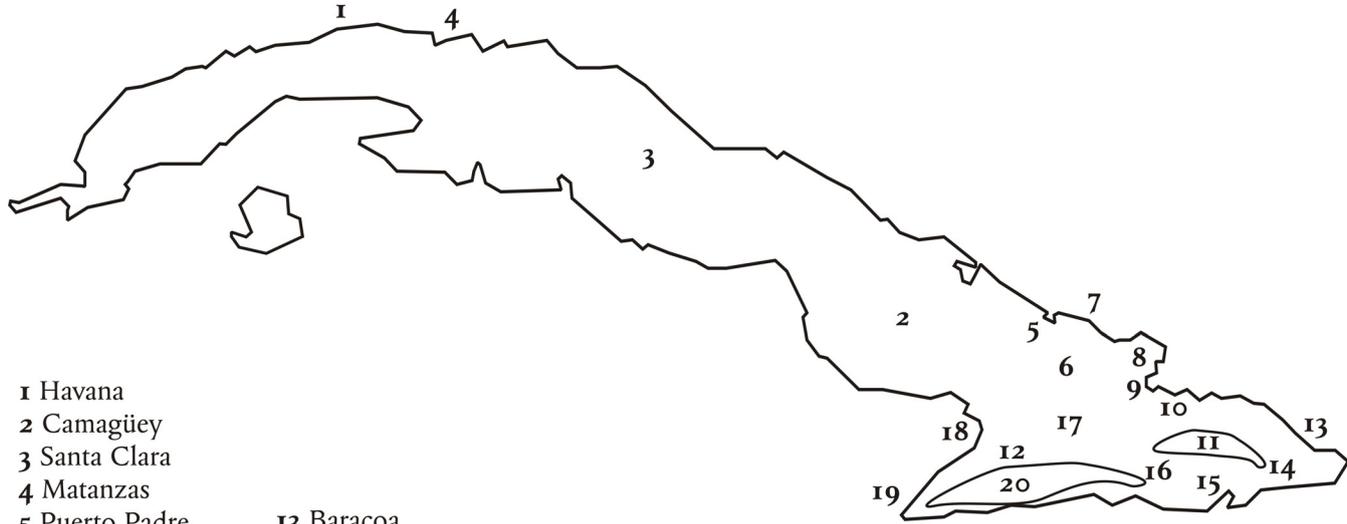
To all Cubans who have given up their lives
for a free, democratic, just and prosperous Cuba,
hoping that their dream will soon become a reality

... and sure that he would die before seeing the revolution.
André Malraux, *The Human Condition* (1936)



There is always something more to every Cuban story.
Leland H. Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony* (1928)

CUBA



- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Havana | |
| 2 Camagüey | |
| 3 Santa Clara | |
| 4 Matanzas | |
| 5 Puerto Padre | |
| 6 Holguín | 13 Baracoa |
| 7 Gibara | 14 Guantánamo |
| 8 Banes | 15 Santiago de Cuba |
| 9 Antilla | 16 Palma Soriano |
| 10 Mayarí | 17 Bayamo |
| 11 Sierra Cristal | 18 Manzanillo |
| 12 Sierra Maestra | 19 Niquero |
| | 20 La Plata |

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PREFACE



Frank País—“the unforgettable Frank País,” as his comrades called him—was a rare soul. . . Frank País was truly “unforgettable”—a superior human being, whose death was the greatest single loss during the pre-revolutionary struggle.

Herbert L. Matthews (1970: 114)

País is immeasurably less known today than Che Guevara but in many ways he was the most extraordinary leader of the 26th of July, other than Fidel himself.

Georgie Anne Geyer (1991: 141)

Frank País [was] the most important figure to emerge from the Baptist churches of Cuba during the 1950s and as a leading figure in the liberation struggles that were so conspicuous a feature of the twentieth century throughout the world.

Paul R. Dekar (2002: 391-392)

In the hot afternoon of July 30, 1957, my friend Eduardo and I were walking to an important meeting with the leaders of a powerful labor union in our hometown of Antilla, on the northern coast of Cuba's easternmost province. Frank País, the top leader of the 26th of July Movement, had sent instructions to our cell to contact all syndicates in preparation for an upcoming general strike he was organizing against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. There were four labor unions along Martí Street, all on the opposite sidewalk we were walking on. We had already reached an agreement with all the organizations but one. The leaders of the fourth Union had to consult with their bosses in Havana. The reason: they were militants of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), the name of Cuba's Marxist-Leninist political party at that time.

The strategic significance of that group for the strike to succeed in a town with intense seaport movement had not been overlooked by País. If the local chapter of the National Maritime Workers Federation (FOMN) followed the call to strike, the merchant vessels could not be loaded with sugar; thus, the economic and political impacts would be significant.

The workers were relaxing on the porches of the four Unions. Music from a couple of radio stations located out of town came through the speakers installed outside. We decided to cross in a corner with a double intersection,

facing one of the Unions, about 25 meters away from our objective. Right in the middle of the street the music stopped and the beep announcing important news was heard. The newscaster of Santiago de Cuba's CMKC radio station read the news with a heartbreaking tone in his voice: "Minutes ago, the leader of the 26th of July Movement Frank País was killed during a shoot-out with police on the streets of Santiago de Cuba... We will continue informing you." The announcement of hardly 25 words impacted us in a way hard to describe. I had to secure Eduardo's arm for he was almost fainting. Everybody was watching us. They knew we were involved in the Movement. A few gestures of solidarity came out of some of the workers as we continued to our meeting place. To our surprise, when we were entering the porch, more than a dozen men stood up to show their respects for our dead leader. It was a scene very difficult to forget. Dockers who had spent a great deal of their lives carrying heavy sacs of sugar on their backs and shoulders, weather-beaten men, were showing their solidarity to the two 16-year old kids arriving. It was very hard to believe that those men could identify Frank País, who had used different pseudonymous until that day: Salvador, David and Cristián. But they did!

Exuperancio Espinosa, general secretary of the Union and of the PSP, came to welcome us when we were inside the modern building. He expressed his sympathy and led us to the office where three more leaders were waiting. More condolences were followed by the same negative obtained days before. The armed struggle was against the line of their Party, they said. The communists believed in a mass movement that would overthrow the regime, although they were still open to a negotiated solution with the dictator. It was the same reply the PSP had given Frank País when he knocked on their door on the eve of the uprising of November 30 of the previous year. Eight months later, with his body still on the street, the communists were providing the same excuse. Two years later, they would be the beneficiaries of the new political order imposed by Fidel Castro without their support.

The pain felt that Tuesday cannot be described. It still hurts. For that to happen, that person must have been a very special individual.

A Brief Introduction to the Hero

Those not familiar with the history of Cuba during the 1950s must be asking themselves who was and what Frank País represented. His name has appeared in some magazines and newspapers in some countries. His importance, however, demands a more thorough and deeper narrative.

Frank Isaac País García was born in Santiago de Cuba, on December 7, 1934, in the bosom of a Christian family. His parents were the Reverend Francisco País, Baptist Pastor, and his mother Rosario García. He was the first of three boys. Agustín came thirteen months later, and Josué was born three years after Frank. The father died when Frank had just turned five years old.

Since the income of the household was not enough to pay for an Architecture career, Frank decided to go for his other vocation and applied to the local

Teacher School. He obtained first place in the entrance exams. He knew how to combine his studies with fun activities and his duties in the church. He had a passion for music, reading, painting, and was attracted by nature to the point of organizing frequent excursions to nearby beaches and countryside. At an early age, he practiced friendship and, despite his strong character, was very popular among his classmates.

The *coup d'état* of March 10, 1952, found a 17-year old Frank in the last year of his teaching career. His classmates had been electing him to different offices of increasing responsibilities in the student association until he obtained its presidency. He would devote the next five years and four months of his life entirely to the cause Cuba's freedom. He conspired, founded two organizations, led student demonstrations, wrote and distributed pamphlets, executed sabotages, went to jail; that is, he lived entirely devoted to the ideal of making a free, just and prosperous Cuba.

When the veterans of the Moncada attack founded the 26 of July Movement in mid-1955, they knew that Frank País had to be the first to be recruited. At 20, Frank had already organized two subversive groups in Oriente province and other parts of the island. An emissary was sent from Havana to talk to País. Despite what appears in several sources, the decision was not made suddenly. One of the witnesses affirms that it was not until after the second meeting with the emissary—one month after Castro's departure for Mexico—that Acción Nacional Revolucionaria joined forces with the 26 of July. He also reveals the existence of negotiations, pointing out that "still unknown, are the discussions and the conditions and capitulations he imposed previously." (Ibarra 2004: 111). That means that Frank pondered a lot, and it is not known what or how much he negotiated, and it is then that he decides to take the step and he tells his followers: "now we are 26 of July." He gave up his teaching job and devoted all his time to organize an uprising that would allow Castro's expedition from Mexico to land safely in Oriente's western coast. Frank traveled around the country establishing new cells and restructuring old ones, acquiring weapons and ammunitions, reinforcing the essential structure of the clandestine apparatus he had already established, a Movement of a magnitude never seen before in Cuban history. No one had doubts about his caliber as a leader.

He met with Fidel Castro twice in México. In their last meeting, he told him that their forces neither in Cuba nor in Mexico were ready for action and that they should postpone the events. Castro did not accept it and Frank returned to Santiago to fulfill his part of the plan. The uprising took place on November 30, 1956, mainly in Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo, although scattered actions took place in other parts of the country. Frank was at the top of the leadership in the central command post. His two brothers were also taking part as members of two different commandos. The uprising was a success, despite some unplanned inconveniences and the death of three of the best men during the attack to the main police headquarters. The city was in the

hands of the revolutionaries for more than one day, but the landing took place two days later. The jails were filled with revolutionaries; the majority of Castro's men in the landing were shot, murdered or taken prisoners. Victory seemed farther away than ever. Again, Frank País took charge of the situation and decided to carry on his shoulders the task of keeping alive the small guerrilla force, reorganizing the Movement, establishing a new oriental guerrilla front, pushing the propaganda, finance, and sabotage campaigns at the national level. From the Boniato Prison where he was detained after the events of November 30, he continued directing each and all of the Movement's activities. When he was found not guilty, he went into a total clandestine life, as well as Agustín and Josué. Doña Rosario misses, but supports them. The work load increased and so did the danger. The houses to hide him start to become scarce and the repressive forces were getting closer to him.

On June 30, 1957, in an action where his two brothers participated, Frank received the news that Josué had died in a police shootout. He was 19. Thirty days later, Frank was taken by surprise while the police was searching the neighborhood where he was hiding, and murdered along Raúl Pujol, the person who was hiding him. It is then that an unusual event took place, an event that reflects the greatness of the young man who had died at 22 at the top of the revolutionary organization he himself had developed and led. The businesses and homes across Santiago de Cuba closed their doors and almost the entire city marched on foot behind the caskets of País and Pujol to the "Saint Ifigenia" cemetery. Rosario García was leading the procession. The people who lived those times have never forgotten him. They call him "unforgettable Frank." Others remember him as Salvador, David, or Cristián, his names in the underground.

Shortly after his death, one of his closest comrades in the National Directorate of the 26 of July Movement, who has remained in top positions in the Cuban government during these fifty years, wrote a brief biographical sketch from which we reproduce a few excerpts: "Frank País assumed with rigor the revolutionary leadership... Frank País led in Cuba from his hideout in Santiago de Cuba... The creative character of that strategy and creator of that organization was Frank País" (Hart Dávalos 1998: 217-218).

Reasons for Writing this Book

Many readers must be asking themselves: "Why writing this book now? The "why" and the "now" are very legitimate inquiries and we intend to provide answers right up front, before finding the many explanations contained in the text of the book itself.

While almost nothing has been printed outside Cuba, the Cuban government has produced tons of paper dealing with some aspects of the life, work, and death of Frank País. However, they have not presented the entire truth, and it can be proven as follows:

- The ultimate goal of most of the material published so far is not to tell the facts as they really happened, but to make Fidel Castro and his closest unconditional followers look good. It follows that the role of Frank País is severely diminished in order not to overshadow Castro's. Writers and reporters have hid, twisted, distorted, concealed, misled, blurred, contradicted, and lied outright to fulfill that goal. The pages of this book are full of revelations that back up that charge.
- Historians on the island have followed the old Soviet Union's methodology where the future was known and the only thing that changed constantly was the past. In that process of changing the past, they have worsened their case, as will be shown in this book.

Why now?

One has to recognize that, for many decades, the world did not want to listen to the clamor of Cuban exiles. A book like this one would have fallen on deaf ears. Second, year after year, especially after the protagonists of the insurrection who remained in Cuba retired from their positions in the armed forces or the civilian government and started writing their memoirs, new sources of information became available. Checking and cross-checking those official sources have provided valuable materials that the reader will have the opportunity to evaluate. A third reason is that, on occasion of the 50th anniversaries of the uprising of November 30, 1956, and the assassination of Frank País on July 30, 1957, the Cuban regimen made a tremendous effort to increase the information available to the new generations, information that has become less and less closer to the truth. Those three reasons have mainly determined the timing of the writing and publication of this book.

Unveiling the Story of the True Leader

This is an untold story of the Cuban insurrection. Why untold? Simply, because the writers in Cuba are not free to tell the truth for their writing's ulterior motive is to serve the regime. In addition to the manipulation of known events, there are many others that still remain in the shadow, unknown by current but also past generations of Cubans, the people of the world who have been fed the official interpretation of the history during the period 1952-1959. Frank País was not only the chief of action of the 26 of July Movement but also the top leader of its National Directorate. For those reasons, the use of "untold" is a legitimate claim when referring to the story contained in these pages.

Perhaps the word "unavailable" can be used as a synonymous in this context. The books published in Cuba in the past few years, despite the fanfare of their announcement, are simply not available to the general population. Their print runs are just a couple of hundred or a little more, intended for distribution to friends and the regime's inner circle. To the fact that previous publications are not available, are out of print, and the new ones are handed to selected people, one can suspect that the Cuban government wants to pose as honoring Frank País to the world while they hide him from the Cuban youth.

Despite the apparent increase in the number of titles in the last few years, one can state categorically that these books **are not available to the public**, despite the fact that they do not contain critiques to the regime. The reason must be that the government does not want to provide the new generations with the figure of a Frank País, his example, his life, his dreams for a new Cuba, because it could become the paradigm of the youth's continuation of the struggle for which Frank País and so many others gave up their lives.

This recent avalanche of books—even in small quantities—could be the regime's reaction to the proliferation of materials that young Cubans are accessing, sometimes illegally, through the Internet.

Finally, “untold” has another dimension. Most people in Cuba ignore the fact that the País brothers were three, not two. The “missing” brother in the official texts (referred to as “traitor” or “left the country” in the few instances he has been included), also played an important role in Cuba's insurrection. The flagrant omission has been condemned by a foreign writer, frequent visitor to the island and author of a País' biography. Says he:

Agustín [País] is completely absent in the writings about Frank País. I consider that to be unjust. The measuring up of his personality far exceeded that of his own life... At a time when the information explosion watches the profiles of the past, this biography of Frank would be incomplete if I excluded his brother Agustín. It can be possible that a writer's skill could be better measured by his ability to omit, but that is to insult History. (Monroy 2003: 147-148)

For that very same reason, Agustín País has finally decided to set the record straight. The second son of Francisco País and Rosario García, who fought alongside his brothers since March 10, 1952, militant of the 26 of July Movement who was appointed by Frank as chief of action in the province of Oriente, has provided valuable information. Readers will know that the truth is not what the Cuban regime has been telling until now. I have also obtained the testimonies of participants in the underground and armed actions of Santiago de Cuba. They can speak freely, without pressure, and have done so to expose the true, hidden story, of the architect of Cuba's betrayed revolution under whom they served to later see their dream stolen by a foreign ideology so far away from Frank's conception about the new republic he wanted to build. In that sense, this book rescues Frank País from Cuba's oblivion.

There is another, equally powerful, reason to present this story to the world. In many countries, especially among the youth, persists the belief that Cuba was freed from the chains of a tyranny because of the leadership of two men the propaganda has turned into mythological figures: Ernesto Guevara and Fidel Castro.

The readers must now understand the reasons for the use of the words “true leader” and “unveiling the story”, or rescuing País from Cuba's oblivion. The Cuban people, and the rest of the world, will know the real story of the Cuban revolutionary, a paradigm for the youth of his country and the rest of the world.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

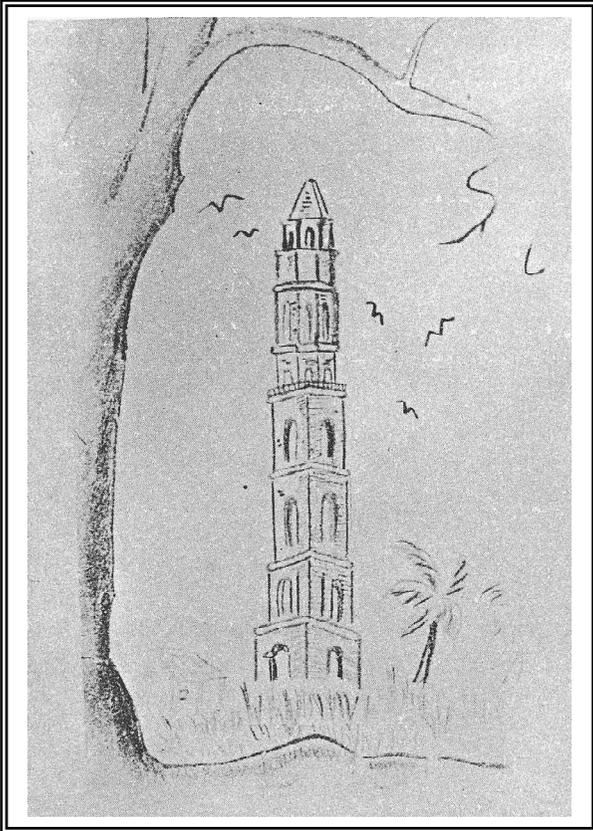
The contributions to this effort went well “beyond the call of duty.” For one or more reasons I am in debt with Eugenio Aguilera, Ariel Arias, Roberto Balbis, Patricia Baloyra, Ernesto Betancourt, José Cervera, Ivonne Danger, Tania de la Nuez, Melinda Esquibel, Alejandro Fernández, Federico Fernández, Remigio Fernández, Jorge Gómez, Teresa González, G.B. Hagelberg, Ana Elba Morales, Luis Pedrón, José Pujol, José Antonio and Carmelina Roca, Roberto Roca, Loida Romero, Marta San Martín, Bilín Santa Cruz Pacheco, Ramón Valdés, and many others that escape my memory.

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My deepest gratitude to Agustín País, who asked me one day to write this beautiful and sad story. Despite the expected emotional burden, and a surprising collateral problem, the task brought me the peace of knowing that Frank’s true story will remain alive long after we are gone.

Thanks also to Jeff Young and the staff at Universal Publishers, especially Christie Mayer for her continuous support with the editorial and formatting aspects of the manuscript and Shereen Siddiqui for developing an excellent cover for the book.

Finally, I recognize that I have abused my family’s tolerance, especially my wife’s Mercy, and I apologize without making any promises about my new book in progress.



SECTION I

**THE STORY
OF THE MAN
AND THE
LEGEND**

CHAPTER I



THE PAÍS-GARCÍA FAMILY: FROM GALICIA TO DESTINY IN SANTIAGO DE CUBA

*When the moon has risen full I'm off to Santiago de Cuba,
off to Santiago
in a wagon of black water...
Oh, Cuba, curve of sigh and clay!
I'm off to Santiago.*
Federico García Lorca, "Sound of the Cuban Negroes" (1930)¹

The Historical Setting

The story written on these pages took place in the city of Santiago de Cuba, the capital of Cuba's eastern-most province, Oriente.² *Santiagueros* are proud of their enclave, their cultural heritage, their patriotism. They say that Santiago de Cuba is the city of history, and that Santiago is in all Cuba and all Cuba is in Santiago. Such attitude sometimes attracts criticisms and accusations of a parochial chauvinism, but nothing is farther from the truth. To understand *santiagueros* one needs to know their city first. The three País brothers were born and raised in that city, and it is in the heart of the city where we can find explanations for many of the historical facts contained in this book. Cubans, and foreign visitors alike, agree on that Santiago is "different" than other Cuban cities, and indeed it is.

Santiago de Cuba was founded by Diego Velázquez in 1515, hardly two decades after the island was discovered by Christopher Columbus. Hernán Cortés was appointed its first mayor. After the drastic reduction of the aboriginal population, Santiago received waves of black slaves from Hispaniola. The early mix of races gave the city a character that would last to these days. Santiago turned and remained *mulatta*. As a seaport, she was the target of numerous attacks by corsairs and pirates, which forced the neighbors to defend themselves and fight back—as they did when they attacked British settlements in the Caribbean—that won them the recognition of the Spanish crown granting the city the title of "very noble and very loyal." Santiago was the country's capital until the middle of the XVI Century. Its special character was reinforced at the end of the XVIII Century when a new wave of immigrants came to the

city. This time they were Haitian-French refugees escaping from the slave uprising in their country. Along with the reinforcement of the crossing of races, they brought their artistic styles, their culture, and refinement. The wars against Spanish colonialism came later, and the city contributed rivers of blood, sacrifices, heroes and martyrs.

Walking on the streets of this city one can find the preserved houses of the local heroes who fought in the wars for independence and who rose to the highest ranks in the liberation army. The city gave birth to hundreds of musicians, poets, writers, engineers, novelists, singers, educators, orchestras, philosophers, painters, and representatives of all other facets of the sciences, the humanities and the arts. The “Bacardi Museum” stands as a symbol of their culture.

In the outskirts of the city one can find the most important places of the ending war for independence. The San Juan Hill, the fort El Viso, and their surroundings, witnessed Spain’s last futile efforts to keep their only remaining and most precious colony in the new world. Not far from there, a mere six kilometers away, stands the village of El Caney, famous for what *Santiagueros* claim are the most delicious tropical fruits in the world, that also witnessed many of the events contained in this book. But the patriotism of *Santiagueros* did not stop with the birth of the Republic. The city was always ready to fight any attempt at disrupting the Republic installed in 1902. Always watching, constantly fighting, ready to take up arms in defense of their beloved country and city. They were part of a political culture of violence inherent to most Cubans. Solving political problems by means other than civic dialogue had become an important part of Cuba’s history. Mother Nature has contributed to that culture in the sense that Oriente province, and especially Santiago de Cuba, experiences sporadic land tremors unknown in the rest of the island.³ *Orientales* and *Santiagueros* proudly state that their land has to shake because their inhabitants do not do so.

Heroism and hospitality are two terms associated with this city, where neighbors share what they have with visitors, where one can find homes that are always ready to receive an outsider with open arms. Santiago de Cuba is the city where, come carnival time, everybody puts everything aside to go about the streets to share and to love, to have a good time, and to thank those who gave birth to their most important event of the year. Their carnival goes back to a procession that came out of the Cathedral on the festivity of St. James, the patron of the village, at the end of the xvii Century. From the rural areas came the African slaves to pay their respects to their masters and to the civil and religious authorities. Due to the colored clothes they wore, they were called the festivities of the masks or *mamarrachos*. The early religious event turned into a pagan holiday with the passage of time. Santiago’s carnival takes place in the cradle of the rum and the *son* during the festivity of Saint Ann in the month of July.

In the xix Century, José Martí called her “untiring Santiago” to denote the constant comings and goings of hard-working people. That was the city

where Francisco País Pesqueira and Rosario García Calviño decided to join their lives in holy matrimony the year 1927, holding the ceremony the 27th of October in the neighboring village of El Cristo, exactly twenty years after Francisco had disembarked in Cuba for the first time. How they got to that point in their lives is not very simple to tell.⁴

The País-García Couple: A World Apart of Similarities

The bride and the groom had many things in common but grew apart as if they were not intended for one another. What some people call destiny, and others Divine Providence, was going to play its role in bringing them together.

Their first—and only bond for a very long time—was that Francisco and Rosario were both born in the town of Marín, located in the northwestern province of Pontevedra in Galicia, Spain, but 37 years apart! Francisco, in 1862. Rosario, in 1899. Rosario was raised in a family of the Evangelical faith and was baptized at 16. Francisco visited an evangelical chapel for the first time when he was 19, and was converted and baptized at 20, both in the same church.

The Spain of the second half of the XIX Century was dominated by Catholicism. Those called “Protestants” at that time did not suffer official persecution but outright discrimination. Taking advantage of the relative religious tolerance of the first Republic in 1873, allowing schools of denominations other than the official one, Francisco País and other members of his community decided to establish a school for the children of their faith. Without a formal degree, but with a better academic background than most of the rest, Francisco was appointed teacher of the new school in Santo Tomé, being transferred later to the school in Marín, where he stayed until 1907. He also started teaching night school, and would go around the countryside preaching the word of the Lord.

Francisco met a girl seven years younger than him in his church some time later. The marriage between Francisco and María de los Dolores Rodríguez Fernández took place on May 4, 1899. Nine months later, their daughter Sara was born. She was given the name of Abraham’s wife. Baptized at 13, she was sent to Madrid the next year to start her high school studies at the International Institute.

The couple País-Rodríguez made a crucial decision in 1907. They wanted to expand their horizons and Cuba appeared to be a good place to continue their teaching of the Gospel to more receptive ears. The Spanish-Cuban war had ended a decade before and the country was independent since 1902. When País and his wife disembarked in Havana in 1907, he must have remembered that his father Agustín País had done so before as a member of the Spanish Army, and had performed an act of war for which he received a medal and a modest monthly pension he started collecting after his return to Marín.⁵

After spending a few days in Havana, the couple departed for Oriente, covering the 1,000 kilometers separating Havana from Santiago de Cuba. The