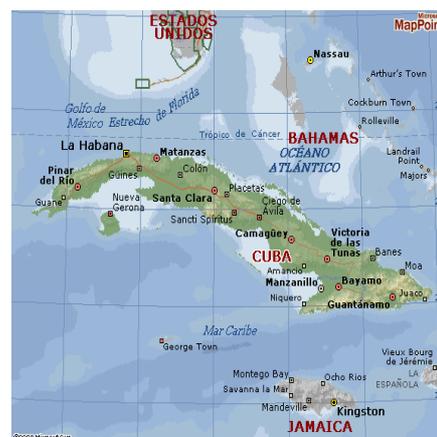


# Report of a Visit to some Christian Assemblies in Cuba 8-17 August 2012



Christopher Columbus visited the island of Cuba in 1492 on his first voyage. It came under Spanish rule for the next four centuries. For a short period it came under British rule, but in 1763 it was returned to Spain in exchange for the state of Florida. Cuba came under American rule after the Spanish-American war in 1898 and finally obtained its formal independence four years later. In 1959, after a successful revolution, it became an atheistic communist single-party state, a political arrangement with its advantages and disadvantages.



All Christian missionaries were expelled from Cuba in the early 1960's, and older Christians today still speak of those difficult years of persecution, prison and forced labour. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, Cuba's economy entered in crisis which they call "Período Especial." The standard of living of normal Cubans dropped drastically and the crisis continues to this day. There is much poverty on the island. Each family has a ration booklet in the kitchen, similar to those used in Europe during World War II. It allows them to purchase daily some basic food items at a cheap price. The rest they must grow themselves or purchase on the black market or from the recently legalized small home-businesses.



Probably due to this economic crisis, the Cuban government is becoming more flexible. For well over 10 years now, Christians are allowed to visit Cuba and teach God's Word. This freedom is respected in private homes and in officially registered religious

meeting places. It is forbidden elsewhere. Today there are about 25 Brethren assemblies in Cuba, the fruit of seeds sown by Canadian and Scottish missionaries. Since this recent opening, some assemblies in Spain have shown a consistent interest in supporting these assemblies and their workers. These also have received occasional visits and support from Germany, Switzerland, Honduras and Colombia.



Alex Gaviria, Roland Kühnke and I travelled to Havana, Cuba, from Colombia. It was my first visit. We had been invited by them in order to bring books and help with some Bible teaching.

Due to our lack of the required Religious Visa, half of our books were confiscated by customs on entering Cuba, and we were forbidden to speak in their meeting halls. After a night near Havana, we travelled east to Bayamo, 14 hours by bus along a fairly flat, hot and well paved road. A number of brothers and sisters were waiting for us and took us to Entronque, a small village, home to one of the older and larger assemblies in the region. During the following week we split the study group in 2 and taught morning and afternoon simultaneously in two houses. There is hunger for God's Word.



The social atmosphere in Cuba is definitely different from other Latin American countries. It is a calm land, no one seems to be in a hurry. Drugs and pornography are virtually unknown among the 11 million inhabitants on the island. A very high proportion of



young people have university or higher education. But there are few serious jobs for them. There is no commercial advertising on the streets, not even for Coca-cola! There are murals, but they display political statements or words of hope and encouragement from key state figures. Only the state has weapons. I have never felt so safe in Latin America as I travelled through markets, lonely roads or coming back from home visits late at night.

**Points for prayer?** We may thank the Lord for the warmth and hospitality of the brethren there, for their desire to learn and grow, for the new assemblies that have come into existence in the last few years. A number of them are involved in prison ministry and make use of Emmaus Bible courses. There is a fairly good organic networking among some of these assemblies. But there are also some serious leadership tensions which are currently causing pain and discouragement among many. May the Lord grant them the grace to accept their differences, to speak gently, humbly and truthfully with each other and to work in harmony



together building up the body of Christ. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! ... For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life for evermore" (Psalm 133:1,3). We all desperately need that divine blessing.

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29 August 2012