“Liborism” is a form of folk Catholicism which developed in the interior southwest region of the Dominican Republic during the early twentieth century. It is based on the devotion to Olivorio Mateo “Liborio” (1876-1922), a miraculous folk healer whose leadership arose at the time of transition between pre-capitalistic and capitalistic society and who became the most important messianic leader in Dominican history. His devotees consider Liborio an incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The video documentary situates the rise of a messianic leader in the area which, not coincidentally, was the political and spiritual center of the island during pre-conquest Taíno times. It traces the development of “Liborism” from both socioeconomic and spiritual perspectives. The work includes its resurgence in the Palma Sola Movement during the early 1960s, a rural Christian commune which developed at another tumultuous time in Dominican history: following the assassination of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo and the end of his 31-year dictatorship. Like Liborio and his followers in the 1920s, the Palma Sola Movement came to a tragic end at the hands of the military. The work features testimonials from family, friends, and devotees of Liborio about his life, death, and practices. These include statements from a daughter and from the living remaining leader of the Palma Sola Movement.

The work also includes extensive examples of the music associated with “Liborism,” past and present: Salves (the sung Salve Regina prayer), palos (long-drums), and the Comarca—the accordion music (a derivative of the carabiné social-dance music) with which Liborio performed his healing.

The documentary suggests that the persecution by both Church and state has lessened today due to a greater respect for this homegrown folk religion and its tenacious followers. In fact, the production itself of the video is an initiative of the Dominican minister of culture. But the work concludes by arguing that, since the marginalization of the peasantry of the southwest has still not been rectified, active, militant “Liborism” could well resurge again.

The video is directed by anthropologist/ethnomusicologist Martha Ellen Davis, produced by Miguel Fernández, and edited by Arturo Guzmán. It was premièred at the Cinemateca Nacional in Santo Domingo on June 22nd, 2003.

**Video content in order**

**Introduction:**

Don José Mateo, great nephew of Liborio and custodian of “La Agüita de Liborio” (Liborio’s Spring) in El Naranjo, above Maguana Arriba, San Juan de la Maguana, says: “Liborio was the chosen one to speak the word of Christ”
Video documentary, Dominican Republic “Papá Liborio”  

I.

**Music:** Drums of the Holy Spirit (of the largest Afro-Dominican religious brotherhood in the country), whose center is the rural area of El Batey, about 18 kms. northeast of the town of San Juan de la Maguana. This drumming style was central to Liborio’s musical milieu. Views of drum dance, El Batey, the doll representing the patron saint (Holy Spirit). Drummer: Don Andrés Medina, folk “missionary” of Liborio.

**History** of La Maguana as the political and ceremonial center of the island during pre-conquest Taíno times. It was also the area of the first Native-American opposition to the European conquest in the New World and likewise of the first African opposition.

**Conclusion:** “Thus we know that this land of Maguana had natural richness, religiosity and rebelliousness since the time of the Taínos.”

**Expert:** Dr. Jan Lundius, Swedish expert in religious studies, author of two books on the folk religion of the San Juan Valley and specifically Liborism. Reviews the historical background of the rise of Liborism during the early days of the Conquest.

The role of religious devotion in sustaining dwellers of the San Juan Valley. Includes three signs of the coming of a messiah: Halley’s Comet in 1910, an earthquake in 1911, and a civil war in 1912.

II.

**Mythology:** St. John the Baptist (San Juan Bautista) was believed to have appeared in Liborio’s Spring (*i.e.*, is the religious milieu in which he was raised), as king of the Indian deities who inhabit this sacred spring.

**Narrator:** Rise of religious leader: It is no surprise that a religious and rebel leader would arise in this same spot, an incarnation of Caonabo (the first Taíno rebel leader) and St. John the Baptist: a miraculous healer, the most important messianic leader of Dominican history.

**Mythology:** Selection of Liborio as incarnation of God/Christ: Don José Mateo, custodian of “La Agüita”: “God asked St. Anthony to go to earth and find someone in whom he could ‘put his word’ (encarnate). St. Anthony looked the whole world over and found no one. God said: ‘Look for him in the Middle of the World; that’s where he is. In our opinion, he chose Liborio.’”

**Expert:** Liborism: Prof. Lusitania Martínez, author of most important book on the Palma Sola Movement: *Palma Sola: opresión y esperanza* (opression and hope). Definition of Liborism.

**Expert:** Messianism: Prof. Lusitania Martínez. Definition of messianism.

**Historical milieu:** Liborism coincided with peasant rebel movements elsewhere in the island: los Gavilleros of the East, Desiderio Arias in the North, and Carlemagne Pèralte of the Cacos guerrilla movement in Haiti.
Liborio as messianic leader: Liborio offered a return to the idyllic state of equality, peace, and brotherly love.

Expert: Prof. Lusitania Martínez. Definition of the “natural state” desired.

Opposition to Liborio and his movement by the local business and intellectual elite of the time, as a threat to their interests.

Testimonies of the illiterate followers who, until now, have not had a voice:
1) Don Andrés Medina, “missionary” and drummer: Liborio was Christ himself. Everybody went to him and supported him because of his enlightenment.
2) Don Antonio Mateo, Liborist of Maguana Arriba: A lot of people went to him because he performed miracles.
3) Don Hermelio Luciano Encarnación, Protestant Liborist of Maguana Arriba: Liborio had great wisdom but we do not know whether human or divine.

Some of today’s local elite who give voice and do justice to Liborio:

Expert: Dr. Leopoldo Figuereo (lawyer, assistant District Attorney, San Juan de la Maguana, author: De Liborio a Palma Sola [From Liborio to Palma Sola].) Says that Liborio was the Dominican folkloric figure of the twentieth century because he was a pioneer in confronting injustices by the local elite who deceived the peasantry to get their land, and in opposing the First U.S. Occupation, 1916-22. Yet he was accused of promoting free love, while there are others who accused him who were local studs.

III.

At El Calvario, Maguana Arriba (upper Maguana), where Liborio was born: The custodian, Doña Reina, raises the flag with the national anthem, as she does every morning. Final part, translated: “And if we were to be enslaved a thousand times, we then must be free the same amount of times.”

Pilgrims arriving at the site to honor Liborio as a living saint. Received by Doña Reina, as their first sacred stop before proceeding to the sacred bath at the spring, La Agüita.

Personal history of Liborio, from unknown, uneducated agricultural laborer to spiritual leader:

He was lost in the mountains (Cordillera Central, Central Mountain Range – the highest in the Caribbean) during a storm for 3 or 7 days (testimonials vary), and thought dead. He reappeared speaking of prophecies and with powers of healing. People thought he was mad until they saw he had returned with a gift of healing and clairvoyance.

Testimonials of his disappearance and reappearance.
• Don José Mateo
• Doña Ventura Agramonte
Miracles when he returned:
• Don José Mateo: He was taken to the hills, and offered the power of “destroying the world and creating it again.” But he had to agree to the same Via Crucis of Christ: he had to be crucified too. He agreed to it all.
• His daughter, Carmela Mateo Valdez: He returned during the wake of his mother-in-law. He was going to revive her from the dead as his first miracle, had a relative followed his orders re: certain preparations. But since he did not, she could not be revived, and tears ran down the face of the dead woman. [Represents mythology developed in just one generation]

Miracles of healing the crippled and the blind.

His healing procedures and how people came from everywhere on mountain paths to reach him: Don Félix Caamaño, local Liborist researcher, San Juan de la Maguana

Prohibited from charging: Don José Mateo says that he was prohibited from making money for his services, and he warned his apostles of the same: “Everything of God is done for love, nothing for profit.”

Don Andrés Medina says that God is unhappy with the poor distribution of wealth today in the world. This must be clarified to the wealth, who “have the solution of the world in their hands”.

Liborio’s healing procedures illustrated at the sanctuary of Doña Reina at El Calvario; with his concluding statement: “Salga el mal y entre el bien” (Out with evil and in with good)

Music at El Calvario: “La Comarca”—the music with which Liborio healed (he had his own accordion); probably derived from the Carabiné (social dance music of the Southwest). Refrain: “Long live God and down with Evil.”

The assassination of Liborio (by the U.S. with Dominican army after some 5 years of tracking him)

The wake (taped: of Liborio’s last living friend) – as if of Liborio himself.

The economic scenario which led to his development as a peasant leader and threat to the powers-that-be, causing him to be killed.

Expert: Reasons for Liborio’s murder: Dr. Jan Lundius. The transition from a pre-capitalistic to capitalistic economy, represented by the measuring and fencing off lands which used to be communal, by the local elite, and the marginalization of the peasantry from the land. At the same time, the loans taken out by national president Ulises Heareaux (“Lilís”) to build railroads and ports, which could not be repaid, leading to the U.S. occupation of the Dominican custom houses and closing off of the Haitian border. This was distasteful to the peasantry of the central southwest, which traded with Haiti (Port-au-Prince was much closer and more accessible than was Santo Domingo). But the
The U.S. occupation of the customs houses, ca. 1905

Commerce by peasantry between San Juan and Haiti: Don Félix Caamaño, local researcher, San Juan de la Maguana

Support of Liborio by the peasantry: How Don Pedrito de los Santos, the last living friend of Liborio, was recruited to join and help him.


How Liborio got arms: from the local caudillo, Wensceslao Ramírez during the 1912 Civil War when Ramírez challenged the central government. Don Félix Caamaño.

How Liborio was persecuted—such as an effort to poison women with him. Don Félix Caamaño.

The last days of Liborio

Liborio’s assassination at the Hoyo del Infierno (Hell Hole)

• Don Félix Caamaño – States date of assassination as July 29, 1922 [error re: day]
• Statement by Don Mateo about the final entrapment where Liborio’s son was shot first and when Liborio returned for him, he was hunted down by the army sharpshooters.

IV.

Question: Was Liborio a rebel or a healer, or all of this and more?

Continued mystical manifestation of Liborio:
Scene of the Bosque de Liborio (Liborio’s Woods), a patch of virgen forest in the denuded mountains that cannot be cut down or injury, illness, or bad luck will disgrace whoever attempts to do so. Reverence of local guide at cross in the woods.

Devotion at La Agüita de Liborio (Liborio’s Spring), La Maguana Arriba – with its many activities: cleansing by holy waters, drum dancing, blessings.
• Blessing by Don Ernesto Manuel Jiménez – “missionary” at La Agüita
• Declaration in trance by Hernández, “missionary” and accordionist at El Calvario

Continued debate about the meaning of Liborio:
• The continued celebration of Liborio’s birthday in La Maguana, April 19th
• Don José Mateo: What does it mean that his tomb was empty the day after his burial? “If he had lived during the era of Christ, he would have been one of the greatest prophets.”
Video documentary, Dominican Republic “Papá Liborio”  

- Da. Ventura Agramonte: “Liborio is not dead; he is alive—he was sanctified by Christ and is alive!”
- Don Antonio Mateo - testimonial (well known) of Carmito Ramírez, surveyor and son of local caudillo Wenceslao Ramírez, about 1940 to the men in Maguana Arriba: that Carmito had placed a handkerchief on Liborio’s face at the time of burial, and that night Liborio appeared to him to return the handkerchief.
- Don Marcos Mateo - a couple of months ago a woman came to his door to deliver a message from Liborio: that he still lives; Marcos responds: “Tell Liborio that I am waiting for him.”

As they sing, a sequence of historical photographs of arrivals to and devotion in that Christian commune, and its destruction by the Dominican army in December, 1962.

Statement by the Mellizo, Don León Ventura: “I am Liborist since I was in my mother’s belly…” About all he and his family suffered. That the men of power (elite) hold the solution to poverty.
Second statement: Speaking with the voice of Liborio: calls for brotherly love “because we are all children of Adam and Eve.”
Third statement: Re: the authorities today are different (respect them) [although have not solved problem of poverty!]
He embraces the minister of culture, who arrives at El Calvario for a visit during the time of St. John the Baptist (June, 2002).

Expert: Could Liborism arise again? Prof. Lusitania Martínez: The division between formal and folk Catholicism has softened; there is more receptiveness by formal Catholicism.
But if the marginalization of the peasantry is not addressed, Liborism could rise again!

Musicians at La Agüita spring: Don “Américo the Musician” sings to long-drums: “In the Dominican nation…when Liborio returns, we don’t know how many followers there will be!…”

A return to Liborio’s wake (actually Liborio’s friend, Don Pedrito):
His spirit, possessing a family member, calls for “water!” (which blesses and spiritually cleanses)

Message for all, Liborio’s statement upon concluding a healing: “Salga el mal y entre el bien” (Out with evil and in with good).

Music: Concluding drumming: The “guaracha de Liborio”:
“They say Liborio is dead, but he is not dead at all…”*
Singer/drummer: Don Andrés Medina

[* Made commercially known by Luis Dias, who arranged it and changed the text]
Following credits (after coming out of trancelike state), singer/drummer Don Andrés reiterates Liborio’s messages of peace with justice: “Let’s love each other as brethren” and “Give bread to the hungry!”