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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN CUBA**

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Religion in Cuba

Country Summary

The Socialist Republic of Cuba, known as “The Pearl of the Antilles,” is an archipelago composed of 3,715 islands (with an area of 109,866 square km) in the Caribbean Sea. The Island of Cuba (104,556 square km), the largest and westernmost island of the West Indies, has a length of almost 750 miles from east to west, and its width varies from 100 miles, at the eastern end, to 30 miles in the western region.

The main island consists mostly of flat to rolling plains, except for the Sierra Maestra mountain range in the southeast whose highest point is Pico Turquino at 1,975 meters (6,480 feet). The nation’s size, geographical position, large number of natural harbors, fertility of the soil and climate made it one of the most important countries in the New World during the Spanish colonial period.

Cuba was in Spanish pos-session for almost 400 years (1511-1898). Its economy was based on cattle-raising, plantation agriculture, mining and the export of sugar, coffee and tobacco to Europe and later to North America. The Spanish population was boosted by settlers leaving Haiti when that territory was formally ceded to France in 1697 by the Treaty of Ryswick. As in other parts of the Spanish Empire, the small land-owning elite of Spanish-descended settlers held social and economic power, supported by a population of Spaniards born on the island and called *criollos* by the Iberian-born Spaniards, other Europeans and African-descended slaves.

The national language is **Spanish**, which is characterized by “certain light local peculiarities of pronunciation,” due to the country’s origin and development as a Spanish colony. **Haitian Creole** is spoken by more than 300,000 Haitian immigrants. It is recognized as a language in Cuba and a considerable number of

Cubans also speak it fluently; a Haitian Creole radio station operates in La Habana. **Lukumi** is a secret language used for rituals by priests (*babalawos*) in the Santería religion. **English** is also widely spoken in major cities.

The population of Cuba has very complex origins and intermarriage between diverse groups is general. Immigration and emigration have had noticeable effects on the demographic profile of Cuba during the 20th century. Between 1900 and 1930 more than a million Spaniards immigrated to Cuba.

According to Cuba’s National Office of Statistics (*Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, ONE*), based on the results of the **2002 Census**, the Cuban population was 11,177,743. Officially, the racial make-up was 7,271,926 whites (65.1 percent); 1,126,894 blacks (10.1 percent); and



2,778,923 mulattoes and *mestizos* (24.9 percent). Cuba has a minority population of Asians, which compromise about one percent of the population. They are primarily of Chinese descent but also include Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans and Vietnamese, who are descendants of farm workers and laborers who built the railroads and worked in mines during the 19th and 20th centuries. After the Industrial Revolution, many of these laborers stayed in Cuba because they could not afford return passage to their homelands.

Chinese immigration to Cuba started in 1847 when Cantonese-speaking contract workers were brought to work in the sugar fields. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers were brought from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan during the following decades to replace and / or work alongside African slaves. After completing 8-year labor contracts or otherwise obtaining their freedom, some Chinese immigrants settled permanently in Cuba. Historically, Habana's Chinatown (known as *Barrio Chino de La Habana*) is one of the oldest and largest Chinatowns in Latin America. An estimated 5,000 Chinese immigrants from the U.S. came to Cuba during the late 1800s to escape from prevailing discrimination during that period. A small wave of Chinese immigrants also arrived during the early 20th century to escape the political chaos in China.

In December 2008, according to ONE, the resident population of Cuba was estimated at 11,237,000; it remains the most populous nation in the Caribbean. The capital is Ciudad de La Habana, the nation's largest city, with an estimated population of 2,150,000, which is 19.1 percent of the national population. The second-largest city is Santiago de Cuba (426,679), followed by Hollguín (276,956), Guantánamo (208,055) and Santa Clara (207,170).

Today, the country is divided politically into 15 provinces, which are: (1) Pinar del Río, (2) La Habana, (3) Ciudad de La Habana, (4) Matanzas, (5) Cienfuegos, (6) Villa Clara, (7) Sancti Spíritus, (8) Ciego de Ávila, (9) Camagüey, (10) Las Tunas, (11) Granma, (12) Holguín, (13) Santiago de Cuba, (14) Guantánamo and (15) Isla de la Juventud. Cuba's "special municipality" is the Isla de la Juventud ("Island of Youth"), known until the 1970s as the Isla de Pinos ("Isle of Pines") and previously as "Evangelista," "Isle of Santiago" and "Isle of Parrots." These 15 provinces were formerly part of six larger historical provinces: Pinar del Río, Habana, Matanzas, Las Villas, Camagüey and Oriente.

The 20th century was marked by the harsh dictatorship of General Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar (b.1901-d.1973, who ruled 1933-1944 and 1952-1959) and the rise of Fidel Castro (b.1926), who overthrew Gen. Batista in 1959. Castro led the leftist revolutionary government until July 2006, when Fidel's brother, Raul, took over the reins of government due to Fidel's failing health. The 23rd and current President of Cuba is Raúl Castro (b.1931), who formally replaced his brother on 24 February 2008, following Fidel Castro's resignation due to his "critical health condition." July 2009 was celebrated as the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

During Fidel Castro's first year as Prime Minister, the revolutionary government carried out measures such as the expropriation of private property and businesses with no or minimal compensation, which motivated many anti-Castro Cubans to begin leaving their country in great numbers. Many of the Cuban exiles formed a burgeoning expatriate community in Miami that is opposed to the Castro government.

The Cuban exodus, which is primarily based on political dissent coupled with the failure of the system to provide economic well-being, has lasted half a century and has brought more than 900,000 Cubans of all social classes to the USA. Others have relocated in Venezuela (85,000), Spain (18,000), Jamaica (8,300), Puerto Rico (8,200), and other countries. It still is standard procedure for the Cuban government to confiscate almost all property from those emigrating from the island.

The Cuban Government adheres to socialist principles in organizing its largely state-controlled planned economy. Most of these means of production are owned and run by the government and most of the labor force is employed by the state. Recent years have seen a trend towards more private sector employment. By 2006, public sector employment was 78% and private sector employment at 22 percent, compared to the 1981 ratio of 91.8 percent for the public sector to 8.2 percent for the private sector. Capital investment is restricted and requires approval by the government. The Cuban government sets most prices and rations goods to its citizens.

Current Religious Situation

According to the 2008 International Religious Freedom Report, the Cuban Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice the government continued to place restrictions on freedom of religion. Foreign missionary groups operate through registered churches. Visits by religious figures are handled by the **Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party**.

Three groups were cited by the government as falling outside of the consideration of the laws guaranteeing religious freedom and the separation of Church and State. The **Seventh-Day Adventist Church**, the **Jehovah's Witnesses**, and the **Gedeon's Evangelistic Band** (*Bando Evangelístico Gedeón*) were cited as advocating a counter-revolutionary ideology. Those laws could not be absolute, since they were subordinated to the basic need of building a Socialist society. Although the government has not registered the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), it maintains a written agreement that allows members to hold weekly meetings and baptize new members. However, the agreement expressly forbids members from proselytizing, a key component of Mormon practice in other countries.

The government continued to exert control over all aspects of social life, including religious expression. Certain groups, particularly **Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses**, faced significant harassment and maltreatment. However, according to the majority of officially recognized religious organizations, there was a slight improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during 2008. Various religious groups reported fewer restrictions on politically-sensitive expression, fewer importation and travel restrictions and permission to repair buildings, while reporting significant increases in membership.

Although guaranteeing religious freedom, the Castro regime passed a number of laws that had a direct effect upon religious groups. It nationalized all schools in 1961. It banned public religious festivals and demonstrations. It also passed regulations that took away church property from many religious groups. Even though there has been sporadic persecution of church leaders, the religious organizations that were in place in 1958 have been allowed to survive. Relations between the Cuban State and Christian churches began to improve following the January 1998 visit to Habana by Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II.

The Cuban revolutionary government declared itself atheist during the early years of its administration, although in 1992 it redefined itself as secular and removed references to atheism in the Constitution, and religious believers were allowed to join the Communist Party.

There are no independent authoritative sources on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership in Cuba. The Roman Catholic Church estimated that 54 percent of the population was Catholic in 2002. However, Catholic Church officials estimated that only about 10 percent of baptized Catholics attended Mass regularly. Membership in Protestant

churches is currently estimated to be about 550,000 persons or 4.8 percent of the total population. A small portion of the population is either non-practicing of any particular religion, or is atheist or agnostic, perhaps 10 percent. That leaves the category of “other religions” with about 30 percent of the national population. The latter category includes other organized religious groups (Christian and non-Christian) as well as non-formal religious groups, such as African-derived “popular religions” (animist).

In 1995, the Center of Psychological and Sociological Investigation (CIPS) in La Habana reported that, prior to 1990, approximately 15 percent of the total population of Cuba had a “systematic religious affiliation,” while 70 percent were “believers in religion or the supernatural” but outside of religious systems, and no more than 15 percent were non-believers (atheists).

However, some reliable sources estimate that now as much as 80 percent of the population consults with practitioners of religions with West African roots, such as **Santería** or Yoruba. During 2008, a historically-secretive male brotherhood associated with Afro-Cuban religious practices, the Abakuá Society, opened a public office. In 1959, the brotherhood made Fidel Castro an honorary member because, as one of the leaders stated: “Fidel had come to defend the blacks who had always been discriminated against in Cuban society.” Castro’s body was ritually cleansed with medicinal plants and rooster blood, and the ceremony was shown on Cuban national TV.

The religious landscape of Cuba is strongly marked by syncretism of various kinds. This diversity derives from West and Central Africans who were transported to Cuba, and in effect reinvented their African religions in the New World. They did so by combining them with elements of the Roman Catholic belief system, with a result very similar to Umbanda in Brazil. Cuban Catholicism is often practiced in tandem with **Santería** (“The Way of the Saints”), a mixture of Catholicism and African belief systems that include a number of cult religions. Cuba’s patron saint, *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* (the Virgin of Cobre) is a syncretism with the Santería goddess Ochún. This important religious festival is celebrated by Cubans annually on 8 September. Other African-derived religions practiced are **Palo Monte** and **Abakuá**, which have large parts of their liturgy in African languages.

The Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) is a private, officially-sanctioned umbrella organization that works closely with the Cuban Government and includes 25 religious organizations as full members, nine as associate members, and three have observer status. Other officially recognized groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the small Jewish and Muslim communities do not belong to the CCC. The Government granted the CCC time for periodic radio broadcasts early on Sunday mornings.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Cuban Government continues to exert control over all aspects of societal life including religious expression. The Ministry of the Interior continues to engage in efforts to control and monitor religious activities and to use surveillance, infiltration, and harassment against religious groups, religious professionals and laypersons. Certain groups, particularly Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, have faced ridicule and mistreatment.

Many Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses reported discrimination or dismissal from employment due to refusal to work on Saturdays, or in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, refusal to serve in the military or pledge allegiance to the flag. There continued to be many reports of discrimination and maltreatment in schools, in part because of the groups' refusal

to participate in mandatory patriotic activities on Saturdays. Students who are Jehovah's Witnesses reported being severely punished for not saluting the flag or singing the national anthem. Many Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly left school in the ninth grade because of ridicule and harassment. Students from these groups who graduated with good grades were reportedly denied university admittance.

Government officials continue to harass, threaten, and fine unregistered religious groups, and state security forces continue to subject officially sanctioned and unregistered house churches to surveillance. Some Pentecostal church officials reported that they consider themselves singled out by the government's house church regulations. Many Pentecostals normally meet in house churches more than twice a week, a practice that would violate the regulations.

The Constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the government places restrictions on freedom of religion. The Constitution has provided for the separation of church and state since the early 20th century. In 1992 the Constitution was changed, and references to scientific materialism or atheism were removed. The government does not officially favor any particular religion or church, but it appears to be most tolerant of those churches that maintain close relations with the state through the CCC.

The government requires religious groups to register with the provincial Registry of Associations within the Ministry of Justice to obtain official recognition. Registration procedures require groups to identify where they will conduct their activities, demonstrate their funding for these activities, and obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, accept imported religious literature through the CCC, and meet in officially recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request exit permits on an individual basis, obtain religious materials through extralegal means, and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places. Proselytizing in general is permitted on a selective basis.

The law allows for the construction of new houses of worship once the required permits are obtained; however, the government rarely authorizes new construction permits. Several religious leaders alleged that during the reporting period the Government more readily gave permission to repair or restore existing churches; however, the process of obtaining a permit for an expansion or repair project and purchasing construction materials from government outlets remained lengthy and expensive.

House churches are subject to numerous regulations, many of which address location and hours of worship. Directive 43 and Resolution 46 require house churches to register with the government. The vast majority of house churches were unregistered and thus technically illegal; however, most registered religious groups were able to hold services in private homes. Christian Solidarity Worldwide estimated that there are at least 10,000 house churches nationwide. Their numbers have increased in recent years, which religious leaders attributed to the government not authorizing construction of new churches.

The government allows for a religious wedding ceremony, but only after a compulsory civil marriage. The government observes December 25, commonly associated with Christmas Day, as a national holiday. Persons who openly declare their religious faith rarely ascend to senior government positions; however, in January 2008, four religious leaders became National Assembly members.

Religious literature and materials must be imported through a registered religious group and can be distributed only to officially-recognized religious groups. The CCC controls distribution of Bibles to its members and to other officially recognized denominations.

Religious groups are required to submit a request to the local ruling official of the Communist Party before being allowed to hold processions or events outside of religious buildings.

The government does not permit religious education in public schools nor the operation of private primary and secondary schools of any kind, including religious schools, although several international schools in Habana are given considerable leeway in setting their curriculums. Churches provide religious education classes to their members, as well as seminars to wider audiences. During 2008, some post-graduate courses in the history of religion were instituted at the state-run University of Habana. The government allows some religious groups, such as the Catholic Church and the Habana Jewish community center, to administer some charities and offer religious education classes and adult education courses on subjects such as computers and foreign languages. During 2008, the First Presbyterian Reform Church of Habana established a suicide prevention hotline.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On February 28, 2008, the Cuban Government signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESC) with reservations. Article 18 of the ICCPR guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Although the Cuban Government never officially made the treaty texts publicly available, the Catholic Church's *Palabra Nueva* published the texts. The treaties have yet to be ratified by the government.

Some religious groups reported fewer restrictions on politically-sensitive expression; for example, some Catholic parishes offered prayers for political prisoners. While religious leaders normally avoided specifically political commentary, congregations reported increasing boldness in discussions of social issues in sermons without repercussions. During 2008, the organization *Damas de Blanco* (Ladies in White), composed of the relatives and supporters of political prisoners, gathered without government interference on Sundays at the Church of Santa Rita in Habana.

Various religious groups have found it somewhat easier to import religious materials; bring in foreign religious workers; travel abroad to attend conferences and religious events; utilize limited Internet access; and restore houses of worship. Outside central Habana, construction has continued on the first new Catholic seminary to be built in 50 years, and instruction began in completed classrooms.

Many religious organizations reported a significant rise in membership as well as a revival in interest in religion in general, especially among young people. Most churches reported increased participation in classes for religious instruction for children because the government schools no longer scheduled competing activities on Sundays.

Historical Overview of Social, Political and Religious Development

Cuba was originally inhabited by the Taino and Ciboney tribes of Amerindians. Their encounter with the Spanish after 1492 was disastrous, and during the 16th century they were largely eradicated by warfare and disease. Cuba subsequently became the staging area for the

Spanish expeditions of discovery and conquest in the New World, specifically the conquest of Mexico and Central America, and the establishment of a Spanish presence in North America.

Cuba was discovered by Christopher Columbus during his first voyage, on the 28th of October 1492. He took possession in the name of the Catholic monarchs of Spain, and named it *Juana* in honor of the *Infante Don Juan*. He again visited the island in 1494 and again in 1502, and on each occasion explored part of the coastline. He then believed that Cuba was part of the mainland, and it was not until 1508 that Sebastian Ocampo, by order of the Spanish king, circumnavigated it, and proved it to be an island.

In 1511, Captain Diego Velásquez, who had accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, was sent to Cuba to subjugate and colonize the island. He landed near Cape Maisí, the eastern extremity, and there founded Baracoa, the first colony in Cuba. In 1514, Velásquez founded Trinidad and Santiago de Cuba on the south coast, and Sancti Spiritus, Remedios and Puerto Príncipe in the central portion. On the site of the present city of Batabanó, towards the western extremity of the south coast, San Cristóbal de la Habana was founded. This last name, however, was given, in 1519, to a settlement existing on the present site of the city of Habana.

The same year Baracoa was raised to the dignity of a city and a bishopric, and was made the capital, as it continued to be until 1522, when both the capital and bishopric were transferred to Santiago de Cuba. Habana became the capital in 1552, and has remained so ever since.

Commercially, it's central location in the Caribbean place it on the crossroads of Spanish trade to and from Spain's American colonies. Sugarcane plantations became the backbone of the nation's economy in the 17th century and were one of the reasons for Cuba's being one of the last counties to abolish slavery (1886).

Upon the death of King Ferdinand, 23 January, 1516, Velásquez changed the name of the island to *Fernandina* in honor of that monarch. Later, the name was changed to *Santiago* in honor of Spain's patron saint, and still later to *Ave María* in honor of the Blessed Virgin. During all these official changes, however, the island continued to be known by its original name of *Cuba*, and it has retained the name to the present day.

The aborigines (Taínos and Siboneys) whom the Spaniards found in Cuba were reported to be a mild, timid, inoffensive people, entirely unable to resist the invaders of their country, or to endure the hardships imposed upon them. They lived under nine independent *caciques* or chiefs, and possessed a "simple religion devoid of rites and ceremonies," but with a belief in a supreme being and the immortality of the soul. They were reduced to slavery by the white settlers, among whom, however, the energetic and persevering **Fiar Bartolomé de Las Casas** (called "The Protector of the Indians") earned a high reputation in history for his philanthropic efforts.

In 1524, the first cargo of Negro slaves landed in Cuba. The Negroes were subjected to great cruelties and hardships, their natural birth rate was checked, and their numbers had to be recruited by repeated importations. This traffic constantly increased until, at the beginning of the 19th century, slaves were being imported at the rate of over 10,000 per year.

In 1538, Habana was reduced to ashes by the French, and was destroyed a second time in 1554. In 1762, the city was taken by the English, but within a year, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Seven Years War, it was returned to Spain in exchange for Florida. From this time forward the progress of Cuba was rapid. Luis de Las Casas, who was sent to Cuba as captain general, was especially energetic in instituting reforms, and he did a great deal for the prosperity and advancement of the island.

During the 19th century, however, Cuba was governed by a succession of captains general, some of whom were honorable in their administration, while others seemed to regard their office solely as the means of acquiring a fortune. Various oppressive measures instituted by some of

these governors, such as depriving the native-born Cubans of political and civil liberty, excluding them from public office, and burdening them with taxation, gave rise to a deadly hatred between the Cubans and the Spaniards, which manifested itself from time to time in uprisings for greater privileges and freedom. Three of these uprisings were the conspiracy of the "Black Eagle" (1829), the insurrection of the black population (1844), and the conspiracy of Narciso López (1849-51), all which gave occasion to repressive measures of great cruelty.

The rebellion of 1868-1878, however, compelled Spain to promise the Cubans representation in the Cortes, together with other needed reforms. Spain failed to keep many of its promises, and the general discontent continued, with the result that in 1895 a new and formidable revolt broke out. The insurgents, under able leaders, were able to keep the field, in spite of the extremely energetic and even cruel measures that were adopted to crush them. They were able to maintain the semblance of a government, and their heroic resistance, as well as the conduct of Spain, aroused great sympathy for them throughout the U.S.

From the time that Florida became a part of the U.S. this government had taken a deep interest in Cuba, fearing that the island might pass from Spain to other hands, especially England or France. In 1848, President Polk had authorized the U.S. diplomat at Madrid to offer \$100,000,000 for the purchase of Cuba, but Spain rejected the offer. The subject had been revived in 1854, following the Ostend Manifesto, but again it came to nothing.

Partly in response to U.S. pressure, slavery was abolished in Cuba in 1886, although the African-descended minority remained socially and economically oppressed, despite formal civic equality granted in 1893. During this period, the rural poverty in Spain provoked by the Spanish Revolution of 1868 and its aftermath led to an even greater Spanish emigration to Cuba.

During the 1890s, pro-independence agitation revived, fueled by resentment of the restrictions imposed on Cuban trade by Spain and hostility to Spain's increasingly oppressive and incompetent administration of Cuba. Few of the promises for economic reform made by the Spanish government in the Pact of Zanjón were kept.

The **Cuban War of Independence** (1895-1898) was the last of three liberation wars that Cuba fought against Spain, the other two being the **Ten Years' War** (1868-1878) and the **Little War** (1879-1880). The final three months of the conflict escalated to become the **Spanish-American War**.

In April 1895, a new war of independence was declared, led by the writer and poet José Martí who had planned and organized the war effort over a ten-year period while in exile in the USA. Martí proclaimed Cuba an independent republic, but he was killed at Dos Rios shortly after landing in Cuba with the eastern expeditionary force. His death immortalized him and he has become Cuba's undisputed national hero.

During the 1895 uprising of the Cuban people, not only the U.S. government but the entire American people were watching the struggle with intense interest, when, on the night of 15 February, 1898, a terrific explosion destroyed the U.S. battleship "Maine" in Habana harbor, where it had gone on a friendly visit by invitation of the Spanish Government. Relations between the two governments became strained, and they finally went to war in April of the same year. The Spanish-American War only lasted a few months, and as a result, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris (10 December 1898), Spain relinquished her hold on Cuba, which she had held for over 400 years together with the island of Puerto Rico. After the evacuation of Cuba by the Spaniards, the new government declared freedom of worship, but the population remained almost exclusively Catholic until the 1940s.

Beginning 1 January 1899, U.S. Government forces occupied the island and appointed a military governor, pending the formation of an independent national government. This was

eventually accomplished with the inauguration as president of Don Tomás Estrada Palma on 20 May 1902, and the U.S. occupation formally ended. Under the new Cuban Constitution, however, the U.S. retained the right to intervene in Cuban affairs and to supervise its finances and foreign relations. Under the Platt Amendment, Cuba also agreed to lease to the U.S. the naval base at Guantánamo Bay.

Cuba seemed to be entering upon an era of peace and prosperity, but it was of short duration. Differences between the Moderate and Liberal parties occasioned by the second presidential election in 1905 culminated in a revolutionary movement started by the Liberal leaders in July 1906. Following disputed elections, an armed revolt led by Independence War veterans broke out and that defeated the meager government forces loyal to Estrada Palma, and the U.S. exercised its right of intervention. The country was placed under U.S. occupation and a U.S. governor, Charles Edward Magoon, took charge for three years. Magoon's governorship in Cuba was viewed in a negative light by many Cuban historians for years thereafter, believing that much political corruption was introduced during Magoon's years as governor. In 1908, self-government was restored when José Miguel Gómez was elected President, but the U.S. retained its supervision of Cuban affairs.

In 1912, *El Partido Independiente de Color* attempted to establish a separate black republic in Oriente Province. Perhaps because the group lacked sufficient weaponry, the main tactic was to set businesses and private residences on fire. The movement was a failure and General Monteagudo suppressed the rebels with considerable bloodshed. Historians differ on the interpretation of the circumstances; some view it as suppression of Black rights, others as an attempt at racial cleansing and secession on the part of the Black activists.

Cuba's colonial history profoundly influenced the development of its society, with Spanish culture, language and values being dominant. However, African, Chinese and U.S. influences have also helped shape Cuban society. African slaves, and later Chinese laborers, were imported to work in the rich sugarcane and tobacco fields, which was the basis for the colonial economy. Each ethnic group contributed greatly to Cuban life, including art, literature and religion. The U.S. influence began after Cuba's War of Independence in 1898. North American business, culture and religion soon made their way into Cuban society.

The official census of 1899 showed a total population of 1,572,797 divided by provinces as follows: Habana 424,804; Matanzas 202,444; Pinar del Río 173,064; Puerto Príncipe 88,234; Santa Clara 356,536; and Santiago de Cuba 327,715. Of the total inhabitants, 1,400,202 were native-born and 172,535 were foreign-born. The white population constituted 68 percent of the total, and the remaining 32 percent were Negroes, mixed elements (*mestizo*) and Chinese. The native white population was nearly all descendants of the Spaniards.

Despite frequent outbreaks of disorder after 1912, constitutional government was maintained until 1930, when **President Gerardo Machado y Morales** suspended the Constitution. Machado's government had considerable local support despite its violent suppression of critics. However, it was during this period that Soviet intrusion into Cuban affairs began with the arrival in Cuba of Fabio Grobart. During Machado's tenure, a nationalistic economic program was pursued with several major national development projects being undertaken.

Machado's hold on power was weakened following a decline in the demand for exported agricultural produce due to the Great Depression, the attacks first by War of Independence Veterans, and later by covert terrorist organizations principally the ABC.

During a general strike in which the Communist party took the side of Machado, senior elements of the Cuban Army forced Machado into exile and installed **Carlos Manuel de**

Céspedes y Quesada (ruled 13 August 1933 – 5 September 1933), son of Cuba's founding father, as president. In an uprising known as the "Revolt of the Sergeants," **Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar** (b.1901-d.1973) conspired with U.S. Ambassador Sumner Welles and overthrew President Céspedes in a coup, which resulted in the formation of the first government of **Dr. Ramón Grau San Martín** (ruled 1933-1934). However, Batista became the Army Chief of Staff, with the rank of colonel, and was the *de facto* leader of Cuba behind the scenes. Notable bloody events in this violent period include the separate sieges of Hotel Nacional and Atares Castle. This government only lasted 100 days, but it engineered radical social changes in Cuban society and a rejection of the despised Platt Amendment.

Batista became the strongman behind a succession of "puppet presidents" until he was elected president himself in 1940. In 1934, Batista and the army replaced Grau with Carlos Mendieta y Montefur. In 1940, Batista decided to run for president himself. Because of a split with the leader of the opposition, Ramón Grau San Martín, Batista turned instead to the Communist Party of Cuba, which had grown in size and influence during the 1930s.

With the support of the Communist-controlled labor unions, Batista was elected president (1940-1944) and his administration carried out major social reforms. Several members of the Communist Party held office under his administration. Batista's administration formally took Cuba into World War II as a U.S. ally, declaring war on Japan on 9 December 1941, then on Germany and Italy on 11 December 1941. Cuba, however, did not significantly participate militarily in World War II hostilities. At the end of his term in 1944, in accordance with the Constitution, Batista stepped down and **Ramón Grau San Martín** was elected to succeed him (1944-1948). Grau initiated increased government spending on health, education and housing. Grau's supporters were bitter enemies of the Communists and Batista, which opposed most of Grau's programs.

Grau completed his presidential term in 1948 and was succeeded by **Carlos Prío Socarrás** (ruled 1948-1952), who had been Grau's Minister of Labor and was particularly hated by the Communists. Corruption is generally believed to have increased notably under Prío's administration; however not all accusations of corruption were proven, and Eduardo Chibás, leader of the Ortodoxo Party to which Fidel Castro belonged, committed suicide when his allegations were not substantiated. Corruption is partially attributed to the influx of gambling money into Habana, which became a safe haven for U.S. Italian mafia operations. Prío carried out major reforms such as founding a National Bank and stabilizing the Cuban currency. The influx of investment fueled a boom which did much to raise living standards across the board and create a prosperous middle class in most urban areas, although the gap between rich and poor became wider and more obvious.

The 1952 election was a three-way race. Roberto Agramonte of the Ortodox Party led in all the polls, followed by Dr. Aurelio Hevia of the Authentic Party, and running a distant third was Batista, who was seeking a return to office. Both front runners, Agramonte and Hevia in their own camps, had decided to name **Col. Ramón Barquin**, then a diplomat in Washington, DC, to head the Cuban Armed Forces after the elections. Barquin was a top officer who commanded the respect of the professional army and had promised to eliminate corruption in the ranks.

Batista feared that Barquin would oust him and his followers, and when it became apparent that Batista had little chance of winning, he staged a coup against President **Carlos Prío Socarrás** on 10 March 1952 and held power with the backing of a nationalist section of the army as a "provisional president" for the next two years. Justo Carrillo told Barquin in Washington, DC, in March 1952 that the inner circles knew that Batista had aimed the coup at him; they

immediately began to conspire to oust Batista and restore democracy and civilian government in what was later dubbed *La Conspiracion de los Puros de 1956* (Agrupación Montecristi).

Batista's return to power did not herald a return to progressivism. He became obsessed with gaining the acceptance of Cuba's upper classes, who had earlier denied him membership (as a mulatto) into their exclusive social clubs. Increasingly, his energies were also devoted to amassing an even greater personal fortune for himself. Batista opened Habana to large-scale gambling, and announced that his government would match, dollar for dollar, any hotel investment over \$1 million, which would include a casino license. Taking Batista up on the offer, U.S. mobster Meyer Lansky placed himself at the center of Cuba's gambling operation, with the financial support of U.S. Italian mafia families. Brothels flourished, and a major industry grew up around them; government officials received bribes, and policemen collected protection money.

Batista became a favorite of the mafia and a close friend of Meyer Lansky. During Batista's first term in power, Habana's Hotel Nacional became a venue for mafia summits: Vito Genovese, Frank Costello and Santos Trafficante were regular visitors, together with stars like Frank Sinatra.

In 1954, under pressure from the U.S. Government, Batista agreed to hold elections. The Partido Auténtico put forward ex-President Grau as their candidate, but he withdrew amid allegations that Batista was rigging the elections in advance, which would make it possible for Batista to become an "elected" president.

Young Cuban attorney Fidel Castro (born in 1926) and his small group of revolutionary forces directed a failed assault on the Cuban Army's Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, and on the smaller Carlos Manuel de Cespedes Barracks and on the Feast of Saint Ann on 26 July 1953.

In April 1956, Batista had given the orders for Barquin to become commander-in-chief of the army. But it was too late. Even after Barquin was informed, he decided to move forward with the coup to rescue the morale of the Armed Forces and the Cuban people. On April 4, 1956, a coup by hundreds of career officers led by Col. Barquin (then Vice Chairman of the Inter-American Defense Board in Washington, DC, and Cuban Military Attaché of Sea, Air and Land to the US) was frustrated by Rios Morejon. The coup broke the backbone of the Cuban Armed Forces. The officers were sentenced to the maximum terms allowed by Cuban Martial Law. Barquin was sentenced to solitary confinement for 8 years. *La Conspiración de los Puros* resulted in the imprisonment of the top commanding brass of the Armed Forces and the closing of the military academies. Barquin was the founder of La Escuela Superior de Guerra (Cuba's War College) and past director of La Escuela de Cadetes (Cuba's Military Academy). Without Barquin's officers the army's ability to combat the revolutionary insurgents was severely curtailed.

On 2 December 1956, a party of 82 revolutionaries, led by Castro, landed in a yacht named "Granma" with the intention of establishing an armed resistance movement in the Sierra Maestra. The yacht had come from Mexico, where Castro had been exiled to, and where his army was strengthened with the help of Ernesto Che Guevara, who later became one of the most important people in the Cuban revolution and one of Castro's closest allies. Castro had gone to Mexico after serving only two years of a twenty year prison sentence for his part in a 1953 rebel attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Castro received his pardon from Batista after being requested by the Archbishop of Santiago, Monseñor Enrique Perez Serantes, and Senator Rafael Diaz-Balart at the time Fidel Castro's brother-in-law. After the landing, Batista launched a campaign of repression against the opposition, which only served to increase support for the

insurgency. With Barquin's professional officers in La Prisión Modelo de Isla de Pinos in the Gulf of Mexico, the army lacked the leadership and will to fight the insurgents.

Through 1957 and 1958, opposition to Batista grew, especially among the upper and middle classes and the students, and among the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and in many rural areas. In response to Batista's plea to purchase better arms from the U.S. in order to root out the insurgents in the mountains, the U.S. government imposed an arms embargo on the Cuba in March 1958. By late 1958, the rebels had succeeded in breaking out of the Sierra Maestra and launched a general insurrection, joined by hundreds of students and others fleeing Batista's crackdown on dissents in the cities.

When the rebels captured Santa Clara, east of Habana, Batista decided the struggle was futile and fled the country to exile in Portugal and later Spain. Batista named Gen. Eulogio Cantillo as Chief of the Army and gave him instructions not to release Barquin and his officers. Nevertheless, Barquin, who had the backing of the U.S. Government, was rescued from Isla de Pinos in the early hours and taken to Campamento Ciudad Militar Columbia where he relieved Cantillo and assumed the post of Chief of Staff – serving as Chief of the Armed Forces and *de facto* president of Cuba for a short period of time – in an effort to establish order in the streets and within the Armed Forces. He negotiated the symbolic change of command between Camilo Cienfuegos, Che Guevara, Raul and Fidel Castro after the Supreme Court decided that the Revolution was the source of law and its representative should assume command. With less than 300 men Camilo assumed the post from Barquin who in Campamento Ciudad Militar Columbia alone commanded 12,000 professional soldiers. Castro's rebel forces entered the capital on 8 January 1959, shortly after Dr. Manuel Lleo Urrutia assumed power.

Fidel Castro (at age 32) became Prime Minister of Cuba in February 1959. In its first year in power, the new revolutionary government carried out measures such as the expropriation of private property with no or minimal compensation (sometimes based on property tax valuations that the owners themselves had kept artificially low), the nationalization of public utilities, and began a campaign to institute tighter controls on the private sector, such as the closing down of the gambling industry. The government also evicted many Americans, including mobsters (who, in collaboration with Batista, ran the gambling casinos in La Habana) from the island. Some of these measures were undertaken by Fidel Castro's government in the name of the program that he had outlined in the "Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra." However, he failed to enact one element of his reform program, which was to call elections under the Electoral Code of 1943 within the first 18 months of his time in power and to restore all of the provisions of the Constitution of 1940 that had been suspended under Batista.

The nationalization of private property and businesses, totaling about \$25 billion U.S. dollars and, particularly, U.S.-owned companies (to an excess of 1960 value of US \$1.0 billion) aroused immediate hostility within the Eisenhower administration. Anti-Castro Cubans began to leave their country in great numbers and formed a burgeoning expatriate community in Miami that was opposed to the Castro government.

The U.S. Government became increasingly hostile towards the Castro-led government of Cuba throughout 1959. Some contend that this, in turn, may have influenced Castro's movement away from the liberal elements of his revolutionary movement and increase the power of hard-line Marxist figures in the government, notably Che Guevara.

The Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961 was an unsuccessful attempt by U.S.-backed Cuban exiles to overthrow the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro. Increasing friction between the U.S. government and Castro's leftist regime led President Dwight D. Eisenhower to break off diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961. Even before that, however, the Central

Intelligence Agency had been training anti-Castro Cuban exiles in Central America for a possible invasion of the island. The invasion plan was approved by Eisenhower's successor, John F. Kennedy.

On 17 April 1961 about 1,300 Cuban exiles, armed with U.S. weapons, landed at *La Bahía de Cochinos* (The Bay of Pigs) on the southern coast of Cuba. Hoping to find support from the local population, they intended to cross the island to Habana. It was evident from the first hours of fighting, however, that the exiles were likely to lose. President Kennedy had the option of using the U.S. Air Force against the Cuban Army but decided against it. Consequently, the invasion was stopped by Castro's armed forces. By the time the fighting ended on 19 April, 90 exiles had been killed and the rest had been taken as prisoners.

The failure of the invasion seriously embarrassed the young Kennedy administration. Some critics blamed Kennedy for not giving it adequate support and others for allowing it to take place at all.

One immediate consequence of the Bay of Pigs Invasion was a strengthening the Cuban-Soviet strategic alliance and the decision to place Soviet medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Cuba. This precipitated the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, during which the Kennedy administration threatened the Soviet Union with nuclear war unless the missiles were withdrawn. The idea to place Soviet missiles in Cuba was suggested either by Castro or Khrushchev, but was agreed to by the USSR for the reason that the U.S. Government had its nuclear missiles placed in Turkey and the Middle East, which directly threatened USSR national security. With minutes to go until the Soviet ships carrying a further shipment of missiles reached a U.S. naval blockade in the Caribbean Sea, the Soviets backed down and made an agreement with Kennedy. All the Russian missiles were to be withdrawn from Cuba, but at the same time the U.S. Government was to remove its missiles from Turkey and elsewhere in the Middle East. Kennedy, however, couldn't lose face by doing this immediately, but made an assurance to withdraw the U.S. missiles within a couple of months.

Another result was that President Kennedy agreed not to invade Cuba in the future. In the aftermath of this, there was a resumption of contacts between the U.S. Government and Castro, resulting in the release to the U.S. Government of the anti-Castro fighters captured in 1961 at the **Bay of Pigs** in exchange for a U.S. aid package. However, in 1963, relations deteriorated again as Castro moved Cuba towards a full-fledged Socialist system modeled on the Soviet Union. The U.S. Government imposed a complete diplomatic and commercial embargo on Cuba, and began Operation Mongoose. In the beginning, U.S. influence in Latin America was strong enough to make the embargo very effective and Cuba was forced to divert virtually all its trade towards the Soviet Union and its allies. However, public declarations of support from Latin American governments for the U.S.' policies were harder to achieve.

Castro's regime soon became anti-religious and promulgated repressive laws, which only began to show signs of being loosened in the 1990s. The country has been strongly affected by the U.S. trade boycott of Cuba, which attempted to isolate the Castro regime from the rest of the world. That boycott included a ban on travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens.

In the early 1960s, the new revolutionary government nationalized all private schools – Catholic, Protestant and secular; however, this was not aimed specifically at the Catholic Church. Rather, it was simply a matter of eliminating one of the vestiges of what was considered “class society” and converting it into a “classless society.”

The Marxist government of Fidel Castro has done much to reshape Cuban life. In his attempts to make the “New Man,” Castro outlawed racial and class distinctions, improved the

health and educational level of the people, and reshaped the Cuban economy. Cuba became the outpost of Communist doctrine in the Western Hemisphere.

By the 1970s, the ability of the U.S. to keep Cuba isolated was declining. Cuba had been expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1962 and the OAS had cooperated with the U.S. trade boycott for a decade, but, in 1975, the OAS lifted all sanctions against Cuba and both Mexico and Canada broke ranks with the U.S. Government by developing closer relations with Cuba. Both countries said that they hoped to foster liberalization in Cuba by allowing trade, cultural and diplomatic contacts to resume; however, they were disappointed at the outcome, because there was no appreciable easing of repression against domestic opposition. Also, Castro did stop openly supporting revolutionary movements against despotic Latin American governments, although pro-Castro groups continued to fight the rightwing military dictatorships that then controlled many Latin American countries.

The Cuban exile community in the U.S. grew in size, wealth and power and politicized elements effectively opposed to the liberalization of U.S. policy toward Cuba; and it has been accused of many terrorist acts, including the bombing of civilian Cubana Airlines flight 455 in 1976, which resulted in the death of all 73 passengers. However, the efforts of the exiles to foment an anti-Castro movement inside Cuba, let alone a revolution there, met with limited success. On Sunday, 6 April 1980, 10,000 Cubans stormed the Peruvian embassy in Habana seeking political asylum. On Monday, 7 April, the Cuban government granted permission for the emigration of Cubans seeking refuge in the Peruvian embassy. On 16 April, 500 Cuban citizens left the Peruvian Embassy for Costa Rica. On 21 April, many of the anti-Castro Cubans started arriving in Miami via private boats and were halted by the U.S. State Department on 23 April. The boat lift continued, however, since Castro allowed anyone who desired to leave the country to do so through the port of Mariel, and this emigration became known as the Mariel Boatlift. In all, over 125,000 Cubans emigrated to the U.S. before the flow of vessels ended on 15 June.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 dealt Cuba a giant economic blow. It led to another unregulated exodus of asylum seekers to the U.S. in 1994, but was eventually slowed to a trickle of a few thousand a year by the U.S.-Cuban accords. It again increased in 2004-06 although at a far slower rate than before.

Castro's popularity, which is difficult to assess, was severely tested by the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, a time known in Cuba as the *Special Period*. The loss of the nearly five billion USD that the Soviet government provided the Cuban government in aid, in the form of a guaranteed export market for Cuban sugar and cheap oil, had a significant impact on the country's economy.

As in all Communist countries, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a crisis in confidence for those who believed that the Soviet Union was successfully "building socialism" and providing a model that other countries should follow. However, this event, even combined with a tightening of the embargo by the U.S. government, was insufficient to persuade Cuba's Communists to surrender their grip on power. There were numerous popular uprisings in the early 1990s, the most notable of which was the "Maleconazo" of 1994.

By the later 1990s, the situation in the country had stabilized. By then Cuba had more or less normal economic relations with most Latin American countries and had improved relations with the European Union, which began providing aid and loans to the island. Communist China also emerged as a new source of aid and support, even though Cuba had sided with the Soviets during the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s. Cuba also found new allies in President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and President Evo Morales of Bolivia, both major oil and gas exporters.

On 31 July 2006, Fidel Castro delegated his duties as President of the Council of State, President of the Council of Ministers, First Secretary of the Cuban Communist Party and the post of commander-in-chief of the armed forces to his brother and First Vice President, Raúl Castro. This transfer of duties had been described as temporary while Fidel Castro recovered from surgery undergone after suffering from an "acute intestinal crisis with sustained bleeding." Fidel Castro was too ill to attend the nationwide commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Granma boat landing on 2 December 2006, which fueled speculations that Castro had stomach cancer.

Numerically, most Christian churches have fared poorly under the Castro regime, which remains in power. The Roman Catholic Church declined from 85 percent of the population to about 49 percent in 1980. The various Protestant denominations and independent churches declined also during the 1960s, but began to grow again during the 1970s.

The Roman Catholic Church

Roman Catholicism came to Cuba in 1512 as a consequence of Spanish colonialism, which was twenty years after Columbus first arrived in the Caribbean in 1492. The first Catholic priests to arrive in Cuba were the **Dominicans**, who were soon joined by the **Franciscans**. Both religious orders served the Spanish colonial settlements, because the native Amerindian population was killed off rather than converted.

In 1518, Pope Leo X established the **Diocese of Baracoa**, which included "all of Cuba" and the Spanish possessions of Louisiana and Florida. The name was changed to the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba in 1522. The priests and bishops in charge of the diocese between 1517 and 1556 were: Juan de Witte Hoos (Ubite), O.P. (1517-1525); Sebastián de Salamanca (1525-1526); Miguel Ramírez de Salamanca, O.P. (1530-1534); Diego de Sarmiento, O. Cart. (1535-1544); and Fernando de Uranga (or Urango) (1550-1556).

Prior to the 19th century, there appears to have been no question regarding the titles of property held by the Church in Spain or in Cuba. But, at the beginning of the 19th century, the property held by the Church in Spain was confiscated by the State. This confiscation, however, related only to the Church possessions in Spain and did not affect her insular possessions. In 1837, Captain General Tacón sought to make this Spanish confiscation act applicable to the holdings of the monastic orders in Cuba.

In 1841, Cuban Governor Jerónimo Valdés actually seized these properties and diverted them to the uses of the State. Among these seizures were the convent of the Franciscans, which has been used since then as the Custom House; the convent of the Dominicans, used for a time by the University of Habana; the convent of the Augustinians, used as the Academy of Sciences; the convent of San Ysidro, which was used by the Spaniards as military barracks, and later by the Americans, as a relief station.

Up to the time of the U.S. occupation in 1899, these and other valuable properties, formerly held by the Catholic Church, had been held by the Spanish Crown, subject to the results of a long series of negotiations between the Spanish Crown and the Holy See. The Spanish Government also held a large amount of *censos*, or mortgages, upon property in different parts of the island that had been given to the church for religious purposes, but which had been taken over by the State for purposes of administration. The Spanish Crown, however, annually paid the Church a large sum for its maintenance.

With the U.S. occupation these annual payments ceased, and the U.S. Government continued to use the property for the same governmental purposes for which it had been used by

the Spaniards. The Church thereupon claimed the right to take back the property. This gave rise to a long discussion and investigation, until the whole matter was finally referred to a judicial commission in 1902. This commission decided in favor of the claims of the Church, and the matter was adjusted to the satisfaction of all. The government of Intervention agreed to pay a rental of 5 percent upon the appraised value of the property, which amounted to about \$2,000,000, with a five year's option to the government of Cuba, when organized, to buy the property at the appraised value, receiving credit against the purchase price for 25 percent of the rental paid. The matter of the *censos* was adjusted by the Government of Intervention taking them at 50 cents on the dollar and permitting the debtors to take them up at the same rate.

In 1910, Cuba was divided ecclesiastically into one archdiocese and three suffragan dioceses as follows: the Archdiocese of Santiago de Cuba, created as such in 1804, comprising the civil province of the same name and that of Puerto Príncipe; the Diocese of Habana, established in 1788, comprising the civil provinces of Habana and Matanzas; the Diocese of Cienfuegos, established in 1903, which includes the province of Santa Clara; the Diocese of Pinar del Río, established at the same time as the preceding in 1903, and comprising the civil province of the same name and the Isle of Pines.

In 1899, the remains of Christopher Columbus, which had been brought from Santo Domingo in 1796 and had since then been preserved in the cathedral of Habana, were once more removed, this time to the cathedral of Seville in Spain.

In 1910, the Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba was the head of the Catholic Church in Cuba. Francisco Barnaba Aguilar, the first native incumbent of this metropolitan see, was consecrated by Archbishop Chapelle on 1 July 1899. Under Spanish rule, all the bishops, as well as most of the priests of the island, were appointed from Madrid. An Apostolic Delegate for Cuba and Porto Rico resided at Habana, but he was not accredited to the Cuban Government, and Cuba had no official representative at the Vatican. The first delegate was Archbishop Chapelle of New Orleans, who was sent by Pope Leo XIII to look after the interests of the Church in Cuba during the U.S. occupation.

At that time, Cuba had 199 secular and 129 religious priests. Of institutions conducted by religious orders, there are 13 colleges for boys, 17 schools and academies for girls, five orphan asylums, one reform school, two houses of the Good Shepherd, two asylums for the aged, and two hospitals. The age of the clergy exempted from military service and jury duty. There were no chapels in the prisons; wills and inheritances were subject only to civil laws; cemeteries were owned in some instances by the municipalities, in others, such as at Habana, by the Church. Church property was held in the name of the "Roman Catholic Church." Both civil and religious marriages were legal and binding and persons were married according to either or both. Divorce was not legally recognized.

During the early history of Cuba, the Catholic clergy seemed to have been the principal if not the only agents of education. By the Bull of Pope Adrian VI (28 April 1522), the Scholatria was established at Santiago de Cuba for giving educational instruction in Latin. In 1689, the College of San Ambrosio was founded in Habana under control of the Jesuits for the purpose of preparing young men for the priesthood. The foundation of another Jesuit college in Habana was the next step that gave a fresh impulse to education; this was opened in 1724 under the name of the College of San Ignacio. The old College of San Ambrosio was then united with it, although it still retained its character as a training school for preparing new priests.

As early as 1688, the city council of Habana petitioned the royal government to establish a university in that city, in order that young men desirous of pursuing higher studies might not be compelled to go to Europe to do so. This was not immediately granted, but finally, by a letter of

Pope Innocent XIII (12 September 1721), the fathers of the Convent of San Juan de Letran were authorized to open that institution. After some years of preparation, the present University of Habana was founded in 1728. The rectors, vice-rectors, counselors and secretaries were all Dominicans. In 1793, under the administration of Don Luis de las Casas, who is always gratefully remembered by the Cubans, the Sociedad Económica de La Habana was founded, which has been the prime mover in educational advancement on the island.

Not until the late 1800s was there a free institution in all of Cuba where children could be taught to read and write. The first opened was that of the Bethlehemite Fathers in Habana, and that through the generosity of a private citizen.

In 1899, at the time of the U.S. occupation, private schools abounded in Cuba, but the benefits of these could be enjoyed only by the children of the rich. The children of the poorer classes, who attended the so-called municipal schools, received only a rudimentary education.

Soon after the U.S. intervention, the work of reconstruction was begun. Adequate school buildings were provided, the number of teachers was rapidly increased, and measures were adopted to compel children to attend the classes. When the new Cuban government assumed control, it continued this good work along the same lines, so that by 1910 the public schools were equal, if not superior, to the private ones, at least as to furniture and teaching apparatus.

Primary education, according to the Constitution, was gratuitous and compulsory. The expenses were paid by the municipality or, in any case of municipal inability to pay, by the Federal Government. Secondary and higher education were controlled by the State. The children of the public schools received religious instruction in what was known as *doctrinas*, of which there was one in every parish, and at the head of it was the parish priest. These *doctrinas* are like Sunday schools, except that sessions were held on Saturday instead of Sunday. The teachers were all volunteers, and were usually ladies who lived in the parish. According to the census of 1899, the proportion of illiteracy was about 60 per cent. But with the extraordinary increase in the number of schools and facilities for teaching, this proportion rapidly decreased by 1908.

A conservative Spanish Catholicism spread across the island during the 19th century. Following the Spanish-American War, the new Cuban government was under U.S. occupation, and it adopted a policy of separation of Church and State. However, the Catholic Church actually experienced a renewal of strength and influence, although its conservatism remained.

Between 1925 and 2009, the following Archbishops led the Catholic Church in Cuba: Valentín (Manuel) Zubizarreta y Unamunsaga, O.C.D. (1925-1948), Enrique Pérez Serantes (1948-1968), Pedro Claro Meurice Estiu (1970-2007), and Dionisio Guillermo García Ibáñez (appointed in 2007).

Between 1933 and 1959, Fulgencio Batista led a corrupt, repressive and often brutal dictatorship. By all accounts, there were "warm relations" between the Cuban government and the Catholic hierarchy. On 31 December 1958, Batista fled the country due to growing political opposition among traditional parties and to revolutionary activities led by Fidel, which were limited to the eastern regions of the country. Batista left a country riddled with corruption, with huge income inequality, massive unemployment and under-employment, and with 50 percent illiteracy.

It was not until February 1958 that the Catholic bishops said anything against Batista in public, and then merely asking for "a national-union government." By then, some individual Catholic priests were speaking out from their own pulpits against the excesses of the Batista regime. However, the political activity of the whole Catholic Church was minimal during the 1950s. In many ways the Church was compromised, not least through its class-bias and relative silence on so many social justice and human rights-related matters.

While some historians say that Catholicism was never as rooted in Cuba as in other Latin American countries, official statistics show pre-revolutionary Cuba as over 85 percent Catholic. Some studies put the percentage of “devout” Catholics at below 50 percent even before the 1959 revolution. Most analysts agree that the Catholic Church was strongest among the upper- and middle-classes because of Cuba’s Spanish colonial past.

The Catholic Church hierarchy, allied to the wealthy elite, had a close and friendly relationship with the Batista dictatorship. Therefore, it was no surprise that shortly after Batista fled Cuba the majority of the Catholic priests – mostly foreigners – also left the country. Other Catholic priests and religious workers were expelled for collaborating with the counterrevolution.

Since 1959, the Marxist-dominated Castro regime (Fidel was educated in a Jesuit high school) has severely repressed the Roman Catholic Church, a situation that began to change only after Pope John Paul II visited Cuba in 1998. While the Catholic Church still exists under restrictions and its adherents have declined, it is able, as one bishop said, "to humbly put forward ... that faith is an indispensable ingredient for good."

However, after Castro came to power, the Catholic Church was accorded some approbation because of a few progressive Catholic laity and priests who identified with and assisted the Cuban Revolution. Nevertheless, Castro took note of the past identification of the Catholic hierarchy with the corrupt Batista regime, and the relations between Catholic leaders and the government were hostile through the 1960s. All religious schools have remained closed since the early 1960s, when hundreds of priests and church workers were expelled or jailed.

After the Cuban Catholic Church issued some pastoral letters in 1969 that offered a new direction to the Catholic faithful, especially a letter calling for Catholics to work for the development of Cuban society, relationships began to improve. The Catholic Church in Cuba was also helped by the rise of Liberation Theology, a theology developed by radical Catholic theologians based on a Marxist critique of society, and its propagation among radical priests in Central and South America.

During 21-25 January 1998, Pope John Paul II visited Habana in an effort to revive the Catholic Faith in Cuba, and to improve relations between the Cuban Catholic Church and the Marxist government. At the time of the Pope’s visit, the Vatican and the government of Cuba had maintained uninterrupted diplomatic relations since 1935.

On the eve of Pope’s historic, Ricardo Alarcon, the elected leader of Cuba's national parliament, noted: "The Catholic Church has changed a lot in these 30 years; it's more ecumenical, more concerned with the poor, with social justice, with a better life for everybody on earth.... We feel their message is pretty close to our own beliefs." President Fidel Castro urged the Cuban population to receive the Pope "as a man who is concerned about many major problems in the world today." While the Pope's visit to Cuba was officially billed as a "pastoral visit" to Cuban Catholics at the invitation of her bishops, the world's attention was drawn nevertheless to the eminently political nature of his visit.

Responding to repeated questions as to whether the Pope could be expected to "bring down the Cuban Revolution" the way he had helped topple Socialist governments in Eastern Europe, Fidel told reporters gathered around him that those who see the Pontiff as some sort of "exterminating angel of socialism, communism and revolution" were likely to be disappointed. "They underestimate his intelligence, his character and his way of thinking," the Cuban president added.

At the beginning of his visit, the Pope was careful to word his messages so they could be interpreted broadly, emphasizing the themes of "peace, love, hope, and reconciliation," which both Vatican dispatches and Cuban Catholics reiterated in the months prior to his arrival. So

when he spoke of "human rights," it was usually in the same sentence as "social justice" -- a kind of human rights that every Cuban revolutionary could proudly boast about.

It was only after the Archbishop of Santiago took a much harder, anti-government line in his introductory remarks before the Pope spoke at the Mass in that southeastern city -- known as the cradle of the Revolution -- that the contradictions between Catholic and Marxist teachings and lifestyles became more apparent. Archbishop Pedro Meurice lashed out at "false messiahs," and complained of Cubans who "confuse the nation with a single Party."

Asked what changes he thought the Pope's visit would bring about -- one of the most typical questions asked by foreign reporters to Cubans -- Hebert Pérez, a professor of history at Santiago's Oriente University, told the press: "I don't think there will be many changes after his visit. I think his visit was the culmination of changes that have been occurring for a number of years, since 1985 or 1986."

Pérez mentioned the discussions concerning religion that took place following the publication of the book, *Fidel and Religion* (Betto 1990), in which the Cuban president told Brazilian Liberation Theologian Frei Betto that he did not believe Marx was referring to "all times and all places" in his description of religion as "the opiate of the masses," nor did he feel that Christianity and revolution were necessarily antithetical. As evidence of this change, Betto mentioned the removal of any restrictions to Communist Party membership based on religious affiliation, and the strengthening of the Cuban Constitution's proscriptions against discrimination on religious grounds by changing the description of Cuba from an "atheist" state to a secular one.

Previously, those practicing a religion were considered to have divided loyalties and could not be candidates for membership in the Communist Party or positions of any importance in the government. Then in 1992, a Constitutional amendment made Cuba a secular instead of an atheist state, thereby opening the door for people who practice a religion to be members of the Communist Party. One's private religious beliefs were no longer seen as an obstacle to participation in the revolutionary process.

The Pontiff took aim at many aspects of Cuban society, including its social, educational, political and economic systems. He made a strong plea for pluralism and specifically rejected the one-party ideology of the Cuban State, insisting that "true liberation cannot be reduced to its social and political aspects," but must also include "the exercise of freedom of conscience -- the basis and foundation of all other human rights."

Nevertheless, the Pope was always careful to "balance" his message, hitting at what he saw as the evils of Communism, but never letting the capitalist world off the hook. At his last morning Mass, the Pope dwelled on some themes that Cuban revolutionaries had been pointing out for some time, and in a similar style and language. "Various places," he said, "are witnessing the resurgence of a certain capitalist neoliberalism, which subordinates the human person to blind market forces and conditions the development of people on those forces."

The Pope made his most critical reference to the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba at the departure ceremony at José Martí Airport in Habana, saying that what he described as Cuba's "material and moral poverty" arises not only from "limitations to fundamental freedoms" and "discouragement of the individual," but also from "restrictive economic measures -- unjust and ethically unacceptable -- imposed from outside the country."

With Fidel Castro standing at his side, he said, "In our day, no nation can live in isolation. The Cuban people, therefore, cannot be denied the contacts with other peoples necessary for economic, social and cultural development, especially when the imposed isolation strikes the population indiscriminately, making it ever more difficult for the weakest to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living -- things such as food, health and education."

While everyone applauded the Pope's outspoken criticism of the U.S. blockade against Cuba, neoliberalism and consumerism, many had hoped that his calls for an opening up toward Cuba would mean an easing of the serious economic crisis Cuba had been enduring since the fall of the socialist camp in Eastern Europe.

From 20-26 February 2008, the Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Tarciso Bertone, visited the Cuba and reportedly met with President Raul Castro. On 23 February, Cardinal Bertone unveiled a statue of Pope John Paul II in the city of Santa Clara to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Pope's visit.

Today, the Roman Catholic Church is led by the Cuban Catholic Bishops' Conference (COCC), under the leadership of Cardinal Jaime Lucas Ortega y Alamino, Archbishop of La Habana. It has eleven dioceses, 56 female religious orders and 24 male religious orders. In 2002, there were 264 parishes and about 200 prayer houses (*casas de misión*), served by 166 diocesan priests and 125 religious priests (total of 291); in addition there were 48 permanent deacons, 198 male religious and 498 female religious workers. Informed observers reported that only about 10 percent of Catholic adherents – an estimated 6 million (54 percent) of the nation's 11.2 million people – attended Mass weekly.

Although the Catholic Church is by far the largest religious community in Cuba, it has experienced a steady decline in adherents since 1960, directly related to the growth of the Protestant movement, other religions and the non-religious sector (atheism) during the last 50 years.

The Protestant Movement

Historically, the Protestant community in Cuba has been small. In 1959, the number of all adherents of an estimated 50 denominations was estimated to be approximately 250,000 people. By 1970, the number of adherents had shrunk to about 50,000, according to some sources. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1970s, the Protestant movement experienced revitalization, with a multiplication of its leaders and house churches (both legal and illegal ones) and a substantial growth in its membership and total religious community (adherents).

Today, an estimated 550,000 persons, or 4.8 percent of the total population, are affiliated with the **Protestant movement in Cuba** (mainline Protestant, Evangelical Free Church bodies, Adventists and Pentecostals), which now has 54 officially-recognized denominations. Pentecostalism has grown rapidly in recent years, and the Assemblies of God alone claims a membership of over 100,000. The Baptists – represented by the Baptist Convention of Cuba and smaller denominations – are reportedly the largest Protestant family of churches in Cuba today, followed by the Pentecostal family of churches. According to many observers, the number of Pentecostals has been growing rapidly in comparison to non-Pentecostals.

The **Church of England** began holding services in Cuba in 1741, though they were limited to expatriate Anglicans. In 1871, the Episcopal Church in the USA sent a pastor to reside in Cuba and serve British and American residents. During the last decades of the 19th century, many Cuban Catholics fled to the USA, and many found the **Episcopal Church** to be an acceptable substitute for the Catholicism of their youth. Several chose to return to Cuba and preach to their fellow citizens. By 1906 the work had grown to the point that a resident bishop was named. The first Cuban bishop was appointed in 1967. Today, the Episcopal Church of Cuba has an unusual status; it is headed by its bishop, who resides in Habana, and a Metropolitan Council. That council includes the primate of the **Anglican Church of Canada**, the archbishop of the

Episcopal Church's Province of the Caribbean, and the archbishop of the **Church in the Province of the West Indies**.

In 1873, ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (now a constituent part of the **United Methodist Church**) began working with Cuban exiles in Florida. In 1883, two Cubans, Enrique B. Someillán and Aurelio Silvera, returned to Cuba and began to preach in La Habana, where the first Methodist church was organized in 1888. As the work grew, the Methodists began to build schools and medical dispensaries in rural areas. The rise of Castro became the occasion of rethinking the church's position, and it was granted independence as the Methodist Church in Cuba in 1964 by its parent body in the USA, now known as the United Methodist Church (since 1968).

As with the Anglicans and Methodists, the Baptists found their initial converts working among Cuban exiles in Florida. In 1882, Juaquín de Palma, who became a Baptist in Florida, returned to Cuba as a Bible distributor with the American Bible Society. He was joined in 1883 by colporteurs Alberto J. Díaz and Pedro Duarte, who were Episcopalian laymen. Later in 1883, Díaz established an independent Protestant church in La Habana, which became *Iglesia Bautista Getsemaní* in 1886 after Díaz became an ordained Baptist minister in 1885 under the Rev. William F. Wood of Key West, Florida, and became affiliated with the **Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)**.

Also, in 1886, the **Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society** began work in Cienfuegos in eastern Cuba among Jamaican immigrants; and, in 1890, Episcopal pastor Evaristo Collazo decides to become a Presbyterian in Cuba. **Southern Presbyterian Church missionary A. T. Graybill** arrives from Mexico to begin work in Cuba.

In 1898, representatives of the SBC and the **Northern Baptist Convention (NBC)** met in Washington, DC, to discuss the future development of Baptist work in Cuba under the U.S. occupation. The two denominations agreed to distribute their mission work geographically to avoid the duplication of efforts, with the SBC working in the western region and the NBC in the eastern region.

In 1899, the Rev. José Regino del Rosario O'Hallaron Valdés, a Cuban exile in Florida who had been converted under the ministry of the Rev. Díaz in La Habana, returned to Cuba affiliated with the SBC to begin mission work in western Cuba. At about the same time, missionaries with the American Baptist Home Mission Society (NBC) began work in eastern Cuba: the Rev. Hartwell Robert Moseley in Santiago de Cuba and the Rev. A.B. Carlisle in Guantánamo. In February 1905, the NBC missionaries organized the **Association of Baptist Churches in Eastern Cuba** with 12 churches, three missions and 17 preaching points. These two Baptist denominations later joined forces to organize the **Baptist Convention of Cuba**, now one of the largest Protestant denominations in the nation.

Under U.S. occupation after the Spanish-American War in 1898, various Protestant denominations began mission work in Cuba among people who were disillusioned with the colonial Catholic Church. Protestant mission schools – eventually supported by mission boards and North American corporations – became centers both for spreading the Gospel and for "civilizing the natives," and Protestantism became the spiritual justification not only for converting Cubans but also for the expansion of U.S. business interests.

Although initially reluctant to be associated with U.S. military or business interests, the missionaries' worldviews, and later their mission policies, more readily converged with those of their countrymen than with the views and policies of the Cubans. From the Protestant churches to the United Fruit Company (UFCO), paternalism toward Cuba in political, social and commercial terms helps explain the U.S. "blind spot" toward Cuban desires for independence. Far from being

a conspiracy, what emerged was a convergence of religious and secular U.S. interests concerning the form of the new Cuba, one that paralleled the convergence of political conflicts between Cuba and the U.S. Government.

The **Congregational Church Home Missionary Society** began work in La Habana in 1899, and the Central congregational Church was organized there in 1900. The **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** also initiated work in Cuba in 1899, but abandoned the field in 1918. Both denominations later passed their work to the **Northern Presbyterians** (Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church USA), who began work in Cuba in 1899 under missionary pastor Pedro Rioseco, who was joined by Dr. J. Milton Green in 1901. The established churches became independent in 1967 as the **Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba**.

Also, in 1899, the **Fire-Baptized Holiness Church** (founded in 1898 in Anderson, SC) sent their first missionaries to Cuba: John Dull, Sarah M. Payne, Nora Arnold and Cornelia Allen. In 1909, this church body became the first Pentecostal denomination in the USA. In 1911, it merged with the **Pentecostal Holiness Church** in Falcon, NC.

The **African Methodist Episcopal Church** and the **Friends United Meeting (Quakers)** both arrived in 1900. In 1902, **The Pentecostal Mission** of Nashville, TN, began work in Cuba, and this Holiness (non-Pentecostal) body merged with the **Church of the Nazarene** in 1915. In 1902, various independent Fundamentalism missionaries began work in Cuba. In 1903, the Board of Missions of the **General Council of the Seventh-day Adventist Church** sent Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hall, Miss Sterguel and Mr. Stytych to Cuba.

Prior to 1898 only five Protestant denominations had begun missionary work in Cuba, but by 1920 thirteen more mission agencies had arrived and new Cuban-based Protestant churches began to emerge. Between 1920 and 1960, thirty-one additional Protestant denominations and independent church associations began work in Cuba. By 1960, there were at least 50 Protestant church bodies existed on the island. All of the churches suffered in the 1960s, when more than half a million Cubans (including many church leaders) left the country for exile in the USA due to growing hardships encountered under the Castro regime.

During the 1920s, two important religious groups emerged in Cuba: **Gedeon's Evangelical Band** and the **Los Pinos Nuevos Evangelical Association**. The former was founded in La Habana in 1922 by Ernest William Sellers of Wisconsin, who came to Cuba to establish a business enterprise. The churches that he and his followers established throughout the island had some special characteristics, patterned after aspects of the Salvation Army, but with a major difference: *Bando Evangélico Gedeón* is a sabbatical Pentecostal denomination. During the 1960s, many of its members fled to the USA and established a new international headquarters in Miami under a new name, the **International Evangelical Church Soldiers of the Cross**. This denomination has affiliated churches in the USA, the Caribbean and Central America.

In 1928, Bartolomé Gregorio Lavastida and Elmer V. Thompson founded the "Los Pinos Nuevos" Bible School, which later became a theological seminary. The affiliated churches became known as **Los Pinos Nuevos Evangelical Association**, under the sponsorship of the U.S.-based West Indies Mission, founded by Thompson. This mission agency, later renamed WorldTeam, and its associated churches in the Caribbean are part of the Evangelical Free Church tradition.

Numerous Pentecostal denominations were founded in Cuba between 1930 and 1960: the Church of God of Prophecy (1935), Open Bible Standard Churches (1937), Church of God World Missions (1942, based in Cleveland, TN), Bethel Evangelical Church (1944, affiliated with Elim Missionary Assemblies), Pentecostal Church of God (1951), Pentecostal Holiness

Church (1952), and the Congregational Pentecostal Church of Cuba (1956, founded by Luis M. Ortiz from Puerto Rico; this denomination was renamed the Worldwide Missionary Movement in 1963). Also founded in the 1950s were the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Church of Christ of the Apostolic Faith, Apostolic Movement of God in Christ Jesus (founded by Emilio Alfonso Howard), United Pentecostal Church, Damascus Christian Church, Missionary Church of Christ, Worldwide Missions (founded by Marco Díaz Gonzáles), and Defenders of the Faith.

Also founded during this period (1930-1960) were numerous non-Pentecostal denominations, including: the Church of God (1930, based in Anderson, IN), African Methodist Episcopal Church (1939), independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (1939), Plymouth Brethren (1939, affiliated with Christian Mission in Many Lands), Free Will Baptist Churches (1941, founded by missionary Thomas Wiley), Interior Gospel Mission (1944, founded by Vicente Izquierdo and his wife, Bessie Vander Valk, who became affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church in 1958), United World Mission (1944), Church of the Nazarene (reopened its work in 1945), Berean Mission (1945, founded by missionaries Ruby Miller and Lucille Kerrigan), Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (1946, Isle of Pines), Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches (1949), Franconia Mennonite Church (1954), Brethren in Christ Missions (1954), Baptist Bible Fellowship International (1955), and the Conservative Baptist Home Mission Society (1957).

Insert Table of Statistics on the Protestant Movement in 1995

In 1995, Dr. Peter Brierly, editor of the *World Churches Handbook* (published in 1997), estimated that there were approximately 193,000 Protestant adherents in Cuba. The largest denominations were the Assemblies of God (320 churches with 28,000 members), the Cuban Baptist Convention (227 churches with 12,750 members), the Seventh-day Adventist Church (110 churches with 11,200 members), the Pentecostal Christian Church (86 churches with 8,620 members), the *Los Pinos Nuevos* Evangelical Convention – WorldTeam (84 churches and 5,040 members), the Methodist Church (90 churches with 3,100 members), the Foursquare Gospel Church (46 churches with 1,620 members), the Pentecostal Holiness Church (16 churches with 1,300 members), the Reformed Presbyterian Church (44 churches with 1,100 members), and the Episcopal Church (21 churches with 1,100 members).

According to PROLADES research on Cuba, using Brierly's statistical data for 1995, the Liturgical Family of Churches had 65 churches with 10,300 members (2.3 percent of the total Protestant membership); the Evangelical Free Church Family of Churches had 546 churches with 36,318 members (38.6 percent); the Adventist Family of Churches had 110 churches with 11,200 members (11.8 percent); the Pentecostal Family of Churches had 560 churches with 44,572 members (47.3 percent). By way of comparison, the **Seventh-day Adventist Church** reported 272 churches in 2007, up from 145 in 1997; and 27,556 members in 2007, up from 16,011 in 1997. This shows a large increase in the number of churches and members since 1980.

The Assemblies of God, officially registered as *Iglesia Evangélica Pentecostal de Cuba*, was founded by U.S. missionaries who laid the foundation for growth during the 1920s. It was reported that “many came to faith in Christ as the Word of God was confirmed with signs and wonders.” When political unrest prompted missionaries to leave in 1963, the Assemblies of God had 42 organized churches, 248 preaching points and 4,100 believers. During the difficult years that followed, the church suffered loss and experience a time of stagnation. However, during the

1980s, there was a resurgence of church growth. By 1990, the Assembly of God constituency numbered 12,000 people in 90 churches. As revival spread, reports indicated that “thousands of people came to faith in Christ and hundreds of healings took place.” Today, the Assemblies of God is one of the largest Protestant denominations in Cuba.

After decades of tension following the January 1959 triumph of the Cuban revolution, relations between the socialist government and Protestant churches took a radical turn for the better in the wake of a 2 April 1990 meeting between President Fidel Castro and 70 Protestant evangelical and ecumenical leaders. As a result of this meeting, the ruling Communist Party opened up its membership to people of faith, discrimination for religious reasons diminished, and new opportunities for religious organizations to work in the social arena were created.

In June 1999, an estimated 100,000 Protestants gathered for a rally at Habana’s Revolution Square, which was an even larger crowd of people who had gathered there in January 1998 to greet Pope John Paul II, and both events signaled a new willingness by the Cuban Government to open up to the world at large and to the Christian churches in particular. The Protestant convocation was called by the **Cuban Council of Churches (CCC)**, an ecumenical agency composed by 25 Protestant denominations, who for a long time had wanted to hold “a great Evangelical event in which all Evangelical churches could come together” to celebrate and confirm its own life and common faith. Participating in this historic event were CCC member organizations, along with another 24 denominations and independent churches that were not CCC members.

Today, an estimated 550,000 Cubans hear the Gospel preached and taught each week in more than 8,300 registered Protestant churches, house churches (*casa culto*) or cell group meetings, some of which are considered illegal gatherings by the Cuban Government. Between 1992 and 1998, more than 700 Protestant churches were established in Cuba, according to reliable sources.

The Cuban Council of Protestant Churches, founded in 1941, was renamed the Ecumenical Council of Cuba in 1977, when it was composed of 14 member organizations. Today, it is known as the CCC and is affiliated with the **Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI)** and the **World Council of Churches (WCC)**. Within the CCC, the only Cuban-based denominations that are members of the WCC are the Methodist Church of Cuba and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Cuba.

In 2008, the CCC registered 25 religious organizations as full members, nine as associate members, and three had observer status. During 2008, the **Greek Orthodox Church** and the **Pentecostal Church of Sovereign Grace in Cuba** became new full members. Three new communities were accepted as fraternal associate members: the Assembly of Christian Churches, the Foursquare Pentecostal Church, and the Reflection and Solidarity Group Mons. Oscar Arnulfo Romero. The Christian New Life Church became an observer member. The CCC is structured into five “zones” across Cuba and represents approximately 100,000 Christians, according to the CCC’s leadership. Most CCC members are officially recognized by the State, although some, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church, lack legal status and are recognized through their membership in the CCC.

Other Religions

In the 1950s, local Catholic priests taught their parishioners that “Protestants were the devil and that the people should not send their children to Protestant schools,” whereas today there is more religious tolerance and respect for differing religious views, whether between Catholics and

Protestants or among Protestants. However, there is less tolerance by Catholics and Protestants regarding religious sects and “new religious movements” in Cuban society. The exception is regarding Eastern Orthodox denominations that exist in Cuba today.

In 1960, the Cuban Government took over the facilities of the **Greek Orthodox Church** in La Habana dedicated to Saints Constantine and Helen, and the building was used to house a children’s theatre company. Following the 1998 visit to Cuba of Pope John Paul II, Archbishop Athenagoras of the Holy Metropolitanate of Panama and Central America, together with the Greek Ambassador to Cuba, Yorgos Kostoulas, began to put pressure at the diplomatic and political levels on the Cuban Government to return the Temple of Saints Constantine and Helen to officials of the Greek Orthodox Church. However, instead of doing this, the Castro government agreed to build a new Greek Orthodox church in La Habana, which was the first religious structure to be constructed in Cuba in 43 years. The new church was built near St. Francesco de Assisi Square, located on the port side of Old (Colonial) Habana, and dedicated to Saint Nikolaos (or Nicholas). The Greek Orthodox Church was founded in Cuba in 1950 in La Habana among a small Greek immigrant population.

In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church received permission and financing from the Cuban Government in 2004 to begin construction of its own cathedral in La Habana, which will be built as a “monument to Cuban-Russian friendship” according to Metropolitan Kirill, the head of the ROC’s foreign relations department who travelled to Cuba from Moscow for the consecration of the cornerstone in mid-November 2004. Attending the ceremony was Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi, the Vatican’s Ambassador to Cuba. The new church pays homage to the thousands of Russian workers, soldiers and technicians who cooperated with Communist Cuba for three “glorious” decades prior to the fall of the Soviet Union. The Eastern Orthodox community in Cuba is composed of only a few thousands immigrants from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East.

Non-Protestant marginal Christian groups include the Jehovah's Witnesses, which reported more than 1,238 congregations (many of these are probably house churches) with 90,783 adherents in 2008; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) currently reports no churches or members in Cuba due to government restrictions; the Unitarian Universalist Church, and the **Church of Christ, Scientist** (one congregation).

Major non-Christian religions include Hinduism (Sant Thakar Singh meditation on the inner light and sound – Sant Mat tradition), Buddhism, Baha'is, Islam and Judaism. **Buddhism:** Sokka Gakkai International (SGI), Nichiren Daishonin and various Western Zen groups. SGI-Cuba became the first Buddhist association to be officially recognized as a religious corporation by the Cuban government. On 6 January 2007, a ceremony celebrating the official registration of SGI-Cuba was held in Havana. **Baha'is:** the Cuban Bahá'í community had its beginning in 1939; its headquarters are in Municipio Cerro of La Habana.

The Muslim population consists of about 6,000 temporary residents and 300 native-born persons, many of Middle Eastern ancestry. Currently, Cuban Muslims perform their prayers at home, because even in La Habana there is no mosque in which they could congregate for prayers; the only prayers that are performed in public are the Friday Prayers that are conducted in a place known as The Arab House, which belonged to a wealthy Arab immigrant who lived in Cuba in the 1940s. The Arab House contains an Arabic museum, an Arabic restaurant, and the place is used by Muslim diplomats for Friday Prayers, but is off-bounds to Cuban Muslims, even for prayers. Among the international Islamic organizations that are carrying out charitable work among Cuba’s Muslims is the Qatari Charitable Society, and it is estimated that the population of indigenous Cuban Muslims is not less than 1,000. Also, the **Subud Association** (founded in

Indonesia in 1925 by Muhammad Subuh) is active in Cuba with representatives in La Habana and Manzanillo de Granma.

Jews settled in Cuba in the 16th century, having been expelled from Spain in 1492. However, the growth of the community did not begin until the 19th century. The Jewish population in Cuba peaked in the 1950s at around 15,000 people, but most of them fled the island in the wake of the 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power. Today, the Jewish community has an estimated 1,500 members, with 1,200 of them residing in Habana.

For more than 40 years, Canadian Jews have been supporting their few remaining Cuban brethren in a variety of ways, thereby helping to ensure that a Jewish presence survives in what is one of the world's few remaining Communist countries. In 1961, the Toronto chapter of the Canadian Jewish Congress inaugurated an annual ritual that continues to this day. Each year, the chapter ships a container of kosher food and wine to the island so that the dietary laws of the faithful can be properly observed during Passover. In 2003, the CJC launched another program, called the Canada-Cuba Experience in Israel, which enables a dozen or so Jewish youngsters from the island to travel abroad each year, first to Canada and then on to Israel for a summertime trip lasting several weeks.

In addition, **a variety of religious and esoteric groups** have survived from earlier in the 20th century, including Freemasonry, the Theosophical Society (Point Loma - The Hague), and the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC).

Freemasonry. On 12 July 1886, a group of persons that included Masons gathered at the invitation of Jaime Noguera Rosés and established a private shelter for paupers to be called "La Misericordia" (Mercy), located on Buenos Aires Street, in the neighborhood now known as Cerro Municipality. In July 1917, a new Board of Directors was formed, composed entirely of Masons, presided by W. B. Enrique Llansó Simoni. After the death of Illustrious Past Grand Master Enrique Llansó Simoni, on 5 July 1932, the name of the shelter was changed from "La Misericordia" to "Lansó National Masonic Home."

Theosophy. In 1906, a Raja-Yoga School was opened in Pinar del Río, staffed by theosophical volunteers. Katherine Tingley (KT) purchased property on San Juan Hill in 1907, and in November 1908 the cornerstone was laid there for the Cuban Theosophical Headquarters. In 1909, another Raja-Yoga School opened in Santa Clara, Cuba, serving almost ninety children. A third school was opened in Santiago del Cuba. The Cuban *Theosophical Review* was published for more than 25 years by the Theosophical Society of Cuba (1903-1928). In 1960, Theosophy officials reported 21 lodges with 589 members in the six provinces. The national president of the Theosophical Society of Cuba was Mr. Alfredo Puig.

AMORC. The Rosacruz Circle of Social Assistance was founded on 8 May 1943 in La Habana and functioned until 21 March 1963. Today, the headquarters of AMORC are located at Logia Lago Moeris, Calle Santa Emilia # 416, Santos Suárez, La Habana.

The Psychic-Spiritualist-New Age movement is represented in Cuba by a variety of religious groups: **Santería** is just one of several branches of African-based *spiritualism in Cuba*, albeit the most popular. Many local newspapers carry notices regarding local psychics, mediums, clairvoyants, fortune tellers, etc., who are available to assist "seekers" (customers) regarding personal, matrimonial, social and spiritual issues. European spiritualism appeared in Cuba in the form of **the International Spiritualist Federation** (founded in 1923 in Paris), which established an affiliated association in La Habana in the 1920s. **New Age groups** include Reiki and Control Mental Silva. The **Sociedad Bodha de Las Antillas** was founded in Santiago de Cuba in 1936, but the parent body, the Bodha Society of America, is now extinct.

While Christianity spread across Cuba, an undercurrent of religion grew among African slaves and their descendents derived from **West African animistic religions**. Various forms of Afro-Cuban religion emerged, primarily **Santería** (also known as Regla de Ocha or Lukumi), Culto a Ifá, Regla Conga, Palo Monte, Palo Mayombe, Arará, Ganga and Sociedad Secreta Abakuá (also known as Ñañguismo). These groups operate as semi-secret religious communities that meet in private homes, and their actual size is difficult to assess. Santería, which many people believe rivals the Catholic Church in adherents, has reached greater recognition in Cuban society after the 1959 revolution, and is now treated by the government on a par with all other religions. In 1999, there were an estimated 2,000 *babalawos* (Santería priests) in the whole country, or one for every 4,000 people. No reliable figures exist, but *santeros* (adherents of Santería) almost certainly outnumber the adherents of other organized religions in Cuba. Some sources estimate that now as much as 80 percent of the Cuban population consults with practitioners of religions with West African roots.

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