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pronewsdesk exlionel martin (havana) re yr 311405 request by upi on new castro book, item follows. also expect to have pix within four or five hours.

fyi also sent a bylined 4 take major piece on the book +fidel and relgion+ via rtr lnd but that for reuter/not upi use. following is ans to 311405

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castro book on religion best seller in cuba:

havana, jan 4, reuter -- a quarter of a million copies of +fidel and religion+ (fidel y la religion) have been sold here since its publication last month and long lines form in front of bookstores for each succeeding edition.

the book is an interview with vvcuban president fidel castro by the 41 year old dominican priest, a firm believer in +liberation theology+ that some catholic churchmen claim is tainted with communist ideology.

the book ranges over a wide spectrum which include new insights into castro's education in catholic parochial schools, his views on relations between the church and state and his convictions on areas of cooperation between chirstians and communists.

both betto and castro coincide in affirming that the primary task of both christans and marxists in latin america is to battle for greater social justice. both believe that there is no inherent obstacle to greater collaboration between them and betto believes that a good christian is essentially a communist.

castro admits that +a certain form of subtle discrimination against chirstians exits in cuba.+ but he says it is neither +deliberate or programmed+ and that it should be eliminated. churchmen here declare that often cubans professing religious beliefs are denied job promotions.

in the interview, castro says that a visit by the pope to cuba +would do us honor+ but he insists that it +take place under appropriate circumstances so that it can be useful for the church and for our country and what we represent.+

during the past year, relations between the cuban government and organised reltion in cuba improved considerable according to both catholic and protestant clergymen here. the improvement began after a visit to cuba by a group of u.s. catholic bishops who held a long conversation with castro.

fxllowing the visit, castro upgraded the authority of the cuban communist party's religous affairs office putting it directly under his own jurisdiction. he also acceeded to a request by the biships to release 75 cuban political prisoners.

last september, castro held a meeting with all of cuba's bishops for the first time in twenty five years and also met with leading representatives of cuba's protestant churches.+

=-rtr/lem

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