

From the Archives: A. A. Allen in Cuba (From the Carver Healing Collection)

One of the most fascinating collections in the archives of B.L. Fisher Library is the Carver Healing Collection, which encompasses a large amount of material on various Pentecostal healing ministries, primarily from 1955 to 1994. One of the largest segments of this collection is devoted to the work of Asa Alonso Allen (1911-1970), a controversial figure in the faith healing movements of the 1950's and 1960's.¹ Born in poverty in Sulphur Rock, Arkansas, he was converted by a woman evangelist in a small Methodist church in 1934 and went on to be ordained in the Assemblies of God as a pastor in 1936.² By 1947 he was pastor in an Assemblies of God church in Corpus Christi, Texas. After hearing Oral Roberts speak in a Dallas tent meeting and seeing the miracles that occurred, he left the pastorate for full-time evangelism. He purchased a large tent and proceeded to hold tent revivals and healing services around the country. Allen mentored both R.W. Shambach and Don Stewart, and was connected early on to Gordon Lindsay's Voice of Healing movement.



A.A. Allen (right) preaching, with Luis M. Ortiz, translating, in Cuba

In 1955, A.A. Allen was arrested for drunken driving in Knoxville, Tennessee. He ended up leaving the state and forfeiting his bail instead of standing trial, although he held that he was innocent and that the devil was trying to destroy his ministry. The Assemblies of God and Gordon Lindsay withdrew their support of Allen. Allen formed his own ministry, Miracle Revival Fellowship, and began publishing *Miracle Magazine*, often calling on Pentecostal churches to be independent of denominations.³ He purchased the revival tent used by Jack Coe after Coe's death in 1956 and ultimately founded A. A. Allen Revivals, Inc. and Miracle Valley Bible College in Phoenix, Arizona. These ministries were quite successful during his life, and as a result A. A. Allen took his revival and healing work abroad, making regular trips to Cuba and Mexico, as well as the Philippines.

The photographic images in this article are from an early revival A.A. Allen held in Cuba, probably in 1956 or early 1957. Many of these images were probably taken in Santiago de Cuba, where A.A. Allen established a revival center led by pastor Luis M. Ortiz of the Iglesia Cristiana Pentecostal de Cuba. By 1958, Allen had established a radio network throughout Cuba with 11 radio stations, 25 new church plants, 40 national workers, and five radio programs including *La Hora de Liberación*, the Spanish version of Allen's *The Hour of Deliverance* program which aired all over the United States.⁴ Ortiz and another pastor, Jose Montalvo, were involved in Allen's Spanish ministry in Cuba from as early as 1954, and together opened the Santiago Revival



Cuban Crowd at an A.A. Allen Revival

Center in 1956, although Ortiz also spent time in Venezuela and in Dallas, Texas working on the Spanish language tapes of *La Hora de Liberación*. Before the opening of the Revival Center, Ortiz made the broadcasts for the show from the church he pastored in Santiago.⁵ While Cuba was the first and primary focus of A.A. Allen's Spanish language ministry, he also broadcast programs in Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Chile, as well as broadcasting into Spain from Morocco, since the Spanish government would not allow Allen to preach in Spain.⁶

Allen appears to have been deeply committed to Spanish language ministry, as his only daughter Mary, and her husband Daniel G. Smith, were sent as the first missionaries of the Miracle Revival Fellowship to Mexico in 1959, and later Venezuela.⁷ But Cuba was Allen's first and largest outreach in the Hispanic world. He did this at a very tricky time politically, after Batista came to power in a coup in 1952, but before Castro took power on January 1, 1959. During most of Allen's Spanish language ministry in Cuba, the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) was in progress. A.A. Allen's last revival in Cuba was actually held in April of 1959 (just months after Castro came to power), when Spanish-speaking pastors from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Florida came with Allen. In the report on this revival, *Miracle Magazine* reported, "Revolutionary soldiers, wearing beards and carrying long rifles, reminded us that although the revolution was 'over,' it was not forgotten!"⁸



Advertising an Allen Revival in Cuba

The last report on Cuba is from the August 1959 issue of *Miracle Magazine*, and sounds as if everything is normal. *Miracle Magazine* becomes silent on Cuba until October of 1960, when Cuba's fall to Communism is cited as the reason to begin a revival campaign in Haiti to preach the Gospel, because, "Next year may be too late!"⁹ Spanish language ministry shifted to Venezuela following a revival there with pastor Luis G. Goldona and his brother Oscar in January of 1961.¹⁰ It is interesting to note, that while *Miracle Magazine* does not report on Cuba again, or the situation following the Communist Revolution for the ministry left in Cuba, the magazine itself goes from articles primarily devoted to healings and miracles, to consistently having at least one lengthy article in each issue devoted to promoting anti-communistic ideas or warning of communist plots in the United States. Clearly the effect of Allen's ministry in Cuba had a powerful influence on his own views on ministry in general.



An A.A. Allen Revival in Cuba, the 1950s

A. A. Allen's ministry stretched far beyond his Spanish-language work. He was one of the first healing revivalists to go on television, was an early proponent of what would become the Prosperity Gospel, and was seen by many as a slick con artist. However, he also was one of the first to desegregate revival meetings, was a strong advocate for the poor, and led thousands to Christ and an experience with the Holy Spirit. He critiqued denominations for relying more on Sunday Schools than converting people at the altar for their growth, and left a legacy of faith healing and revivalism in many different parts of the world.



A.A. Allen Healing People in Cuba

The death of A.A. Allen was as controversial as his life. He was found dead in front of a television set in the Jack Tar Hotel in San Francisco, California at age 59. His blood alcohol level was .36 according to the coroner and numerous pain pills were found with him.¹¹ Supporters claim that he was trying to deal with the pain of arthritis in his knee, while others, including the coroner, attribute his death to liver failure due to acute alcoholism.



Cuban Woman in Need of Healing

The rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America owes much to the work of Pentecostal evangelists and faith healers, such as A.A. Allen, and many others who are less well-known, who helped plant seeds of faith among the poor and marginalized of the region. Cuba has undergone a very rocky history in the twentieth century, but current statistics show that in a country of 11.26 million people, there are around 1.04 million Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Charismatics compared to 5.87 million Roman Catholics, and according to the reports they continue to be one of the fastest growing groups in Cuba, as in much of the rest of Latin America.¹² While modern Pentecostalism in Latin America can look very different from what A.A. Allen envisioned, it often still has a strong belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and bring miracles in the midst of daily life. A.A. Allen's life once again shows that even with the many flaws of human beings, God has a way of using all of those who strive to follow Jesus Christ.

The archives of the B.L. Fisher library are open to researchers and works to promote research in the history of Methodism and the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. Images, such as these, provide one vital way to bring history to life. Preservation of such material is often time consuming and costly but are essential to helping fulfill Asbury Theological Seminary's mission. If you are interested in donating items of historic significance to the archives of the B.L. Fisher Library, or in donating funds to help purchase or process significant collections, please contact the archivist at archives@asburyseminary.edu.

Endnotes

¹ All photographic images used courtesy of the Archives of the B.L. Fisher Library of Asbury Theological Seminary who own all copyrights to these digital images. Please contact them directly if interested in obtaining permission to reuse these images.

² Biographical information for this article comes from the B.L. Fisher archive material as well as the Miracle Valley website (<http://miraclevalley.org/aaallen.html>) and The Voice of Healing website (<http://www.voiceofhealing.info/05otherministries/allen.html>).

³ B.L. Fisher Library archives contains many issues of A.A. Allen's *Miracle Magazine*, and his other booklets and tracts, as well as copies of the legal documents and newspaper clippings from the DUI case in Knoxville.

⁴ See Luis M. Ortiz, "4 Years of Miracles: A Quick Work in Cuba" in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 3 (9), June 1958, page 9.

⁵ See anonymous, "New Revival Center Opens In Santiago de Cuba", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 1 (8), May 1956, page 18.

⁶ See anonymous, "La Hora de Liberacion", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 1 (7), April 1956, page 15, and anonymous, "Forward in Radio", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 1 (1), October 1955, pages 16-17.

⁷ See anonymous, "Missionary Night", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 4 (6), March 1959, page 18, anonymous, "Young Missionaries Face Persecution For the Gospel", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 5 (1), October 1959, page 10, and Daniel Smith, "Revival Fire Still Burning", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 7 (2), November 1961, pages 12-13.

⁸ See anonymous, "Miracle Revival Tent in Cuba", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 4 (9), June 1959, page 12.

⁹ See anonymous, "The Islands Call", in *Miracle Magazine*, vol. 6 (1), October 1960, pages 6-7.

¹⁰ There is a special missionary issue of *Miracle Magazine* covering the Venezuelan revival in vol. 6 (8) from May 1961.

¹¹ B.L. Fisher Library archives also contain a copy of the coroner's report, memorabilia from A.A. Allen's funeral and memorial service, as well as other newspaper clippings on his life and death.

¹² Statistics from the World Christian Database, retrieved September 11, 2013. To read more about the growth of Pentecostalism in Cuba see Nick Miroff's article, "Religion: Born Again in Cuba" from *The Global Post*, October 16, 2010, retrieved at: <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/cuba/101005/evangelical-christianity-pentecostal-church>.