

POPE RIGHT ON CUBA

President Obama made the right decision on Cuba. Kudos also to Pope Francis for working to break the stalemate between the United States and Cuba. While a lot of foolish things have been said by those on both sides of this issue, the fact is that the only losers in this gambit are the Communists in Cuba.

Cuba's economy is in deep trouble, and its patrons in Venezuela are in no position to help them. The amount of traffic that this opening will bring—look for hoards of Cubans and non-Cubans to line up for travel to Cuba—will ineluctably whet the Cuban appetite for more freedom. Once Cubans learn more about the lifestyle of their relatives in the U.S., and the freedoms they enjoy, they will press for more changes.

Economic liberty does not guarantee political liberty, but it does work to undermine the forces of repression. More important than markets is the exchange of ideas that this rapprochement will bring. And no idea is more threatening to a dictatorship than liberty. While no one expects a Jeffersonian democracy to appear overnight, historically these kinds of thaws work to undermine the tyrants. Given the proximity of the two nations, the vector of change will move more quickly toward freedom.

Ever since Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998, the Catholic Church has been gaining more breathing room there. The recent decision by the Cuban government to allow Cubans from Tampa, Florida to fund the construction of a Catholic Church on the island is a good omen. There will be more such opportunities. As with economic liberty, religious liberty also works to facilitate political liberty.

Fidel Castro was a wealthy man who did more to punish the poor than any of his predecessors. A true Communist—he once begged

Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* to stop calling him an agrarian reformer and start labeling him a Communist—he is the ultimate loser in this development.