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

SECOND EDITION

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# Religion in Colombia

## Country Overview

The Republic of Colombia is a large country in the northwestern corner of the South American continent, located between Ecuador and Peru to the south, Venezuela and Brazil to the east, and Panama to the west on the Darién Peninsula. Its northern coastline east of Panama touches the Caribbean Sea and to the west is the Pacific Ocean. Colombian territory also includes several small islands in the Caribbean Sea (San Andrés and Providencia) and in the Pacific Ocean (the largest of which is Malpelo).

According to the 2018 census, Colombia had 48,258,494 inhabitants in an area of 439,735 square miles (land and water) that made it the third-most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico; about 77 percent of total population was urban. The nation is divided administratively into **thirty-two departments** and a **Capital District**. Each department has a Governor and a Department Assembly elected by popular vote for a four-year period. Departments are subdivided into municipalities, which are governed by a mayor and municipal council, both of which are elected by the people for a four-year period.

The Capital District is the nation's capital, Santafé de Bogotá (founded in 1538), with a population of 7,412,566 in 2018, which is partially dependent on the Department of Cundinamarca that surrounds it. Perched in Colombia's central mountain range, Bogotá is about 8,700 ft above sea level and basks in year-round spring-like weather, with warm days and chilly nights. Bogotá is the nation's primary commercial, cultural and political center (followed by Medellín, Cali and Barranquilla), and one of the most important financial centers in Latin America.

The **Cordillera Central** range is one of the three branches of ridges in the Andes Mountains that are split in southern Colombia by broad river



valleys that lead north to the **Montes de María and the Caribbean Sea**. The central mountain range is bounded by the Cauca and Magdalena river valleys to the west and east, respectively. The valleys of the Cordillera Central form the nation's principal coffee-growing region.

Medellín (founded in 1615), located in the Department of Antioquía, is the nation's second-largest city, with a population of 2,427,129 in 2018. The Medellín Metropolitan Area, located in the fertile Aburrá Valley (where most of the nation's premiere coffee is produced), contains more than 3.6 million people (2018). During the 19th century, Medellín was a dynamic commercial center that exported gold, then produced and exported coffee. After the Thousand Day's War (1899-1902), Medellín was the first Colombian city involved in the Industrial Revolution with the development of the textile industry and railways that facilitated its export business; it also became an educational center with the founding of several universities and vocational training institutions.

Colombia has at least eleven active or dormant volcanoes, and its tallest mountain rises to 18,947 feet at Cristobal Colón Peak. The highest volcano in the country, *Nevado del Huila*, erupted in 1994 after being dormant for about 500 years, and caused the death of more than a thousand Indigenous people living nearby; it last erupted in November 2008. The Colombian climate shows all possible varieties, from the moist heat of the tropical lowlands to the bitter cold of the high mountain ranges.

East of the Andes Mountains are the savannas of the Orinoco River basin, which extends farther east into Venezuela; to the southeast along the border with Brazil, and to the southern border with Peru, are the vast lowlands of the Amazon River basin. Together these savannas and lowlands comprise over half of the national territory, but they contain less than three percent of the total population. The northern Caribbean Coast is home to 20 percent of the population and the location of two major port cities, Barranquilla (2.4 million) and Cartagena (1.0 million) in 2018. The northern region generally consists of low-lying plains, but it also contains the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountain range that includes the country's tallest peaks, and the aired plains of the Guajira Peninsula that borders Venezuela. By contrast, the narrow and discontinuous Pacific coastal lowlands, backed by the Baudó Mountains, are covered in dense vegetation and sparsely populated. The nation's largest and busiest seaport is Buenaventura (pop. 308,188 in 2018), located in the Department of Valle del Cauca on the Pacific Coast. The **Cauca River** flows north between the Western and Central mountain ranges. **Santiago de Cali**, the capital of the Valle del Cauca Department, had a population of 2.2 million in 2018 and was the nation's third-largest city.

## **Ethnic and Racial Characteristics**

The 2005 census reported that the "non-ethnic population," consisting of whites and mestizos (those of mixed white European and Amerindian ancestry), constituted 86 percent of the national population. In addition, 10.6 percent is of African ancestry, and Amerindians comprise 3.4 percent of the population. It is estimated that 49 percent of the Colombian population is mestizo and approximately 37 percent is white, mainly of Spanish ancestry with more recent additions of Italian and German immigrants and their descendants.

The Colombian government officially acknowledges three ethnic minority groups within the national population: Afro-Colombian, Indigenous Amerindian, and Gypsy (Rom, or Romany). The Afro-Colombian population consists of blacks (negroes of African heritage), mulattoes

(people of mixed European and African ancestry) and *zambos* (a term used since colonial times for people of mixed Amerindian and African ancestry).

**The Indigenous tribal peoples** suffered a large reduction in population during the Spanish colonial period due to warfare and disease, and others were absorbed into the mestizo population, but the remainder currently represent more than 80 Indigenous ethnolinguistic groups. Most Amerindians inhabit the remote upper extremities of the Amazon River basin in the eastern regions of Colombia that border Brazil. Although the Colombian government recognizes 87 different Amerindian groups in the 2005 census, the Colombian National Indigenous Organization (ONIC) maintains that there are 102 different Indigenous communities: <https://www.onic.org.co/pueblos> Currently, 65 Amerindian languages are spoken in the country, of which five have no capacity for revitalization and another 19 are in serious danger of disappearing.

Source: <https://www.iwgia.org/en/colombia.html>

According to the 2005 national census, Amerindians comprised 3.4 percent of the population or about 1,640,800 people: 78.6 percent of the Indigenous population was concentrated in rural zones and 21.4 percent in urban zones. Out of the total Indigenous population in 2005, 796,916 inhabited *indigenous reserves* (57.2 percent). The departments with the highest proportion of Indigenous people in the 2018 census were: Vaupés (66.7 percent), Guainía (64.9 percent), La Guajira (44.9 percent), Vichada (44.4 percent), Amazonas (43.4 percent), Cauca (21.6 percent) and Putumayo (20.9 percent). The departments of La Guajira (278,212), Cauca (248,532), Nariño (155,199), Córdoba (151,064), and Sucre (82,934) contain approximately two-thirds of the country's Indigenous people. Amerindian communities have legal autonomy to enforce their own traditional laws and customs in the indigenous reserves.

Source: [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etnograf%C3%ADa\\_de\\_Colombia](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etnograf%C3%ADa_de_Colombia)

Colombia's Political Constitution of 1991 finally recognized the fundamental rights of Indigenous peoples and ratified, ILO Convention 169. The government signed and ratified the current international law concerning indigenous peoples, The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989. The Government of Colombia adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. At the national level, Indigenous peoples are represented by two main organizations: the "Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia" (ONIC) and "Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia" (AICO).

President Santos signed a decree in 2014 that created a special regime to put into operation the administration of Indigenous peoples' own systems in their territories until Congress issues the Organic Law of Territorial Management that will define the relations and coordination between the Indigenous Territorial Entities and the Municipalities and Departments.

Source: <https://www.iwgia.org/en/colombia.html>

According to the information provided by Higinio Obispo, President of ONIC, the much-awaited peace agreements signed in 2016 between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas, aiming at putting an end to more than 50 years of civil war, have not put an end to the violence and the systematic violation of the rights of the indigenous peoples in the country. On the contrary, the number of attacks and murders are increasing on a nearly daily basis.

According to the statement issued by ONIC last week (July 2018), since the signing of the peace accords in 2016, 68 indigenous leaders and community members have been killed. The horrendous figures provided by ONIC of human rights violations committed against Indigenous leaders and community members provide evidence of the danger of extinction and extermination that indigenous peoples are currently suffering in Colombia.

The legal and illegal armed groups that perpetrate these crimes are dissidents from the guerrilla armed groups, paramilitaries and military forces and impunity is around 90%, according to the Colombian Commission of Jurists. In addition, recruitment and use of indigenous children, adolescents and young people by legal and illegal armed groups, is still a common practice in peacetime said Higinio Obispo in New York and denounced the Colombian Government for criminalizing indigenous peoples' mobilization to silence their protest.

Source: <https://www.iwgia.org/en/colombia/3269-solidarity-indigenous-peoples-colombia.html>

**Black Africans** were brought to Colombia as slaves, mostly to the coastal lowlands, beginning early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The black and mulatto populations have largely remained in the lowland areas on the Caribbean and Pacific coasts and along the Cauca and Magdalena rivers. According to the results of the 2005 Census, conducted by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), a total of 4,311,757 people self-identified as *Afro-Colombian*, which included the categories of **Raizal, Palenquero, Negro, Mulatto and Afro-Colombian**, that represented 10.4 percent of the nation's total population.

The **Raizal** are a Protestant Afro-Caribbean ethnic group who speak San Andrés-Providencia Creole, an English-based Creole, who live in the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina Islands of Colombia, in the San Andrés-Providencia Department (61,280 inhabitants in 2018), in the Caribbean Sea, located about 775 km northwest of mainland Colombia. The Raizal people are the native population of the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, who to avoid confusion with the name of "natives" given to the Indigenous people call themselves "raizales." They are the product of miscegenation between Indigenous, Spanish, French, English, Dutch and African peoples who settled in these remote islands, with the British culture being dominant as a result of British colonization in these Caribbean islands. The Raizal culture has its own unique cultural expressions: the Baptist religion (a result of Jamaican Baptist missionary efforts), Creole language and oral tradition. The isolated inhabitants of such a small space produced a strong social network that maintains permanent community solidarity, which has generated a collective feeling of independence from Colombian continental events. The DANE 2005 Census reported 30,565 self-recognized people as *Raizales* in all of Colombia; however, the *Raizales* constituted only 57 percent of the department's population in 2005. Adapted from: <https://www.mincultura.gov.co/areas/poblaciones/comunidades-negras-afrocolombianas-raizales-y-palenqueras/Documents/Caracterizaci%C3%B3n%20comunidad%20Raizal.pdf>

**Palenquero** is a Spanish-based creole language primarily spoken in the village of San Basilio de Palenque, which is located southeast of Cartagena, and in some neighborhoods of Barranquilla. *Palenquero* is the only Spanish-based Creole in Latin America. The ethnic group that speaks this language only consisted of 6,637 people in 2018.

Self-recognized communities such as **Negro, Mulatto and Afro-Colombian** are concentrated in the Valle del Cauca department, where 25.5 percent of this ethnic population (1,090,943 people) live, followed by Antioquia with 13.9 percent (593,174 people), Bolívar with 11.5 percent (491,364 people), and Chocó with 6.7 percent (285,964 people). These four departments contain 57.6 percent of the population in this category.

Source: <https://www.mincultura.gov.co/areas/poblaciones/comunidades-negras-afrocolombianas-raizales-y-palenqueras/Documents/Caracterizaci%C3%B3n%20comunidades%20negras%20y%20afrocolombianas.pdf>

However, according to the results of the 2018 Census, the population that self-identifies as Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal or Palenquera totaled 2.98 million people. The director of DANE, Juan Daniel Oviedo, stated that "between the General Census of 2005 and the National Census of

Population and Housing of 2018, the self-recognition of people in this ethnic population was reduced by 30.8 percent," since the 2005 census reported 4.3 million people in this category. The reasons for this decline in "self-identification" of people in this category were not given in the census documents.

Between the 2005 and 2018 census, the departments where the population that self-identified as Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal or Palenquera increased the most were Guainía, with an increase of 149 percent, Arauca with an increase of 70 percent, and Casanare with an increase of 53 percent. Regarding the geographical distribution of this ethnic population, the department with the highest concentration of Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizales or Palenque people was Valle del Cauca, with 647,526 people. However, compared to the 2005 census, in which 1.1 million people were counted in this ethnic category in this department, this ethnic population decreased by 40.7 percent. According to DANE, the department of Chocó had 337,696 people in this ethnic group, followed by Bolívar with 319,396, Antioquia with 312,112, and Cauca with 245,362 people in this ethnic group.

Source: <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/el-dane-informo-que-la-poblacion-afro-asciende-a-298-millones-de-personas-2929745>

## Immigration History

After the initial period of Spanish colonization, immigration has included a variety of other Europeans (Dutch, German, Italian, French, Swiss, Belgian and Basque), also many North Americans arrived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, along with Middle Easterners fleeing the cruelties of the Ottoman Empire (ended in 1914). In addition, there were an estimated 79,000 Romani (or Roma), popularly known as *gitanos* (Gypsies), in Colombia; the Romani are a European ethnic group that traces its origins to medieval India. During and after World War II, small numbers of Poles, Lithuanians, English, Irish and Croats arrived. Many immigrant communities have been formed on Colombia's Caribbean coast. Barranquilla, the largest city on the Caribbean coastline, has the country's largest concentration of foreign residents, including people of Lebanese, Arab, Sephardic, Romani, Italian, German and French descent. There are also small communities of Chinese and Japanese; the city of Cali has the largest Asian community because of its proximity to the Pacific Coast. Asians can also be found in other major cities, such as Barranquilla, Bogotá, Bucaramanga and Medellín.

**Venezuelan immigration.** In 2016, for every 2,000 inhabitants in Colombia, one or two were going to live abroad; since 2018, for every 2,000 inhabitants, 26 are arriving from abroad. This population increase is directly related to the inflow of Venezuelan migrants who have fled their homeland due to the political crisis and economic collapse in Venezuela. The reality of the country is quite different from that of three years ago, since the population rate from 2005 to 2018 grew, year by year, by one percent. However, because of Venezuela's political and economic problems, which caused people to leave, the population rate doubled to 2.3 percent, which means that each year there will be 1,150,000 more people living in Colombia if this trend continues. Source: <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/colombia-ganara-un-millon-de-habitantes-anualmente-por-la-migracion-venezolana-2963902>

Border tensions between Colombia and Venezuela since 2015 have produced heavy migration streams between the two countries, which have created a serious refugee problem in Colombia due to Colombians and Venezuelans fleeing from Venezuela.

A **Venezuela–Colombia migrant crisis** occurred in mid-2015 following the shooting of three Venezuelan soldiers on the Venezuela–Colombia border that left them injured and President of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro's response of deporting thousands of Colombians. Maduro's response of declaring a state of emergency, closing the border to Colombia indefinitely and deporting thousands of Colombians that lived near the border, struck fear in tens of thousands of other Colombians living in Venezuela resulting in their emigration from the country and a crisis involving separated families and Colombians seeking food and shelter. The actions of President Maduro were questioned by human rights groups, the United States, the United Nations and the European Union.

Tensions between the two countries slowed months after the initial border controversy. Nearly one year later, in July 2016, the Venezuelan government allowed Venezuelans to cross the border into Colombia on specific dates. In that month, over 200,000 Venezuelans poured into Colombia to purchase goods due to shortages in Venezuela. On 12 August 2016, the Venezuelan government officially reopened its border with Colombia, with thousands of Venezuelans, again, entering Colombia to seek escape from Venezuela's socioeconomic crisis. Through 2016, many Venezuelans sought to emigrate into neighboring Colombia following the reopening of the Venezuela–Colombia border.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela%E2%80%93Colombia\\_migrant\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venezuela%E2%80%93Colombia_migrant_crisis)

***UNHCR welcomes Colombia's decision to regularize stay of Venezuelans in the country***

*This is a summary of what was said by UNHCR spokesperson Shabia Mantoo – to whom quoted text may be attributed – at today's press briefing at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.*

04 February 2020

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, welcomes the Colombian government's announcement of the creation of two new Special Stay Permits (PEP) that seek to benefit more than 100,000 Venezuelans, by allowing them to stay and work in the country. *Colombia is host to more than 1.6 million Venezuelans, of whom more than half, almost 60 per cent, lack a regular status.* Many of them face difficulties accessing essential services, such as health, education and employment.

The two new Special Stay Permits announced by Colombia this week are expected to benefit Venezuelans who entered Colombia before 29 November 2019 with stamped passports as well as those currently in an irregular situation but holding an offer of employment for a period of at least two months up to a maximum of two years.

Venezuelans receiving the new Special Stay Permits will therefore be able to regularize their situation in the country, receive wages and be covered by Colombian labour laws. They will also be able to enroll in and benefit from the national social security and healthcare system.

UNHCR protection monitoring exercises indicate that access to the labour market remains a top priority among Venezuelans in Colombia.

According to the Colombian Migration Authority, only 14 per cent of the almost 600,000 Venezuelans in the country that currently hold a special stay permit are engaged in formal employment.

Since 2017, Colombia has created several Special Stay Permits that have been granted to Venezuelans who entered the country during specific periods of time and who fulfilled specific requirements such as having their passports stamped at an official border crossing.

Among these permits is also one issued for Venezuelans who were irregularly present in Colombia and were registered during a nation-wide registration exercise carried out by the Colombian government and supported by UNHCR in 2018.

The UNHCR remains committed to support governments across Latin America and the Caribbean to regularize the situation of Venezuelans currently living in an irregular situation. These efforts are key to guaranteeing the inclusion of Venezuelans in national systems, reducing their vulnerabilities and allowing them to contribute to the economy of their host countries.

In 2020, USD 1.35 billion will be needed to respond to the increasing needs of Venezuelan refugees and migrants and the communities hosting them in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Source: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/2/5e3930db4/unhcr-welcomes-colombias-decision-regularize-stay-venezuelans-country.html>

## The Economy

Historically, Colombia had an agrarian economy based on the production and export of coffee from the lush valleys of the central highlands. However, Colombia experienced rapid urbanization during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and by 2000 just 22.7 percent of the workforce was employed in agriculture, which generated 11.5 percent of its GDP. In 2000, 58.5 percent of the workforce was employed the services sector, while 18.7 percent were industrial workers. The country's main industries are: textiles, food processing, petroleum, clothing and footwear, beverages, chemicals, cement; gold, coal and emeralds. During the 2000s, Colombia's main exports were minerals and agricultural products; the later includes: coffee, fresh-cut flowers, bananas, rice, tobacco, corn, sugarcane, cocoa beans, oilseed, vegetables, forestry products and shrimp. Colombia's principal export partners in 2008 were the USA (32.1 percent), Venezuela (16.8 percent) and Chile (4.8 percent).

Beginning in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Colombia developed an underground economy based on the cultivation, processing and sale of cocaine to other nations, especially in North America and Europe. The 1960s saw the emergence of various private armies, including leftist guerrilla movements seeking to overthrow the government and paramilitary forces assembled to protect the interests of the wealthy landowners.

For many years serious internal armed conflict deterred foreign tourists from visiting Colombia. However, in recent years international tourism has risen sharply, as a result of improvements in public security resulting from President Álvaro Uribe's "democratic security" strategy (President from 2002-2010), which has included significant increases in military and police strength and presence throughout the country. This strategy has resulted in rebel groups being pushed further away from the major cities, highways and tourist sites that attract international visitors. For a critique on this "democratic security" strategy, see *The Failure of Colombia's "Democratic Security"* at: <https://nacla.org/article/failure-colombia%27s-democratic-security>

Uribe's "Democratic Security" strategy is based on and draws support from the same political discourse as the Bush Administration's War on Terror. It is a discourse that obliges him to combat "terrorist groups" in Colombia at all costs. According to Uribe, "The Colombian State has theoretically given all liberties [to citizens], and terror has overcome these liberties." Uribe regularly paints his government's actions as a war against terrorists, rather than placing the current internal armed conflict in historical perspective and thereby recognizing the political and social elements of the fighting. "There is no armed conflict here," says Uribe. "There was armed conflict in other countries when insurgents fought against dictatorships. Here there is no dictatorship; here there is a profound, complete democracy. What we have here is the challenge of a few terrorists."

According to the U.S. government's list of terrorist organizations, Colombia is home to three different terrorist groups: the paramilitary group AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), and the two guerrilla groups, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). However, the Uribe Administration has opted not to pursue each of these terrorist groups equally. Rather, his Administration is implementing a three-pronged platform to gain "national security": negotiating with paramilitaries, attacking the FARC, and pursuing legal and constitutional reforms. All of these strategies have been dependent upon the financial support of Washington through Plan Colombia. The strategies have also led to continuing violence and insecurity.

During his tenure (2002-2006), President Uribe's declared priority was to contain or defeat the three main armed groups in Colombia: the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), National Liberation Army (ELN), and FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). By the end of his first term in office, the AUC had other right-wing militias agreed to disarm and go to jail under special sentences of seven years.

Uribe stated that the government had to first show military superiority in order to eventually make the guerrillas return to the negotiating table with a more flexible position, even if this would only happen after his term in office expired. Early in his government, he was quoted as saying that Colombia's main concerns were the challenges of terrorism and the narcotics trade. In a dialog with BBC's *Talking Point*, Uribe stated: "Of course we need to eliminate social injustice in Colombia but what is first? Peace. Without peace, there is no investment. Without investment, there are no fiscal resources for the government to invest in the welfare of the people" ("Uribe defends security policies," BBC News, 18 November 2004).

## **Current Religious Situation**

The 1991 Constitution provides for freedom of religion (Article 19), and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution states that there is no official church or religion but adds that the State "is not atheist or agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment." Some interpret this to mean that the State unofficially sanctions a privileged position for Catholicism, which was the official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution.

A 1973 Concordat between the Vatican and the government remains in effect, although some of its articles are unenforceable because of constitutional provisions regarding freedom of religion. A 1994 Constitutional Court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to a religious characterization of the country.

The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religious organizations: recognition as a legal entity (*personería jurídica*) and special public recognition as a religious entity. Although the application process is often lengthy, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI-DAR), Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Dirección de Asuntos Religiosos*), readily grants the former recognition; the only legal requirements are submission of a formal request and basic organizational information. In addition, any foreign religious group that wishes to establish a presence must document official recognition by authorities in its home country. The MOIJ may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights. However, many non-Catholic religious groups have opted not to apply for

legal recognition and instead operate as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or as informal religious entities.

Between 1995 and 2004, the MOI-DAR approved 1,170 applications for special public recognition as a religious entity; an estimated 90 percent of the approvals were for Protestant entities (including denominations, local churches and service agencies). An article in the daily *El Tiempo* (2 April 2007) quoted Bogotá's mayor as stating that “there are now 700 non-Catholic places of worship in the capital city, compared to 450 Catholic churches.” According to the MOI-DAR, 1,775 applications failed to meet constitutionally established requirements and thus were not approved. Although the MOI-DAR has statutory authority over recognizing religious entities, there is no government agency to monitor or enforce laws governing religious freedom.

According to the MOI-DAR, as of 4 July 2019, a total of 7,726 non-Catholic religious associations had been registered, including Christian and non-Christian groups:

<https://asuntosreligiosos.mininterior.gov.co/mision/asuntos-religiosos/registro-publico-de-entidades-religiosas>

Although the government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, some religious leaders stated their opinions about the matter. The Colombian Council of Evangelicals (CEDECOL) stated that approximately 15 percent of the population is Protestant, while the Colombian Catholic Bishops' Conference estimated that 90 percent of the population is Catholic during the mid-2000s.

However, the daily newspaper *El Tiempo* (22 March 2007), based on a national public opinion poll, reported that only 80 percent of the population claimed to be Roman Catholic (with a footnote that not all were active practitioners), 13.5 percent belonged to non-Catholic forms of Christianity (independent Western Roman, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant or marginal groups), 2.0 percent were agnostic (no religious affiliation), and the remaining 4.5 percent were affiliated with other religious groups, such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Afro-Colombian and Indigenous animistic religions.

According to the 2018 *International Religious Freedom Report* (IRFR) for Colombia, the U.S. government estimated the total population at 48.1 million (July 2018 estimate). The Roman Catholic Church claimed that 75 percent of the population was Catholic. According to a 2017 survey by Corporación Latinobarómetro (Santiago, Chile), only 73 percent of the population was Catholic, 14 percent was Protestant, and 11 percent was atheist or agnostic or “nones.” Groups that together constituted less than 2.0 percent of the population included unaffiliated people or members of other religious groups, including Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as well as various animistic and syncretistic groups. The Colombian Confederation of Jewish Communities (CJCC) estimated that there were approximately 5,000 Jews in the country.

According to a series of public opinion polls by Corporación Latinobarómetro between 1995 and 2017 in Latin American countries, the Roman Catholic population in Colombia declined by 14 percentage points, from 87 percent to 73 percent. Meanwhile, the Protestant population increased from four percent in 1995 to 14 percent in 2017, an increase of ten percentage points (more than 300 percent increase in 22 years).

Adherents of some religious groups are concentrated in specific geographical regions. The vast majority of practitioners of syncretistic beliefs that blend Catholicism with elements of African animism are Afro-Colombians who reside in the western Department of Chocó. Most practitioners of Indigenous animistic religions dwell in remote, rural areas that are sparsely populated, such as the eastern departments (tropical lowlands of the Amazon River basin) and the northeastern peninsula of Guajira (the northernmost extension of the Andes mountain range).

Jews are concentrated in major cities, Muslims on the Caribbean coast, and a small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous region of Santander Department.

The presence of terrorist organizations in some areas of the country, such as the leftist **Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)**, have inhibited free religious expression by killing, kidnapping and extorted money from religious leaders and practitioners. However, the terrorist organizations generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political rather than religious reasons. The **National Liberation Army (ELN)**, the smaller of the two main Marxist guerrilla organizations, has continued to threaten members of religious organizations but generally adheres to its agreement to cease killing religious leaders who pose a threat to its revolutionary agenda. The dominant rightwing paramilitary group, the **United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)**, and former paramilitary and new criminal groups, including the *United Black Eagles of Colombia*, have also targeted members of religious organizations who challenge their authority in areas where these groups operate.

The Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office continues to investigate the killings in past years of 14 members of the clergy believed to have been targeted because they were outspoken critics of terrorist organizations. The Presidential Program for Human Rights reported that nearly all killings of priests by terrorist groups could be attributed to leftist guerrillas, particularly the FARC. Since 1 July 2005, according to the Colombian Catholic Bishops' Conference, terrorist groups have killed seven priests.

Catholic and Protestant church leaders reported that killings of religious leaders in rural communities were generally underreported because of the communities' isolation and fear of retribution. Religious leaders generally chose not to seek government protection because of their pacifist beliefs and fear of retribution from terrorist groups. Human rights organizations and CEDECOL claimed that leftist guerrillas, rightwing paramilitaries, and new criminal groups equally committed violence against evangelical church leaders. Religious workers involved in human rights activities have received death threats.

Most religious groups reported that due to threats many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the internal civil conflict. Illegal armed groups, especially the FARC, threatened or attacked religious officials for opposing the forced recruitment of minors, promoting human rights, assisting internally displaced persons, and discouraging coca cultivation. The Colombian Catholic Bishops' Conference also reported death threats against rural priests who spoke out against the illegal armed groups. In response to such threats, some religious workers relocated to other communities.

Because of the widespread influence of leftwing guerrillas, rightwing paramilitary groups, and international drug traffickers, the safety of North American Protestant missionaries also has been a concern of the government and human rights organizations. During the 1980s and 1990s, several missionaries were killed as the result of leftist guerrilla activity in the eastern jungle area where Wycliffe Bible Translators and New Tribes Mission established their presence among the remote tribal communities of unassimilated Amerindians.

Especially in the more remote regions of the country, many of the Amerindian groups have resisted Christianization by Catholic and Protestant missionaries and have maintained their traditional religious beliefs and practices (animism). The Guahibo, located in the remote eastern lowlands, are the largest of these groups. Many of the remote tribal groups have been targeted by Evangelical mission agencies and national denominations in recent decades as part of their quest to "reach the unreached people groups" who have retained their non-Christian religions.

## Historical Overview of Social, Political and Religious Development

The Spanish colonies on the Isthmus of Darién (since 1903, the Republic of Panama, but previously a province of Colombia) and the discovery of the Pacific Ocean by Vasco Nuñez de Balboa in September 1513 directed the course of Spanish explorations of Colombia to its northwestern and Pacific regions. The banks of large rivers (the Atrato, Cauca and Magdalena) that flow into the Caribbean Sea were also explored and conquered early by the Spanish. The river valleys, especially the Cauca, were inhabited by numerous agrarian Amerindian tribes, predominantly Chibchan, which also gathered gold from the rivers and crafted it into figures, ornaments, masks, utensils and other items. Much of the precious metal was found by the Spaniards at Indian gravesites.

More than a dozen Amerindian cultures inhabited Colombian territory before the Spanish Conquest and left vestiges of the surprising level of development they had attained. Towns and stone paths, enigmatic statues, burial urns and impressive gold and pottery objects constitute part of their inheritance that has survived to modern times. The Muisca, for example, were farmers on the highland plains, in addition to being excellent goldsmiths and potters, and left behind invaluable treasures. Pottery making and gold working also were notable among the Quimbaya, Sinu, Tayrona and Calima tribes.

The Amerindians of Antioquia, Anserma, Cali and Lile, although living in settled villages, were discovered to be cannibals by the Spanish, who waged wars of extermination against them. These tribal peoples, as well as many others, were brought to extinction as a result of warfare and European diseases. In western Colombia, the Spanish explorers penetrated to the northern limits of modern Ecuador (Río San Juan) comparatively early, and there they met other Spaniards who had traveled north from Quito, which led to strife and even to bloodshed.

The valley of the Magdalena River formed a natural route to the country's interior from the Caribbean coast. The Amerindian tribes around and to the south of the **Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta** (Chimilas, Panches, Tayrona, Muisca) were of a sedentary and hostile character, and offered prolonged resistance to Spanish colonization. Considerable gold was found among these Amerindian peoples, chiefly in burial places.

Until 1536, Tamalameque had been the most southern point reached from the Caribbean coastal town of Santa Marta by Spaniards exploring the Magdalena River valley. In the beginning of that year, however, an important expedition was launched under the command of Pedro Fernandez de Lugo, with the object of penetrating into the unknown mountain region to the south. Although Lugo soon died, his lieutenant Gonzalo Ximenes de Quesada led the Spanish forces that persevered and reached the central plateau, where they found numerous Chibchan tribes established in formal settlements and engaged in agriculture. The Spaniards found this region to be rich in gold and emeralds, especially among the Muisca, where these minerals are still found today.

By August 1538, Quesada had occupied the region of Cundinamarca in the central highlands after considerable warfare with the natives. There he founded the town of **Santafé de Bogotá, which later became the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada**. After the conquest of the Chibchan territories, other Spanish expeditions explored the territory to the east and southeast, which led toward the region known today as the Republic of Venezuela. **The Audiencia de Nueva Granada**, established in 1563, formed part of the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru until 1751, when it became a separate viceroyalty. The *audiencia* functioned as a court of appeal that arbitrated disputes and issued judgments in the Spanish colonial society.

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The Spanish colonial system encompassing the *audiencia* was extractive and exploitative, relying heavily on cheap native labor. Domestic industry was constrained during the colonial period because the *audiencia* was bound to Spain as part of a mercantile system. Under this arrangement, the colony functioned as the source of primary materials and the consumer of manufactured goods, a trade pattern that tended to enrich the metropolitan power at the expense of the colony.

Because Spaniards came to the New World in search of quick riches in the form of precious metals and jewels, mining for these items became the pillar of the economy for much of the colonial period. Indeed, the extraction of precious metals – such as gold and copper – in the American colonies formed the basis of the crown's economy.

Spain monopolized trade with its colonies. The Spanish Crown limited authorization for intercontinental trade to Veracruz (in present-day Mexico), Nombre de Dios (in present-day Panama), and Cartagena in Colombia. Direct trade with other colonies was prohibited; as a result, items from one colony had to be sent to Spain for reshipment to another colony. The Spanish Crown also established the routes of transport and the number of ships that were allowed to trade in the colonies. Merchants involved in intercontinental trade had to be Spanish nationals. Finally, the Spanish Crown circumscribed the type of merchandise that could be traded. The colony could export to Spain only precious metals, gold in particular, and some agricultural products. In return, Spain exported to the colonies most of the agricultural and manufactured goods that the colonies needed for survival. Domestic products supplemented these items only to a minor degree.

Agriculture, which was limited in the 1500s to providing subsistence for colonial settlements and immediate consumption for workers in the mines, became a dynamic enterprise in the 1600s and replaced mining as the core of the Colombian economy by the 1700s. By the end of the 1700s, sugar and tobacco had become important export commodities. The growth in agriculture resulted in part from the increasing exhaustion of mineral and metal resources in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which caused the Spanish Crown to reorient its economic policy to stimulate the agricultural sector.

As commercial agriculture became the foundation of the Colombian economy, two dominant forms of agricultural landholdings emerged: the *encomienda* and the *hacienda*. These landholdings were distinguishable by the manner in which the landholders obtained labor. The *encomienda* was a grant of the right to receive the tribute of Indians within a certain boundary. In contrast, the *hacienda* functioned through a contract arrangement involving the owner (the *hacendado*) and Indian laborers. Under a typical arrangement, Indians tilled the land a specified number of days per week or per year in exchange for small plots of land.

The *encomendero*, or recipient of the *encomienda*, extended privileges to *de facto* control of the land designated in his grant. In effect, the *encomendero* was a deputy charged by the Spanish Crown with responsibility for the support of the Indians and their moral and religious welfare. Assuming that the land and its inhabitants were entirely at its disposal, the Spanish Monarchy envisioned the *encomiendas* as a means of administering humane and constructive policies of the government of Spain and protecting the welfare of the Indians. The *encomenderos*, however, sought to employ the Indians for their own purposes and to maintain their land as hereditary property to be held in perpetuity (land barons). Most *encomenderos* were private adventurers rather than agents of the Spanish Empire. The remoteness of the *encomiendas* from the center of government made it possible for the *encomenderos* to do as they pleased.

Under the influence of Catholic Church personages, such as Bartolomé de las Casas, the Spanish Crown promulgated the New Laws in 1542 for the administration of the Spanish Empire in America. Designed to remove the abuses connected with *encomiendas* and to improve the general treatment of Indians, the laws called for strict enforcement of the existing regulations and freedom for the enslaved Indians, who were placed in the category of free subjects of the Spanish Crown. They further provided that *encomiendas* would be forfeited if the Indians concerned were mistreated; that the tribute paid by Indians being instructed in religion should be fixed and in no case required in the form of personal service; and that public officials, congregations, hospitals, and monasteries could not hold *encomiendas*. Additional provisions – especially resented by the *encomenderos* – prohibited the employment of Indians in the mines, prevented *encomenderos* from requiring Indians to carry heavy loads, forbade the granting of any future *encomiendas*, ordered a reduction in size of existing *encomiendas*, and terminated the rights of wives and children to inherit *encomiendas*.

The *encomenderos* opposed the Spanish government's attempts to enforce these regulations. A formula was adopted according to which the laws would be "obeyed but not executed." The *encomenderos* also had the opportunity to send representatives to Spain to seek modifications of the laws – modifications that the Spanish Crown eventually granted. The tensions between the royal authority and the colonists in the new Spanish colonial empire were never entirely removed.

The institution of the *hacienda* with its associated *mita* (ancient tribute) system of labor began in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. After 1590, the Spanish Crown started to grant titles of land-ownership to colonists who paid the colonial government for the land and reserved the right to use Amerindian labor on their *haciendas*. Under an agrarian reform of 1592, the colonial government established *resguardos*, or reservations, for the Indians to provide for their subsistence; the resulting concentration of Indians freed up land to be sold to *hacendados*. The purchase of land as private real estate from the colonial government led to the development of large landed estates, called *latifundios*.

The new *hacendados* soon came into conflict with the *encomenderos* because of the ability of the latter to monopolize Amerindian labor. The Spanish authorities instituted the *mita* to resolve this conflict. After 1595, the Spanish Crown obliged *resguardo* Indians to contract themselves to neighboring *hacendados* for a maximum of fifteen days per year. The *mitayos* (Indians contracted to work) also were contracted as miners in Antioquía, as navigational aides on the Río Magdalena, and as industrial workers in a few rare cases. Although the *mitayos* were considered free because they were paid a nominal salary, the landowners and other employers overworked them to such an extent that many became seriously ill or died. Because the *mitayos* could not survive these extreme working conditions, the Spanish Crown sought an alternate source of cheap labor through the African slave trade.

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The Amerindians in Colombia resisted Spanish attempts to enslave them and force them to work the land and the mines under the colonial feudal system, which included resettling them near the Catholic missions (*reducciones*) to make it easier to “convert” them to Christianity, instruct them in the Catholic Faith, and organize them as a labor force to work in the fields and mines, and to build roads, towns and churches. As disease reduced the native Amerindian populations in Spanish-conquered territories, the Spanish colonial government and colonists began relying on imported slaves from Africa as a source of cheap labor. In 1518, the first shipment of black

slaves went directly from West Africa to the Caribbean islands where the slaves primarily worked on sugar plantations.

**The port city of Cartagena de Indias** was founded in 1533 by Conquistador Don Pedro de Heredia. Because of its strategic position on Colombia's Caribbean Coast, it achieved considerable importance by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and became one of the few South American ports to export the wealth of South American gold and silver directly to Spain. Cartagena became the main port for the infamous African slave trade soon after the first slave ship arrived in 1564. Thereafter, African slaves by the tens of thousands arrived in Cartagena to be sold and shipped all over South America among the Spanish colonies, where they were used as laborers in the mines and on the ranches and plantations, and to build churches, monasteries, roads, bridges, towns and other civil projects.

The Spanish Crown sold licenses to individuals allowing them to import African slaves, primarily through the port at Cartagena. Although the Spanish government initially restricted licenses to Spanish merchants, it eventually opened up the slave trade to foreigners as demand outstripped supply. The mining industry was the first to rely on African slaves, who by the 17<sup>th</sup> century had replaced Amerindians in the mines. The mining industry continued to depend on black slave labor into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the decline of the mining industry, African slavery remained the key form of labor. However, from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, plantation-style agriculture grew in prominence and raised the demand for black slave labor on sugar and tobacco plantations and on cattle ranches. Other minor segments of the colonial economy also supported slavery and used blacks as artisans, domestic servants and navigational aides of the nation's largest rivers.

African slaves had no legal rights in the Spanish colonial system. The Spanish Crown enacted laws to separate the African slaves from the Amerindians so that the two groups would not rise up in rebellion against the Spanish and *criollo* (those born in the Americas of pure Spanish-blood) ruling classes. The African slaves, however, often revolted against their subhuman living conditions, and many escaped to form *palenques* (towns) high in the mountains where they could maintain their freedom and African customs. These *palenques* existed separately from Spanish colonial society and, therefore, were among the first towns in Spanish America to be free of Spanish authority. The *palenque* movement was strongest in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the institution of slavery as it existed in the Spanish colonies was in crisis. By the end of the 1700s, the high price of slaves, along with increasing anti-slavery sentiment in the colonies, caused many Hispanic Colombians to view the system as anachronistic; nonetheless, it was not abolished until after Independence from Spain was achieved in the early 1800s.

The Church of San Pedro Claver in Cartagena is dedicated to this Spanish Dominican priest, known as the "Slave of Slaves" or the "Apostle of the Blacks," who devoted most of his adult life to the welfare of the unfortunate African slaves who were brought to Cartagena to be sold in the city's infamous slave market. Friar Claver (b.1581-d.1654) even begged in the streets to obtain money to care for the slaves' basic needs. Claver was the first person to be canonized (1888) in the New World by the Holy See, and his body lies in a glass coffin on the church's high altar.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the ports of the Colombian coast were exposed to formidable attacks by marauding pirates of many nationalities. In 1671, the notorious Captain Morgan took Panama City and sacked it, and the most horrible cruelties were committed upon its inhabitants. Two years later, pirate bands captured and sacked the coastal town of Santa Marta in Colombia. In May 1697, a French naval fleet under Baron de Pointes captured and pillaged the fortified port city of Cartagena, the richest city of the region, founded 1510.

Religious strife, also, between the secular and some of the religious clergy, and between the bishops and the civil authorities, caused trouble in Cartagena, Popayán and other dioceses. Extreme measures of taxation and exorbitant duties provoked a popular uprising in 1781 against the colonial government. The country remained in a state of turmoil, which was aggravated by the downfall of the Spanish Monarchy before the invading French armies of Napoleon Bonaparte, which occupied Spain between 1808 and 1814 during the so-called Peninsula Campaign.

With the resulting collapse of the Spanish colonial government in the Americas, including the Viceroyalty of New Granada, a period of chaos and uncertainty ensued in Colombia and neighboring countries. On 20 July 1810, a junta of *creole* revolutionary leaders met at Bogotá to determine the territory's future, and the following year the independent "United Provinces of New Granada" were established, which included Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador. Soon two warring parties emerged among the revolutionaries, so that by 1816 three civil wars had been fought.

Spain was unable to do anything to recover its South American colonies until 1815, when a respectable Spanish military force under Lt. General Pablo Morillo landed in Venezuela, which united the revolutionary factions against him, and for five years a war of extermination was carried on in the three neighboring states. The War of Independence waxed and waned for the decade prior to the march of Venezuelan General Simón Bolívar's army on Bogotá in 1816, which resulted in the defeat of Spanish forces. The revolutionaries suffered many reverses, but the Republican victory at the battle of Sogamoso (12 June 1819) decided the fate of the remnants of the Spanish army; and the military engagement at Carabobo (24 June 1821), near Valencia in Venezuela, was the last battle of any consequence.

Gen. Bolívar's victory in Bogotá in 1816 led to the establishment of the Republic of Greater Colombia (*República de Gran Colombia*) in 1819 under his leadership (1819, 1827-1830) and that of Francisco de Paula Santander (1819-1827). Venezuela and Ecuador became independent countries in 1829-1830, and the territory of Colombia became the Republic of New Granada in 1831; its present name, the Republic of Colombia, was adopted in 1886.

No country of Spanish America, since its independence, was so often and so violently disturbed internally as Colombia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With a single exception (President Aquileo Parra, 1876-1878, a soldier, businessman and radical Liberal politician), every presidential term was marked by one or more bloody revolutions that produced disruption and anarchy. Since its inception, Colombia has been characterized by extreme class stratification, social exclusion, territorial rivalry and political conflict. Panama seceded from Colombia for a while, in 1856, and the political events of 1903 made the separation between Colombia and Panama definitive, largely as a result of pressure from the U.S. Government to occupy Panama and continue the construction of the Panama Canal, which had begun previously by the French. Despite these upheavals, Colombia settled down and became more orderly after 1909. This pattern of constitutional order was maintained until 1948.

Reasons for the frequent disruption of social and political order in Colombian society are not difficult to discover. One source of conflict has been the continuing rivalry between partisans of strong central government (called federalism) and the defenders of the sovereign rights of individual departments (states' rights). Colombian geography made travel, commerce and communication difficult between the scattered centers of population. The nation's formidable geography created regional city-states, not unlike the pattern of medieval Spain. Living for generations in relative isolation from one another, each region developed its local way of life and even local variations in the Spanish language. Pride, jealousy and competition between regions produced civil wars and hindered national unity.

Another major reason for social and political conflict has been differences of opinion about the status of the Roman Catholic Church. The role of religion in society became a primary source of discord between Conservatives and Liberals after Independence from Spain. Prior to Independence, the primary obligation of the citizenry was absolute obedience to the authoritarian State and Church, which allowed no competition to its dictatorial powers: there was no freedom of expression, conscience, association, religious affiliation, information or commerce. The Conservatives were the self-appointed custodians of traditional order based on highly centralized government and the continuation of socioeconomic class and clerical privileges, while opposing pluralism and the extension of voting rights to all the people, regardless of gender, race, religion and socioeconomic level. The Liberals, by contrast, have emphasized states' rights, pluralism, universal voting rights, freedom of expression (thought, speech and action), freedom of association and freedom of religion, which fostered the democratization of society and the separation of Church and State. Since Independence, there has been continuous sparring between these two political factions, which has led to angry and violent clashes between the clerical Conservatives and the anti-clerical Liberals.

The Liberal and Conservative parties, founded in 1848 and 1849 respectively, are two of the oldest-surviving political parties in South America. In summary, the Liberal Party is anti-clerical, broadly liberal economically and federalist), while the Conservative Party supports Roman Catholicism, protectionism, and centralism. The material development of Colombia was retarded by the political disturbances that occurred between Conservatives and Liberals during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and made its history a continuous succession of civil wars. The history of the foreign debt of this republic was a series of borrowings and attempted settlements of accumulated capital and interest, which was rendered impossible by political disturbances.

Liberal politicians controlled the government from 1844 to 1855, then Conservatives were in charge from 1855 to 1861; Liberals were again in power from 1861 to 1884, followed by Conservatives who dominated the government from 1884 to 1930. Tensions between the two political parties frequently erupted into civil violence, most notably in the **Thousand Days War (1899-1902)**. In 1899, the ruling Conservatives were accused of maintaining power through fraudulent elections. The situation was worsened by an economic crisis caused by falling coffee prices in the international market, which mainly affected the Liberal Party and its supporters, who had lost power. After a series of battles in various parts of the country, which led to repression and cruelty by both armies, a tentative peace treaty was signed in October 1902 but fighting between the two sides continued for several more months in the province of Panama. However, faced with the threat of military action from the U.S. Navy, sent by President Theodore Roosevelt to protect future U.S. interests in the construction of the Panama Canal, the Liberals, under the command of Gen. Benjamin Herrera, were forced to lay down their arms. The final peace treaty was signed on the U.S. battleship *Wisconsin* on 21 November 1902.

After the Colombian Senate rejected the Hay-Herran Treaty, the U.S. Government decided to support the Panamanian independence movement. In 1903, President Roosevelt sent the U.S. warship *Nashville* to Panama City, where U.S. Marines landed as a show of force in support of Panamanian independence. In November 1903, Panamanian leaders proclaimed their nation's independence from the Republic of Colombia and immediately signed the Hay/Bunau-Varilla Treaty, which created the Panama Canal Zone (about 10 miles wide and 50 miles long across the Isthmus from coast-to-coast) under a 99-year lease with the U.S. Government. Under the administration of the U.S. Panama Canal Authority, the Panama Canal was built and opened for international shipping in 1914.

There are no official or general statistics of either exports or imports for Colombia during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Partial data, however, gives some general idea of the principal articles produced by Colombia. The gold mines up to 1845 yielded £71,200,000 and the yield was estimated at £115,000,000 up to 1886. Silver production during the later period was estimated at £6,600,000. The average output of rock-salt from 1883 to 1897 was 11,000 tons per year. In 1904, the exploitation of the Muzo emerald mines, in the Western Boyacá Province of Boyacá Department, yielded the government £10,000, but the production was not as high as in previous years.

Among agricultural products, coffee was the major export product, but the annual export figures have varied according to the political state of the country. In 1899, before the **Thousand Days War**, 254,410 bags of coffee were exported from Barranquilla but during the following year, only 86,917 bags were exported. During 1900, 24,000 tons of bananas left Barranquilla for the USA, and tobacco and India-rubber (*caoutchouc*) began to figure largely in Colombian exports.

In 1906, reports began to surface about Indians enslaved to service the India-rubber export trade in the Putumayo watershed within the Amazon River basin. The Putumayo is a major river in its own right; it is 1,900 km long and begins in the mountains on the west coast of Colombia and joins the massive Amazon River in Brazilian territory. For much of its length, the Putumayo River forms the border between Peru and Colombia (Putumayo and Amazonas departments). The **British-registered Peruvian Amazon Company (PAC)**, owned by Peruvian Julio César Arana, monopolized the India-rubber trade in the region. PAC enslaved tribal peoples by means of the local system of debt bondage, called peonage. Reports of rape, murder and torture of the Indian rubber tappers began to filter out to the civilized world.

In May 1910, the British Foreign Office asked Roger Casement to draw on his previous African experience and investigate the reports of Amerindian slavery in the upper Amazon River basin. The British Government had to be careful not to infringe on the established Monroe Doctrine in South America and upset U.S. Government sensibilities. It justified the investigation of PAC's employment of Barbadian British subjects. Casement conducted meticulous investigations of the area in question during 1910 and 1911, and he issued his 1,242 page "Putumayo Report" in 1912. It was another damning indictment of the international rubber slave trade. He calculated that 30,000 Amerindians (mainly Huitotos) had been murdered or killed by deliberate starvation brought about by crop destruction in the Putumayo River Valley as part of the development of PAC's rubber plantations. A British parliamentary enquiry demanded Arana's imprisonment, but Arana fled back to Peru and the First World War (1914-1918) put an end to the official enquiry.

Faced with an international uproar over these alleged atrocities, the PAC was forced into liquidation in 1912. However, the Colombian government's concerns about abuses in the rubber extraction industry in the Putumayo River Valley was one of the related causes that led to the armed conflict with Peru in 1932-1933, after which the government became more involved in protecting this border territory and the rights and welfare of its Amerindian inhabitants.

After the U.S. Wall Street Stock Market crash of 1929, which triggered the worldwide Great Depression, **President Olaya Herrera (1930-1934, Liberal Party)** was given special powers and dictated economic reforms that helped, at some levels, the nation's economic development and managed the debt generated by the brief and costly War with Peru (September 1932-May 1933). The war began after the Colombian river-port of Letícia, located in the Department of Amazonas, in eastern tropical lowlands was taken over by invading Peruvian troops. Colombia's military operations were financed directly by the government with help from the citizenry, which

donated jewelry and money to support their “just cause” of defending national territory and sovereignty. After several minor battles the war ended with the signing of the Rio de Janeiro Protocol in 1934, and Colombia recovered its lost territory along the Peruvian border.

**Alfonso López Pumarejo (Liberal Party)** served as president of Colombia twice, from 1934 to 1938 and again between 1942 and 1945. **Mariano Ospina Pérez (Conservative Party)** was president between 1946 and 1950 when conflicts between the nation’s two main political parties erupted into violence that lasted for a decade (1948-1958), called *La Violencia*. On 9 April 1948, **Liberal politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán** was running for the presidency for a second time, and this time Gaitán had won his party's primaries and had strong support from the labor movement and the masses, when he was assassinated in confusing circumstances. Anger and frustration triggered by Gaitán's assassination provoked massive riots and vandalism (called the *Bogotazo*) that took place throughout Bogotá and later extended to other areas of the country.

Government forces supported by the Conservatives throughout the country began a campaign of repression against the Liberals after a failed attempt to establish a government of national unity with a shared responsibility in the government. President Ospina was heavily criticized by the Liberals, especially in the National Congress where, in 1948, the Liberals attempted to impeach him. Ospina suspended congressional sessions before the Liberals achieved their goals and established a decade-long civilian-military dictatorship that lasted until 1958.

Colombia was thrown into a constant state of insurrection and criminality from 1948 to 1958, a period during which more than 200,000 people lost their lives and more than a billion dollars of property damage was done. **Laureano Eleuterio Gómez**, an arch-Conservative, served as Colombia's president from 1950 until his ouster in 1953 in a coup led by the Army Chief of Staff, **General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla**, who ruled as dictator until his corrupt and brutal regime was ousted in 1957 by a military junta supported by both Liberals and Conservatives.

In 1958, democracy finally returned to Colombia after the formation of a Liberal-Conservative coalition government (called the National Front), which formalized arrangements for an alternation of power between the two parties and excluded non-establishment alternatives. Under newly-elected **President Alberto Lleras Camargo (1958-1962, Liberal Party)**, the nation’s faltering economy was stabilized and agrarian reform was instituted. However, the political monopoly of the National Front (1958-1974) fuelled the nascent armed conflict that has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Since the 1960s, government forces, leftwing insurgents and rightwing paramilitaries have been engaged in the continent's longest-running armed conflict. Fuelled by political rivalry and the lucrative cocaine trade, the nation’s violence escalated dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s. Medellín became world-famous as home of the "Medellín Drug Cartel," led by the infamous Pablo Escobar, who reportedly was one of the world’s richest men at the time of his death in 1993 in a rooftop shootout with police.

However, the Marxist-inspired insurgents have lacked the military or popular support necessary to overthrow the government, and during the 2000s the level of violence decreased significantly. More than 31,000 paramilitaries were demobilized by the end of 2006 as part of a controversial and on-going peace process with the government, and the leftist guerrillas have lost control in many areas of the country where they once dominated. However, in the wake of the paramilitary demobilization, more criminal gangs have become active throughout the country. Nevertheless, Colombia's homicide rate, for many years one of the highest in the world, declined significantly after 2000, from 60 homicides per year per 100,000 inhabitants to 36 in 2008.

The term “**Plan Colombia**” is most often used to refer to U.S. legislation aimed at curbing drug smuggling by supporting different anti-drug war activities in Colombia financed by the U.S.

Government. However, **Plan Colombia** also refers to a wider aid initiative originally proposed by Colombian **President Andrés Pastrana Arango** (1998-2000, Conservative Party), which took into consideration the U.S. legislation but was not limited to it. The plan was conceived between 1998 and 1999 by the administration of President Pastrana with the goal of social and economic revitalization, ending the armed conflict and creating an effective, long-term anti-drug strategy.

The most controversial element of the Plan Colombia strategy was aerial fumigation to eradicate coca plants, used to produce cocaine for the international drug market. However, aerial fumigation has been condemned by environmentalists and human rights advocates because it also damages legal crops and has adverse health effects upon those exposed to the herbicides. Critics of the initiative also claimed that elements within the Colombian security forces, which received aid and training from Plan Colombia, were involved in supporting or tolerating abuses by the now largely-dismantled rightwing paramilitary forces (financed by the nation's largest landowners) that were fighting against leftwing guerrilla organizations and their sympathizers.

By the time the National Front was dissolved in 1974, traditional political alignments had begun to fragment, and this process has continued to the present. The consequences of this are seen in the results of the 2006 presidential election won by the incumbent, **Álvaro Uribe Vélez** (first term 2002-2006), with 62 percent of the vote. President Uribe (second term 2006-2010) is from a Liberal Party background but he campaigned as part of the "**Colombia First**" movement, with the support of the Conservative Party and a coalition of Liberal and Conservative party dissidents, and his hard line on public security issues and liberal economic policies places him on the right of the modern political spectrum. In second place, with 22 percent of the vote, was Carlos Gaviria Díaz of the **Alternative Democratic Pole**, a newly-formed Social Democrat alliance that includes elements of the former M-19 guerrilla movement. Horacio Serpa Uribe of the **Liberal Party** was third with 12 percent of the vote. Later, he served as governor of the Department of Santander (2008-2011).

Meanwhile, in the congressional elections held earlier in 2006, the two traditional parties obtained only 93 out of 268 available seats in both chambers. The Colombian Congress is composed of the 102-seat Senate (five parties control 81 seats) and the 166-seat Chamber of Representatives (five parties control 117 seats), with members of both houses elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms.

**Juan Manuel Santos Calderón** served as President of Colombia from August 2010 to August 2018 under the Social Party of National Unity (*Partido Social de Unidad Nacional*), a centrist social-liberal political. It was formerly Colombia's largest political party, in a coalition with the Liberal Party and Radical Change, until it lost seven seats in the 2018 elections.

On 7 October 2016, Santos became the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in negotiating a peace treaty with the FARC-guerrilla movement, despite his defeat in the referendum held over the deal, where the "no" campaign led by Uribe's party Democratic Center won. The Colombian government and the FARC signed a revised peace treaty on 24 November and sent it to Congress for ratification instead of conducting a second referendum. Both houses of Congress ratified the revised peace accord on 29–30 November 2016, thus marking an end to this prolonged conflict. The peace treaty produced deep divisions and polarization in the country. Juan Manuel Santos was named as one of Time magazine's 100 most influential people in 2017. However, Santos left office with one of the lowest levels of popular approval ever, and his successor was the new Uribe's protégé, Ivan Duque Marquez, a moderate critic of Santos' peace treaty with the FARC-guerrillas.

Sources: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan\\_Manuel\\_Santos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Manuel_Santos) / [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Party\\_of\\_National\\_Unity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Party_of_National_Unity)

**Iván Duque Márquez** (born 1 August 1976), a lawyer, is the current President of Colombia, in office since 7 August 2018. He was elected Colombia's youngest president as the candidate of the Democratic Centre party in the 2018 presidential election. Backed by his mentor, ex-president Alvaro Uribe, he ran a campaign that was opposed to the peace treaty with the FARC. **The Democratic Center** (identified electorally by the slogan “Strong Hand, Big Heart”) is a Conservative political party founded by former President Álvaro Uribe, former Vice President Francisco Santos Calderón, and former Minister of Finance and Public Credit Óscar Iván Zuluaga. It is a self-described party of the political center, although in opinion groups it is often considered a right-wing party. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic\\_Center\\_\(Colombia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Center_(Colombia))

**Colombia has historically been a source of migration rather than a destination, but that has changed in recent years due largely to the ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.** Colombia has absorbed a majority of the exodus of more than three million Venezuelans who have fled their homeland due to political and social chaos and poverty. An estimated 4,000 people stream across the Venezuela-Colombia border every day, as hyper-inflation, starvation, and violence worsen under the Socialist regime of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The more than 1.4 million Venezuelans who have settled in Colombia since 2015 have overwhelmed border zones and major cities, which experts say are unprepared to manage the crisis. However, Colombia’s borders and the arms of the Colombian people have remained comparatively open—partly because that mass migration once flowed in the opposite direction. Beginning in the 1960s, when guerrilla groups and government forces began to clash, through to the rise of cartels and paramilitaries in the 1980s, violence in Colombia has persisted for decades. The 50-plus-year armed conflict displaced millions of Colombians, many of whom turned to the oil-rich neighbor that offered a chance at work and peace: Venezuela.

Source: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/14/heres-why-colombia-opened-its-arms-to-venezuelan-migrants-until-now/>

As part of his government’s response to rising Venezuelan immigration to Colombia, **President Ivan Duque** announced on 5 August 2019 that 24,000 children born to Venezuelan refugees would be granted Colombian citizenship. “Today Colombia gives this message to the world: to those who want to use xenophobia for political goals, we take the path of fraternity,” President Iván Duque of Colombia said in a speech announcing the measure in Bogotá. Source: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/28197/venezuelan-immigration-to-colombia-is-spiking-here-s-how-duque-is-handling-it>

## The Roman Catholic Church

Roman Catholicism entered Colombia with the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, colonists and missionary priests, and the Diocese of Santa Marta was established on the Caribbean coast in 1534. The town of Santa Marta is situated at the mouth of the Río Manzaneros on the Gulf of Santa Marta, about 46 miles northeast of the port of Barranquilla. The Diocese of Santafé en Nueva Granada was created in 1562 out of the Diocese of Santa Marta, and in 1564 it was elevated to the status of Archdiocese of Santafé (de Bogotá) in Nueva Granada. The Diocese of Santa Marta became a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Santafé in Nueva Granada in 1577.

What progress was attained in evangelizing the Amerindians during the colonial period was due to the efforts of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits and other religious orders. However, missionary work was often opposed by the colonists and government officials who were more interested in achieving worldly prosperity.

The Jesuits established mission stations in the vast savannas of the Orinoco River basin, where they gathered the Amerindians into mission-controlled villages, called *reducciones*, in order to more conveniently protect, indoctrinate, train and utilize their labor. These Jesuit missions supported themselves by engaging in commercial enterprises, such as agriculture and raising livestock, and the production of artisan handcrafts. However, many of the Indigenous people resisted being confined to the *reducciones* and the exploitation of their labor. Also, the commercial activities of the Jesuits on the Meta and Orinoco rivers generated conflicts with other commercial centers.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Portuguese and Dutch traders explored the upper Orinoco River basin for the purpose of capturing Amerindians and selling them as slaves on plantations in the Guyanas and Brazil.

The Jesuits were the first religious order during the colonial period to establish colleges for secondary-level instruction; eight or ten colleges were opened in which the privileged youth in major cities were educated. At the Jesuit College of Bogotá the first instruction in mathematics and physics was given in the nation.

However, due to the expulsion of the Jesuits by Charles III in 1767, the Catholic Church in New Granada lost her principal ally in the evangelization and civilization of the country. The Church's efforts were practically paralyzed for many years due to a lack of human resources to carry out its evangelistic work among the Amerindians, although Augustinian and Capuchin missionaries attempted to fill this void on the nation's missionary frontiers.

The history of the Society of Jesus in Colombia is also closely associated with the city of Cartagena de Indias, because of the saintly work of Pedro Claver, S.J. (b.1581-d.1654). The son of a Catalonian farmer, Pedro was educated at the University of Barcelona, and at the age of twenty became a Jesuit novitiate at Tarragona. During his religious training, he felt a divine call to evangelize the Spanish possessions in America. Peter obeyed, and in 1610 landed at Cartagena, where for 44 years he was known as the "Apostle of the negro slaves."

Early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the colonial rulers of Central and South America needed laborers to cultivate the soil they had conquered and to exploit the gold and silver mines. However, the Amerindians were decimated by warfare, physical mistreatment by the colonists, and European diseases and were unable to supply the needed labor required. Therefore, it was determined to replace them with African slaves brought from the coasts of Guinea, the Congo and Angola. The Africans became the new market for slave dealers, to whom African petty kings sold their own subjects and their prisoners of war.

Because of its position as a key port on the Caribbean Sea, Cartagena became the chief slave-market of the New World. A thousand slaves landed there each month. Although half the cargo might die, the African slave trade remained profitable. Neither the repeated censures of the Pope, nor those of Catholic moralists, could prevail against this evil and despicable enterprise. Because of the authoritarian and despotic rule of the Spanish colonial government, the Catholic missionaries could not suppress slavery, so they sought to alleviate the suffering of those enslaved, and no one worked more heroically than Pedro Claver, according to historical accounts.

To instruct so many slaves speaking different dialects, Claver assembled at Cartagena a group of interpreters of various nationalities, of whom he made catechists. While the slaves (men, women and children) were penned up at Cartagena waiting to be purchased and dispersed, Claver sought to instruct and baptize them in the Catholic Faith. He firmly believed that baptism in water would save their souls from eternal damnation in the fires of Hell; he advocated for humane treatment of the slaves on the nation's plantations and in the mines; and he organized charitable societies among the Spanish colonies, similar to those organized in Europe by Saint Vincent de Paul. For 44 years, Claver visited the slaves frequently and inquired concerning their needs and defended them against their oppressors.

However, the work done by Claver caused him severe trials, and the slave merchants were not his only enemies. The Apostle was accused of indiscreet zeal, and of having profaned the Holy Sacraments by giving them to creatures that scarcely possessed a soul. Fashionable women of Cartagena refused to enter the parish churches where Friar Claver occasionally assembled his Negro flock. Claver's superiors were often influenced by the many criticisms that reached them from concerned citizens who were more interested in financial gain than in spiritual endeavors. Nevertheless, Claver continued his heroic career, accepting all humiliations and adding rigorous penances to his many works of charity.

Carver became known as the prophet and miracle worker of New Granada, the oracle of Cartagena, and many people were convinced that often God would not have spared the city but for him. During his lifetime, he allegedly baptized and instructed in the Faith more than 300,000 African slaves. He was beatified on 16 July 1850 by Pope Pius IX, and canonized 15 January 1888 by Pope Leo XIII. The Feast of San Pedro Carver is celebrated on 9 September. On 7 July 1896, he was proclaimed the special patron of all the Catholic missions among the Negroes.

Although the growth and expansion of the Colombian Catholic Church progressed steadily throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Church authorities ran into trouble with leaders and sympathizers of the Independence movement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Catholic clergy accused the Republicans of being Liberals, Freemasons, agnostics and atheists who wanted to destroy Catholic civilization, which was based on the authoritarian rule of State and Church where dissent was not tolerated during the colonial period.

The Catholic Church and its rigid dogma permeated every corner of Colombian colonial society, where the norms of the Spanish Monarchy were theoretically absolute. However, there were exceptions to these standards, as seen in the cases of those tried in the Inquisition and the limited tolerance of diversity allowed among the Amerindian and Afro-Colombian communities. It was there where generations of religious syncretism created expressions of "popular Catholicism" that preserved the outward appearance of Christianity hide the underlying presence of ancient animistic beliefs and practices.

However, neither the Spanish State nor the Catholic Church allowed any outward expressions of non-Catholic religions among Europeans within the national territory during the colonial period. The Inquisition officially began in Cartagena de Indias in 1610. Construction was completed in 1770 on a two-story building for exclusive use by the Tribunal of the Holy Office of

the Inquisition, which began in Spain in 1480 and ended in 1835. About 700 people were tried (the majority for committing blasphemy or practicing superstition and magic) and some were tortured and “executed” in this building, which today is known as the Palace of the Inquisition. Recently restored, the edifice is now a museum dedicated to Cartagena’s history, with special emphasis on the Inquisition. Those brought before the Inquisitors included 70 Jews and 62 Lutherans, a term used for any person who professed Protestant beliefs.

Following Independence in 1819, the new Colombian government terminated the Catholic Church’s financial support from Spain, and the government had troubled relationships with the papacy. This period of the conflict between Church and State provided an opening that allowed Protestantism to enter the country in the early-1800s. The first Masonic Lodge was founded in the city of Santa Marta, Department of Magdalena, in 1833, which favored the Liberal movement. Internal political struggles among anti-clerical Liberals and pro-clerical Conservatives (support by the Catholic hierarchy) generated a period of civil wars between 1853 and 1866. In 1853, Church and State were separated during the Liberal administration of President **José Hilario López (1849-1853)**, who also abolished slavery, created the agrarian law, and supported freedom of the press and the federalization of the State.

The Conservatives were in power between 1855 and 1861, and the Liberals governed between 1861 and 1884. The Liberal period ended with the government under Conservative control and the establishment of a pro-clerical Constitution, which was approved in 1886 and amended in 1904 and 1905. This Constitution explicitly provided (Article 38) that "the Catholic Apostolic Roman Religion is that of the Nation; the public authorities will protect it and cause it to be respected as an essential element of the social order. It [is] understood that the Catholic Church is not and shall not be official, and shall preserve its independence." However, the next article guaranteed to all people freedom from molestation "on account of religious opinions," and Article 40 stated that "the exercise of all cults not contrary to Christian morality or the laws is permitted."

The Colombian Government signed a Concordat with the Vatican in 1887 that gave the Catholic Church a distinct advantage in Colombian society; however, “dissenters [were] in no way [to be] interfered with on account of their religious peculiarities.” It was not until 1930 that Liberals finally took over the government and adopted reforms that gave Protestants and other religions more favorable treatment.

The name of the “Archdiocese of Santafé en New Granada” was changed in 1889 to the “Archdiocese of Santafé de Bogotá.” In 1908, the male religious orders in the Archdiocese of Bogotá were the Jesuits, Franciscans, Augustinians, Salesians and the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine. The female religious congregations were the Sisters of Charity, of the Visitation, of the Good Shepherd, Salesians, Dominicans, Carmelites, and the Little Sisters of the Poor.

In 1908, the ecclesiastical organization of the Colombian Catholic Church consisted of four provinces: Bogotá, with four suffragans: Ibagué, Nueva Pamplona, Socorro and Tunja; Cartagena, with two suffragans: Santa Marta and Panama; Medellin, with two suffragans: Antioquia and Manizales; and Popayan, with two suffragans: Garzón and Pasto. There were also two vicariates Apostolic: Casanare and Gajira; and three prefectures Apostolic: Caqueta, Piani di San Martino, and Intendencia Orientale.

The Diocese of Santa Marta became a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Cartagena in 1900, at which time it comprised the State of Magdalena and the territories of “Sierra Nevada y Motilones” and La Guajira. The Guajira Peninsula protrudes into the Caribbean Sea and is the northernmost portion of South America. It was the subject of a dispute between Venezuela and

Colombia in 1891 and after arbitration was awarded to the latter and became part of the State of Magdalena in Colombia.

In 1905, the Guajira Peninsula, the northeastern portion of the Diocese of Santa Marta, was formed into the Vicariate Apostolic of the Guajira and assigned to the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. The Capuchin Friars established Catholic missions in this region and had a great influence over Amerindian tribes living there, and large numbers were reportedly converted. Various Amerindian tribes populated the peninsula's vast arid plains, such as the Wayuu (Guajiro), Macuiro, Anate, Wayunaiki, Cuanao and Eneale, prior to the Spanish conquest. The major languages spoken there are dialects of the Arawak-Maipurean linguistic group.

The Catholic Church was able to weather the stormy period of Liberal anti-clericalism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of its strong hold on the hearts and minds on the majority of the people, who identified as Catholics first and then as Colombians. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church emerged as the guardian of Conservative values and the protector of the people against what were considered harmful ideas and practices, which included Liberalism, Freemasonry, Protestantism, Socialism and Communism. The Colombian Episcopal Conference argued that "religious freedom" was contrary to Catholic Dogma, which was the One, True Religion. Those Catholics who accepted Protestant literature or who participated in Protestant worship were threatened with excommunication. During the 1940s and 1950s, the Colombian Episcopal Conference called for the establishment of "anti-Protestant committees" in each diocese and parish throughout Colombia, with the responsibility to identify every Protestant person in the nation, to socially ostracize them, and to produce Catholic literature that denounced and refuted their heresies while emphasizing the Catholic catechism, the Holy Sacraments, and worship of the Holy Trinity and of the Most Holy Virgin Mary.

The Liberals returned to power and governed between 1930 and 1946, and the Conservatives from 1946 to 1953. However, in June 1953, Gen. **Gustavo Rojas Pinilla** seized power by means of a coup d'état, supported by Liberals and Conservatives, and ruled as military dictator until 1957. Continued Catholic opposition to Liberal reforms and modernization culminated in the terrible decade (1948-1958), known as *La Violencia*, in which Protestants were identified with the Liberals and suffered the consequences of that association: the vast destruction of church and school property, and the murder of more than 120 Colombian Protestants by fanatical Catholic mobs led by priests and Conservative agitators, which forced thousands of Protestants to flee for their lives to safer areas.

For the Catholic hierarchy and the Conservative leadership, the persecution of Liberals and Protestants was a high priority in order to safeguard traditional values, which were based on Catholic Dogma and Social Christian principals. *Mons. Iván Cadavid affirmed that Liberalism patronizes Protestantism, Freemasonry and Communism; therefore, the proponents of these heresies were to be despised, condemned and ostracized in order to eliminate discord and division in Colombian society.* Protestantism, in particular, was denounced by Mons. Miguel Angel Builes in a pastoral letter (24 February 1953) as an offense against "our nationality, our liberty, and our independence" as a Catholic nation. He, and many other Catholic clerics, feared that the "invasion of Protestant sects in Latin America" would be a prelude to "Yankee imperialism," and they argued that "one could not be a Colombian if not a Catholic." Therefore, the subject of religious tolerance and religious pluralism in Colombia was considered anathema, and the Church authorities argued that the State had a moral obligation to keep this from happening in order to safeguard Catholic civilization.

During the 1960s and following years, diverse tensions and conflicts arose within the Colombian Catholic Church, which resulted from challenges posed by the Second Vatican

Council (1962-1965), the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín in 1968, Latin American Liberation Theology, and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

**These new movements polarized Catholic bishops, parish priests, religious workers and the laity into various factions:** *traditionalists* who wanted the Church to remain as it was prior to the reforms approved by the Second Vatican Council (late 1960s); *reformers* who supported the Church's modern stance; *progressives* who sought to implement the new vision for "a preferential option for the poor" through social and political action aimed at transforming Colombian society and establishing social justice through peaceful democratic means; *radicals* who adopted Liberation Theology, based on Marxist ideology, and advocated violent revolution by the people as a means of overthrowing the oligarchy and creating a socialist state that would serve the marginalized masses; and *charismatic agents* (priests, nuns and lay members) who sought to transform the spiritual and communal life of Catholics by means of the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit (including the "baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues").

Since the mid-1960s, the Colombian Catholic Church – influenced greatly by papal calls for a refocus of attention on the needs of the urban poor – has directed significant resources toward assisting the lower classes and empowering the laity in the local parishes. Surprisingly, Colombia became a center of the more radical approaches of Liberation Theology, which found strong support among priests working with the poorest sectors of society. The Colombian Catholic Church began to call for an end to government and economic oppression, while denouncing the violence being committed by leftist guerrilla organizations and rightwing paramilitary groups.

**The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR)** began in Colombia in October 1967 when the **Rev. Harald Bredezen** (pastor of Mount Vernon Dutch Reformed Church in New York) and an ecumenical team of charismatics from North America held a series of meetings in Bogotá. During their visit, **Friar Rafael García-Herreros** (b.1909-d.1992), who was well-known for this radio and TV program, *Minuto de Dios* (founded in 1955), was baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. In the early 1960s, Friar García had launched the construction of a new community to house the homeless in an area then on the edge of Bogotá. Friar García communicated his new-found charismatic enthusiasm to a young priest, **Diego Jaramillo**. In 1970, Friar Jaramillo joined him to work in the housing development, which was called *Minuto de Dios*. Jaramillo later became a prominent leader in CCR in Latin America and one of its main international spokesmen.

Priests García-Herreros and Jaramillo (both members of the religious order *Congregación de Jesús y María*, called Eudistas), organized charismatic prayer groups within their sphere of influence, which included the radio audience of *Minuto de Dios*, and organized numerous events (charismatic Masses, praise and prayer congresses, musical concerts, seminars, leadership training conferences, etc.) and promoted the CCR through radio and TV programs and publications. They also founded the *Centro Carismático Minuto de Dios* in Bogotá in 1976 and similar centers in other major cities. After García-Herreros' death in 1992, other priests in his religious order continued his work of evangelization and charismatic renewal throughout the nation.

One of García-Herreros' colleagues was Friar Juan Mario Montoya who began participating in the CCR in 1977. He later served as director of radio station *Minuto de Dios* in Bogotá, an advisor to charismatic prayer groups in that city, director of the School of Evangelization in Bogotá, parish priest of San Miguel Arcángel de Medellín, and regional director in the *Centro Carismático Minuto de Dios* for the Department of Antioquía.

In 1991, despite strong efforts by the Conservative Catholic hierarchy to block constitutional reforms backed by Liberals, Protestants, Indigenous peoples and other minority groups, Colombia's Constitutional Convention took away the official status of the Roman Catholic Church as the nation's official State Religion and declared that "all religious confessions and churches are equally free before the law" (Article 19).

This was a serious blow to the Conservative Catholic leadership and further demoralized the Catholic clergy and members of religious orders, who were already suffering the negative impact of reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council, which affected the recruitment and training of new priests and religious workers. Although the number of secular priests in the nation declined slightly between 1999 and 2006 (from 492 to 394), the greatest decline was seen in the number of religious priests (from 960 to 297), religious brothers (from 1,929 to 997) and religious sisters (from 4,975 to 2,604), which created serious shortages in local parishes and Catholic institutions in general throughout the country.

Nevertheless, Colombia's faithful Catholic population continued to honor and make annual pilgrimages to shrines dedicated to the nation's patron saints:

- **Saint Louis Bertran** (b.1526-d.1581) is honored on 9 October as "The Apostle of South America"; this Spanish Dominican priest served as a missionary to Central and South America and the Caribbean, where he expected to be martyred; he allegedly survived being poisoned by local shamans and converted 15,000 Indians by officiating at their baptisms; he was known as a prophet and miracle worker, and may have had the "gift of tongues"; after seven years in the Americas, he returned to Spain to report on the bad treatment of the American Indians by Spaniards; he was re-assigned to preaching and training Dominican novices in Valencia, where he died in 1581; he was canonized by Pope Clement X in 1671.
- **Our Lady of Chiquinquirá** (also known as *La Chinita*), honored on 9 July, was made Patroness of Colombia by Pope Pius VII in 1829; according to legend, the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century portrait of the *Virgin of the Rosary* was placed in a rustic chapel where it was exposed to the air and was soon damaged by the humidity and sunlight, which completely obscured the image; in 1577, the damaged painting was moved to Chiquinquirá, in 1586, the faded, damaged image was suddenly and miraculously restored as if brand new, with the small holes and tears in the canvas self-sealed; for 300 years the painting hung unprotected and thousands of people touched the frail cotton cloth; although this rough treatment should have destroyed it, the painting survived and was canonically crowned in 1919; and, in 1927, her sanctuary was declared a Basilica.
- **Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary** is celebrated on 7 October throughout Colombia, especially in La Ceja del Tambo, Department of Antioquía.
- **San Pedro Claver** (canonized in 1888 by Pope Leo XIII) is honored on September 9 as "the slave of the black slaves" for his dedication to African slaves who arrived in Cartagena de Indias, where they were sold in that city's slave market to Spanish colonists throughout Spanish America; Claver, born in Spain in 1581 and died in Cartagena in 1654.
- **The Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus** is celebrated on the Friday after the Octave of Corpus Christi when an act of reparation is prescribed for recitation in every Church throughout the land. The Sacred Heart of Jesus, according to Catholic dogma, is honored as a reminder or symbol of His love for humanity, and we are moved to return His love,

because He first loved us. Love, consecration and reparation for our sins are the characteristic acts of this devotion.

In 2002, the Colombian Catholic Church had 13 archdioceses and 75 dioceses that were assisted by 278 permanent deacons, 4,163 religious brothers and 15,178 religious sisters (nuns). The head of the Metropolitan See of Colombia was **Cardinal Pedro Rubiano Sáenz** (1994-2010), Archbishop of Bogotá, who was appointed archbishop in 1994 and named cardinal in 2001. In 2007, about 80 percent of Colombia's population was reported to be at least nominally affiliated with the Catholic Church, which totaled 35.9 million people.

Source: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/eco.html#tail>

The next Archbishop of Bogota was **Cardenal Rubén Salazar** who was installed on 13 August 2010 and retired on 25 April 2020. He had presented his resignation letter to the Pope in September 2017, following the protocol that requires all bishops to leave their official duties upon reaching the age of 75. However, Pope Francis asked him to remain in his post as long as he was in good health and willing to continue.

On 25 April 2020, Pope Francis decided to appoint a new Archbishop who was more liberal and more in tune to the Pope's own progressive agenda. **Mons. Luis José Rueda Aparicio** (age 58), Bishop of Popayán, Cauca, was chosen to become the new Archbishop of Bogotá and head of the Catholic Church in Colombia. Mons. Rueda Aparicio is well-known as a defender of the Peace Accords and opposed to violence against social, *campesino* and Indigenous leaders in the southwestern region of the country.

**Independent Western Roman Catholic-derived groups.** The following religious organizations are known to exist in Colombia.

#### **OLD CATHOLIC JURISDICTIONS:**

**National Apostolic Catholic Church of Colombia** / *Iglesia Católica Apostólica Nacional de Colombia*: <https://iglesiacolombiana.wixsite.com/icac/qsomos>

**The Orthodox and Apostolic Old Catholic Church** (founded in 1889 in Utrecht and in the 1980s in Colombia) is registered with the government as *Iglesia Misioneros Veteros de Nuestra Señora de la Alegría*, under Mons. Gonzalo Jaramillo Hoyos in Antioquía; <https://iglesiamisionerosveteros.es.tl/RECONOCIMIENTO-DE-COLOMBIA.htm>

**Body & Blood of Christ Old Catholic Church** / *Iglesia Veterodoxa Cuerpo y Sangre de Cristo*: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Iglesia-Veterodoxa-Cuerpo-y-Sangre-de-Cristo-610720552753868/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Iglesia-Veterodoxa-Cuerpo-y-Sangre-de-Cristo-610720552753868/about/?ref=page_internal)

**Old Catholic Church (1870) in Colombia** / *Iglesia Católica Antigua en Colombia (Viejos Católicos 1870)*: <https://iglesiantiguaencolombia.jimdofree.com/>

**The Old Catholic Church in Colombia** / *La Iglesia Católica Antigua en Colombia*: <https://theoldcatholic.church/esp%C3%B1ol>

**Old Roman Church Latin Rite in Colombia** / *Vieja Iglesia Romana Rito Latino en Colombia*: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ViejosCatolicosRomanos/about/>

## **OTHER INDEPENDENT JURISDICTIONS:**

**The Fraternal Priestly Society of Saint Pius X / *Fraternidad Sacerdotal San Pio X*** in Bogotá (Capilla de los Sagrados Corazones de Jesús y María), in Bucaramanga (Capilla San José), in Tabio, Cundinamarca (Capilla Nuestra Señora de Lourdes) in Barranquilla: <https://www.fsspx-sudamerica.org/es/> / <https://fsspx-sudamerica.org/es/capillas>

**Catholic Church of England and Wales / *Arquidiócesis San Pablo Apóstol de Medellín***: <https://icig-colombia.jimdo.com/arquidi%C3%B3cesis-de-san-pablo-apostol-medell%C3%ADn/>

**Ecumenical Catholic Church of Christ, Diocese of Bogotá, Colombia / *Iglesia Católica Ecuménica de Cristo-Diócesis de Bogotá, Colombia***: <http://www.ecumenicalccc.org/international-directory.php>

**Independent Apostolic Catholic Church of Colombia / *Iglesia Católica Apostólica Independiente de Colombia***: <https://docplayer.es/22233432-Iglesia-catolica-apostolica-independiente.html>

(Monsignor Antonio Clavijo was appointed Archbishop of Colombia by patriarchal decree on 6 December 2009 by the **Independent Apostolic Catholic Church of Brazil / *Igreja Católica Apostólica Independiente do Brasil*** (ICAIB).

**Independent Catholic International Priestly Congregation Church / *Iglesia Congregación Sacerdotal Internacional Católicos Independientes***: <https://www.congregacionsacerdotal.org/>

**NOTE:** There are several religious groups in Medellín that are led by former Catholic priests (suspended, excommunicated, not ordained, independent, or out of fellowship with the official Roman Catholic Church), such as the House of Father Anthony, Casa Misionera San Francisco Javier, and Orden Misionera de San Andrés Apóstol.

The Archbishop of Medellín, Monsignor Ricardo Tobón, in the document “Schismatic Movements and Alleged Priests,” said that in recent years, in addition to the followers of the various Christian groups and members of other religions, there are a number of people who, without receiving the official Roman Catholic sacrament of Ordination, pose as Catholic priests in schismatic movements. The Archbishop explained that some priests from groups that have voluntarily separated from the Roman Catholic communion, called by the Church as schismatics (of schism), often promote themselves as members of the Catholic Church and hold celebrations, use liturgical vestments, wear titles and employ Catholic books and symbols. Some even appear on behalf of well-known Catholic parishes or Catholic social institutions.

Adapted from: [https://www.elcolombiano.com/historico/cuidese\\_de\\_los\\_falsos\\_sacerdotes-GVEC\\_184417](https://www.elcolombiano.com/historico/cuidese_de_los_falsos_sacerdotes-GVEC_184417)

## The Protestant Movement

**General Overview.** At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, there were signs of general unrest against the growing power, corruption and abuse of authority by the Papacy. The Roman Catholic Church was beset from within by centuries of frustrated attempts at reform, and without by the rise of strong nation states along the northern border of the Old Roman Empire that were tired of bondage to civil and religious authorities in Rome. What started out as a symbolic protest by a rebellious monk in (East) Germany in 1517, against perceived abuses by his superior officials in Rome, turned out to be the spark that ignited strong movements of religious and civil disobedience (protests) against “the powers that be.” This led to the birth of the Protestant Reformation and the civil independence of Northern Europe from Roman Catholic jurisdiction. Martin Luther, a friar of the Augustinian Order, a Bible scholar and professor at the University of Wittenberg, began his “symbolic protest” by nailing a document known as “Ninety-five Thesis” to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. See: <http://www.carm.org/creeds/95theses.htm>

**Fundamental Doctrines of Protestantism.** All denominations and independent churches that are part of the Protestant movement share certain basic beliefs that are clearly stated in *The Apostles Creed* [1<sup>st</sup> century] and *The Nicene Creed* [325 AD], which are shared with other branches of Christianity. However, the Protestant reformers all had a firm conviction in *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), *sola scriptura* (scripture alone), a simple formula to remember the basic tenets of the Protestant Reformation: *justification by faith alone, salvation by God’s grace alone and not by human merit, and the supreme authority of the Word of God as the only rule of faith and practice.* Other basic concepts include the *priesthood of all believers* and the *lordship of Jesus Christ* (His divinity and power) as the only Savior of mankind.

Any religious group that does not share these convictions cannot be considered part of the Protestant movement, which is formed by church bodies, whether denominations or independent congregations, that are an integral part of the Universal Body of Christ, composed of “all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Conversely, no single church body (denomination, independent church or any other organization) represents the totality of the Church of Jesus Christ on planet Earth. The concept of “denominationalism” means that each church body constituted of “born-again believers” forms part of the invisible Universal Body of Christ, and that those believers have received the gift of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their spiritual heritage as members of the Family of God. Those who seek to obey the Lord Jesus Christ as His disciples meet regularly in congregations of believers to share their common faith, study the Holy Scriptures, share the Lord’s Supper, worship together, and support and encourage one another in the endeavors of the Christian life, in obedience to the Great Commandment and in fulfilment of the Great Commission.

The various congregations and denominations of the Protestant movement are related to each other as a “family of believers,” but may have different forms of church government: the basic types are episcopal, presbyterian and congregational. Individual congregations of believers may be affiliated with other congregations in associations of churches (typically called “denominations”) whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally. Each of these denominational organizations is self-governing and usually have legal status before their respective civil governments. The various congregations and denominations may have some *historical, doctrinal and life-style affinity* so as to be grouped into Families of Denominations and Major Traditions within the Protestant movement such as those listed below in this document. The categories shown

below are based largely on Dr. J. Melton Gordon's *Encyclopedia of American Religion* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1996, Fifth Edition); see the following links for basic definitions:

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/profiles/listmelton.htm>

<http://www.kentaurus.com/domine/protestant.HTM> [http://bpc.org/reading\\_room/books/wylie/protestantism.html](http://bpc.org/reading_room/books/wylie/protestantism.html)

**In general, the history of the Protestant movement in Colombia can be divided into six stages:** (1) missionary pioneers (1629-1900); (2) early denominational development (1900-1948); (3) political violence and social turmoil (1948-1958); (4) organized evangelistic activities (1959-1969); (5) Charismatic renewal and evangelical organizational development (1970-1989); and (6) accelerated evangelical church growth (1990-2020).

**The first stage was an era of missionary pioneers (1629-1900).** Today, the Caribbean archipelago of **San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina** constitutes a department of Colombia, with its capital is the town of San Andrés. The archipelago consists of two island groups and eight outlying banks and reefs located about 480 miles northwest of the Colombian mainland and 140 miles east of the Nicaraguan coast. During the early 1700s, these two small islands were largely unpopulated, which attracted Puritan colonists from England to settle there in 1629 under the sponsorship of the **Providence Island Company**.

At that time, the isolated islands were under British rule and remained as such until the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, which ceded the islands to Spanish control. In 1670, English buccaneers led by Captain Henry Morgan took over the islands, and the buccaneers controlled the islands until 1689. However, they remained thinly populated by English-speaking white Protestants and their black slaves. In 1806, the islands were inhabited by 1,200 people, 800 of whom were slaves.

After slavery was abolished in the British-controlled Caribbean in 1833, other English-speaking Protestant creoles of African ancestry (freedmen) arrived from the British West Indies. Emanuel Baptist Church was founded in 1844 on San Andrés Island by evangelical missionaries from the Southern USA. Eventually, the islands attracted the interest of the **Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society**, which sent black Jamaican missionaries there in 1860. Consequently, many of the islands' oldest churches are Baptist.

The Scotsman James Thompson (d. 1850), an agent of the *British and Foreign Bible Society* (BFBS), introduced Protestantism to many South American countries, and was active on the Colombian mainland in 1824. The BFBS established an agency in Cartagena that functioned during part of 1837 and 1838. Two Swiss Evangelicals visited Bogotá in 1853, taught Bible studies and distributed New Testaments among the population.

Between 1855 and 1867, the Rev. Ramón Montsalvatge (a Spaniard and former Franciscan novitiate who studied theology in Italy) preached the Gospel message in Cartagena and organized groups of evangelical believers in private homes. He soon became an agent of the *American Bible Society* (ABS) and distributed the Scriptures along the Caribbean Coast. He also helped establish schools for children and a training program for adult Christian workers. However, opposition from the Archbishop of Cartagena and civil authorities brought an end to his endeavors.

Between 1856 and 1859, BFBS agent A.J. Duffield had an office in Bogotá and established distribution depots in several Colombian cities that facilitated Bible distribution throughout the country. The BFBS maintained a presence in Colombia until 1921, when Bible distribution was turned over to the ABS.

It was not until 1856 that the first permanent U.S. missionary, the Rev. Henry Barrington Pratt, settled in Bogotá, as a representative of the *Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.* (now a constituent part of the **Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]**). This was the only Protestant denomination in Colombia for many years, and it succeeded because of the establishment of a school system and medical facilities. Nevertheless, this denomination attracted relatively few church members during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, advancement of Presbyterian work throughout the country allowed the organization of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1936, at the convention of Ministers held in Medellín. The Synod of the Church was constituted based on three Presbyteries: the North Coast, the Central and the South. These three Presbyteries remained the same until 1993 when a group of churches left the IPC and formed the **Reformed Synod** as an independent institution. The current **Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia / *Sínodo de la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia*** (SIPC), with headquarters in Barranquilla, Department of Atlántico, is composed of the Presbytery of the North Coast, the Central Presbytery, and the Presbytery of Urabá. In 1995, the SIPC reported 35 congregations with about 4,500 communicant members. Source: Bauswein and Vischer, editors, *The Reformed Family Worldwide: A Survey of Reformed Churches, Theological Schools and International Organizations* (1999: 127).

The **Reformed Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia**, founded in 1993 as a separation from the Presbyterian Synod, is headquartered in Ibagué, Department of Tolima. In 1995, the Reformed Synod reported 15 congregations with 5,673 communicant members: one synod with four presbyteries. Source: Bauswein and Vischer, editors (1999:128).

**The Episcopal-Anglican Church of Colombia** is an official body of the Anglican Communion based in London, England. The Episcopal-Anglican Church in Colombia began as a chaplaincy serving English-speaking foreigners residing in the country. For this reason, the pastoral jurisdiction passed successively from the Falkland Islands, to Jamaica, to British Honduras (now Belize) and finally to the Republic of Panama.

It was missionary White Hocking Stirling, from the Falkland Islands, who having been consecrated a bishop in 1869 in London, assumed the responsibility for the pastoral supervision of Colombia. The Falkland Islands was the only territory on the South American continent where an English bishop could legally settle. From such a remote residence, the bishop was unable to visit the missions or chaplaincies in Colombia, so he used priests residing in Panama for this service.

The Rev. James Crack Morris, consecrated bishop on 5 February 1920, was in charge of the *Episcopal Church Missionary District of Panama and the Panama Canal Zone*, which included the Republic of Colombia. He made his first visit to Colombia in March 1921. **The Protestant Episcopal Church** began work in 1923 among English-speakers in Cartagena and Santa Marta in northeastern Colombia. Until 1964, "The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America" was the only official name of this denomination. The financial and labor crisis of the years 1927-1929 decimated the missionary presence, because people were forced to migrate to other places in search of work. Bishop Morris died in 1930 and the Diocese of Panama was vacant until Bishop Harry Beal was elected and consecrated on 13 January 1937. Two years after his consecration, Beal made his first pastoral visit to Colombia in 1939.

In 1944, Bishop Beal sent the Rev. George F. Packard to Colombia for a two-week visit. The report he gave so motivated the National Council of the Church that he approved the reopening of mission work in Colombia in February 1945. In 1946, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, passed the pastoral care of the churches of Colombia and Ecuador to Bishop Henry Sherrill, president of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA, who placed the two countries

under the pastoral care of Bishop Reginal Heber Gooden (1946-1963). Mission work in Colombia began to grow through Gooden's strategy. The most important temple in the diocese was Saint Alban, inaugurated on Easter 1958.

In the early 1960s, it became clear to Bishop Gooden that the ministry should be extended to nationals if further growth of the Anglican-Episcopal Church was to be desired. On 13 April 1961, the bishop celebrated the first mass in Spanish in Barranquilla. Ten days later, he officiated a baptism in Spanish in Cali. It is noteworthy that the English-speaking missionaries who entered Colombia could do so on the condition of pastorally ministering only to foreigners. In 1963, the **Episcopal Diocese of Colombia** was formally established. Colombia was detached from the missionary district of Panama and the Canal Zone. At that time, the membership of the diocese was predominantly foreign and English-speaking. The first diocesan convention of the Diocese of Colombia was chaired by Bishop David Reed in Barranquilla between 18-20 May 1964. At this convention, Bishop Reed outlined the goals of his ministry: to create a strongly pastoral church, to be a Colombian church in the Spanish language, and being an ecumenical church to participate in world mission, while trusting the laity to exercise a vanguard ministry in social work. The first Colombian priest, Oscar Pineda Suárez, was ordained in Guayaquil, Ecuador, by Bishop Reed, in 1964. The first Colombian deacon was Samuel Pinzón Gil.

The process of indigenization of the church was gradually accomplished. In 1965, the diocese had five North American priests, one British and two Colombians. In 1969, there were six Colombian priests, four North Americans and one Spaniard. Foreign membership in the diocese had declined to about 65 percent. In 2014, the diocese was a nationwide church with 35 parishes and missions.

“Most of the priests and deacons active in the diocese attended Roman Catholic seminaries and were priests in the Roman Catholic Church before joining the Episcopal Church, and many see the priesthood as a ‘vocational call’ rather than a career,” according to the Rev. Ted J. Gaiser, the diocese’s director of mission development and an Episcopal Church-appointed missionary. An active congregation, including outreach, is a canonical requirement to be priested in the diocese. The “process,” Gaiser explained, works like this: Aspirants, with the support of a priest or a deacon in their area, begin to build a worship community. Ordination to the diaconate and a long period of “Anglicanization” follows before ordination to the priesthood.

The Rev. Francisco Duque Gómez, Bishop of the Episcopal-Anglican Church of Colombia, is the only official Bishop of the Episcopal-Anglican Church of Colombia with voice and vote in the Lambeth Conference, a decennial assembly of bishops of the Anglican Communion convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Episcopal-Anglican Church of Colombia has its headquarters in Bogotá. Adapted from: <http://www.iglesiaepiscopal.org.co/> - <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/article/colombia-episcopal-church-marks-50-years>

**The second stage was characterized by early denominational development (1900-1948).** It was not until 1915 that the Seventh-Day Adventist Church from the USA arrived to begin mission work on the Caribbean islands of San Andrés and Providencia, which are part of the Republic of Colombia. Later, other Protestant churches were established on these islands, such as the Christian Mission of Barbados, the Assemblies of God, and the Church of Christ (as well as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Roman Catholic Church and Islam).

**Additional evangelical mission agencies arrived on the Colombian mainland between 1900 and 1930:** the Gospel Missionary Union (1908) in Buenaventura and Cali; the **Seventh-Day Adventist Church** (1921); the **Christian and Missionary Alliance** (1923), a holiness

denomination, opened its first mission station in Ipiales and Cali and pioneered in the western departments; and the **Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1929)** in Cali, Valle del Cauca (reported 32 congregations with 3,528 communicant members in 1995).

**The Scandinavian Alliance Mission (SAM)**, began missionary work in Maracaibo, Venezuela, in 1906 after the arrival of two missionary couples from New York, USA. In 1890, Norwegian and Swedish immigrants in the USA created the Scandinavian Alliance Mission among their compatriots. This missionary organization was constituted by a group of Presbyterian, Baptist, Mennonite and members of other denominations for the purpose of taking the gospel to the most remote places in the world and “winning thousands of souls for Christ.”

Missionary work in Colombia began as an extension of SAM’s work in the western part of Venezuela from the border town of Rubio. Between 1916 and 1918, U.S. missionary John Christiansen decided to visit the border city of Cúcuta in Colombia, Department Norte de Santander, to carry out evangelistic work, but due to the prevailing opposition from the Roman Catholic Church it was not possible to continue this work. Four years later, in 1923, missionary Christiansen returned to Cúcuta accompanied by Norwegian missionary Olav Eikland; after making several visits there, evangelistic services began in the city of Cúcuta, which became the first SAM church in Colombia. Later, other North American missionaries and national church leaders continued evangelistic work throughout the national territory. After the work expanded geographically and grew in the number of organized churches and in membership, the **Association of Evangelical Churches of Eastern Colombia** (ADIEOC – *Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Este de Colombia*) was organized. In 1949, the Scandinavian Alliance Mission changed its name to **The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM)**. In 1998, because of the expansion of the work within Colombia, the organization was renamed the **Evangelical Alliance Denomination of Colombia** (DEAC – *Denominación Evangélica Alianza de Colombia*): <https://www.iglesiaalianzazonacentro.com/alianza-colombia>

Statistically, the DEAC-affiliated churches increased from 665 members in 1960, to 2,800 members in 1978, and to 5,850 members in the year 2000 (see table below).

**During the 1930s, at least 14 Protestant mission agencies, denominations or independent groups arrived in Colombia:** independent Baptist missionaries from Brazil began work in Puerto Leticia in 1930; another independent missionary began work in La Cumbre, near Cali, in 1930; some of the first missionaries later became associated with the U.S. Assemblies of God arrived in Sogamoso in 1932; the **Worldwide Evangelization Crusade** (now WEC International) arrived from Australia and began work in Cundinamarca and Meta in 1933 (founded the Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches); the **Church of the United Brethren in Christ** in Nariño in 1933; the **South American Indian Mission** (since 1970, South American Mission, SAM) arrived in 1934 and began work in La Guajira Peninsula among the Wayuu and in the Motilones Valley on the border between Venezuela and Colombia among the Barí and Arauca Indians; the **Christian Brethren-Plymouth Brethren** began work in 1935; the **Evangelical Lutheran Mission** began work in Boyacá in 1936; the **Calvary Pentecostal Holiness Mission** (from Great Britain) began work in Magdalena in 1937; the **Latin America Mission** (Scottish Presbyterian roots) began work in Bolívar in 1937 and founded the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean (AIEC - *Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Caribe*); independent Pentecostal missionaries arrived in Bogotá and Cundinamarca in 1938; the **Association of Baptists for World Evangelization** arrived in 1939; and the **Bolivian Indian Mission (BIM)**

began work in Boyacá in 1939 (the BIM changed its name Andes Evangelical Mission in 1965, which merged in 1982 with SIM International).

The **Christian Brethren-Plymouth Brethren** have been present in Colombia since 1935 but have not experienced much growth; only 55 congregations with 2,500 baptized members were reported in 2005, and 79 congregations with 4,050 baptized members in 2010 (Source: Newton, 2015:86). The *Emmaus Bible Institute* (Open Brethren) offers self-study correspondence courses (distance education) in Colombia, with offices in five cities: Bogotá, Bugalagrande, Pereira and Barranquilla: <https://emmausworldwide.org/collections/escuela>

**Christian Missions in Many Lands** (a nondenominational, faith-based missions support agency, founded in 1921 in New Jersey, USA) supports 12 missionary couples and five single missionaries in Colombia: <https://www.cmml.us/site/search?keys=colombia>

**The Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ** (founded in the USA in 1931; after a merger with another Pentecostal denomination in 1945, the merged group became the **United Pentecostal Church - UPC**), a “Jesus Only” or Oneness Pentecostal denomination, entered Colombia in 1936 and soon became one of the largest non-Catholic religious organizations in the country (see table below). However, in 1970, more than 90 percent of its members had become independent of the U.S. and Canadian headquarters and were part of the **United Pentecostal Church of Colombia / Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia** (IPUC), which was formally established in 1967 as a result of conflicts between national leaders and foreign missionaries. After 1967, both these Oneness denominations continued to grow in numbers and to expand geographically, however the IPUC has had greater success. For an early history of the UPC in Colombia, see Donald C. Palmer’s *Explosion of People Evangelism: An Analysis of Pentecostal Church Growth in Colombia* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1974).

The **United Pentecostal Church of Colombia / Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia** (IPUC) is a completely autonomous denomination (directed only by Colombians), and is the largest non-Catholic religious denomination in Colombia today. In 2016, it had an approximate constituency (adherents) of 600,000 people, an estimated 307,500 members, 4,400 pastors and 4,100 congregations (with an average of 75 people per congregation) throughout the country. Its headquarters are in Medellín, Antioquia; and it reports mission work in 37 countries worldwide. See: Forero, Eduardo; and Hernández, David. *Una historia que no termina: comienzo y primeros años de la Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia* (primera edición). Editorial Buena Semilla, 2005.

**The Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean / Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Caribe** (AIEC) was founded in 1937 by Harry and Susan Strachan, independent Scottish Presbyterian missionaries who also founded and directed the Latin American Evangelization Crusade (later known as the Latin America Mission) in 1921, based in San José, Costa Rica. The history of the AIEC has been divided into five different periods, which are summarized as follows:

- Between 1937 and 1945, mission work began in the main cities of the old department of Bolívar, such as: Sincelejo, Montería, Cartagena and Magangué. The church planting was carried out by missionaries of different nationalities and of various non-Pentecostal denominational backgrounds.

- Between 1945 and 1958, the work was organized and the initial name of “Association of Evangelical Churches of Bolívar” was adopted and the first statutes of the Association were approved in 1945. In 1953, the name of the Department of Bolívar was changed to the Department of the Caribbean, which resulted in renaming this denomination the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean (AIEC).
- During the period 1958 to 1975, there was a movement of the power of God manifested in signs, wonders, miracles and extraordinary growth in the nascent AIEC. There was also a change in leadership, liturgy, and doctrine [During this period, the AIEC became a Pentecostal movement; this was an early expression of the Charismatic Renewal movement that had worldwide manifestations during the 1960s-1970s; see David M. Howard’s *The Victor: The Victor Landero Story as told to Bob Owen*, published by Fleming M. Revell in 1979].
- The period 1975 to 2000 was one of restructuring the AIEC, with statute reforms and a new internal regulation came into effect. There were significant changes in the administrative structure.
- The period 2001 to date began with a consultation among all the representative leadership of the AIEC, which became known as the "Consulta de Tolú" in August 2001. In this consultation, fundamental changes were proposed in the structure, vision and mission of the AIEC. These changes were carried out leaving as a result a new definition of revival, which has been evidenced in the manifest presence of God in numerical growth, expansion and construction of new temples; solid economies of the churches; greater study and responsibility with the Word of God; spiritual renewal of our pastors; increased leadership initiative; and greater social impact in communities through a manifestation of God's power with miraculous signs and wonders.  
Adapted from: <https://www.iglesiasaiec.org/historia/>

Statistically, the AIEC grew from 649 members in 1960, to 1,200 in 1966, to 2,750 in 1978, and to 4,530 in the year 2000. Its headquarters are in Sincelejo, Department of Sucre.

**Between 1940 and 1948, at least nine new mission agencies or denominations began work in Colombia**, including the **Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board** (1941); the **Wesleyan Methodist Church World Missions** (1941-1943); the **South American Evangelical Union** (1942 in Magdalena Department among the Barí-Motilón, near the Venezuelan border), now called South America Mission; the **International Church of the Foursquare Gospel** (1942); the **Inter-American Missionary Society** (1943), founded by the Oriental Missionary Society (later known as OMS International); the **Evangelical Lutheran Church** and the independent **New Tribes Mission**, both in 1944; and the General Conference Mennonite Church in Cachipay and the Mennonite Brethren Missions Services in Palmira, both in 1945.

**The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board** began work in Colombia in 1941, which led to the formal founding of the **Baptist Convention of Colombia / Convención Bautista de Colombia** (CBC) in 1970. However, in 1998, the name **Baptist Denomination of Colombia / Denominación Bautista de Colombia** (DBC), with headquarters in Bogotá, was registered with the Ministry of the Interior and Justice. By 1970, the CBC reported 56 affiliated congregations with

a membership of 5,400 communicants; by 1990, the CBC reported 88 congregations with about 14,000 members, according to Justice C. Anderson (2005:351).

**The Missionary Bible Churches / Iglesias Bíblicas Misioneras (IBM)** trace their origins to October 1942 with the arrival of missionaries from the *Evangelical Union of South America (EUSA)*, who established their headquarters in Santa Marta. The EUSA was given responsibility for the department of Magdalena Grande, which at that time included the departments of Magdalena, Cesar and a sector in the south of La Guajira. In March 1956, the **Association of Evangelical Churches of Magdalena / Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Magdalena (ASIE-MAG)** was officially organized. In 1987, at their headquarters in the city of Valledupar (Department of Cesar), they celebrated 45 years of missionary presence in Colombia. In 1998, ASIEMAG was dissolved and the Missionary Bible Churches (IBM) were officially established: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/Iglesias-B%C3%ADblicas-Misioneras-120022678019614/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/Iglesias-B%C3%ADblicas-Misioneras-120022678019614/about/?ref=page_internal)

Statistically, this denomination reported the following: 361 members in 1960, 600 members in 1966, about 1,000 in 1978, and 2,010 in the year 2000.

**The New Tribes Mission (NTM, Fundamentalist, nondenominational; now Ethnos360)** began work in Colombia in 1944 among Indigenous tribal peoples by translating the Holy Scriptures and producing literacy materials and Bible lessons into a previously unwritten languages, by teaching native peoples how to read and write in their own language, and by evangelizing and planting churches where none previously existed among unreached people groups. In 1993, members of the FARC guerrilla movement abducted three NTM missionaries from a village in Panama and brought them to Colombia where they were killed in 1996. In 1994, two other NTM missionaries were killed after being taken at gunpoint from an NTM school in Colombia.

**Four Anabaptist-Mennonite groups are working in the country:** *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Colombia* (an outgrowth of **General Conference Mennonite** mission work, begun 1945); *Asociación de Iglesias de los Hermanos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren, 1945)*; *Iglesia Colombiana de los Hermanos* (an outgrowth of mission work by the **Brethren Church**, Ashland, Ohio, 1973); and *Comunidad Cristiana Hermandad de Cristo (Brethren in Christ, 1982)*. Together these groups had an approximate membership in 1986 of 2,300 in 40 congregations served by 31 pastors. These organizations devote themselves to evangelism, education, health, and social services. The *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Colombia* and *Asociación de Iglesias de los Hermanos* work together in the social service agency MENCOLDES (*Fundación Menonita Colombiana para el Desarrollo, 1977*) in cooperation with Mennonite Central Committee and the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA).

In 2012, the following Anabaptist-Mennonite groups were active in Colombia:

Denomination	Members in 2009	Congregations in 2009	Members in 2012	Congregations in 2012
Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Colombia	1,200	24	1,045	21
Iglesia Hermandad de Cristo	131	5	80	2
Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia	1,700	44	1,700	44
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,031</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>2,825</b>	<b>67</b>

Missionaries of the **Worldwide Evangelization Crusade** (WEC), John and Jane Firth, arrived in Colombia in the 1930s. In 1942, the first Foursquare Church was established in the city of Bucaramanga. In 1953, under the sponsorship of the **International Foursquare Gospel Church (IFGC)**, the Firths went to Barranquilla and worked in that region of the country until 1974. Then they moved to Bogotá and settled in the Fátima neighborhood, a popular sector in the southern part of the city. During 1976-1977, they began to teach “liberation seminars” to members of the Catholic Church in the northern part of the city. They, especially Jane, were pioneers in the “liberation ministry” (to free people from demonic oppression) in Colombia. At that time, the Charismatic Renewal movement was so strong that people eagerly sought the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was no longer just evangelical Christians, but also many Catholics, who were experiencing the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” This led to the founding of **Foursquare Charismatic Christian Church / Iglesia Cristiana Carismática Cuadrangular** in Bogotá in 1978. This denomination listed 24 affiliated churches on its website in 2020.

Source: <https://iccc-colombia.org/nuestra-historia/#1540842909732-19432795-5579>

Statistics reported by the IFGC in Colombia reveal the following: 1,524 members nationally in 1960; 3,620 in 1966; 24,600 in 1978; and 46,000 in the year 2000 (see table below). However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* only reported 40,594 members and 290 congregations (an average of 140 members per congregation) for this organization. Nevertheless, it was considered to be the third-largest Protestant denomination in Colombia in 2000 and the fifth-largest in 2010.

**The third stage of Protestant missions in Colombia was between 1948 and 1960, during *La Violencia* and its early aftermath.** Although the general situation markedly improved for Protestants after the Liberal government came to power in 1930, it deteriorated significantly during the civil war that divided the country between 1948 and 1958, called *La Violencia*. Continued Conservative political opposition to reforms and modernization culminated in a horrific decade of violence (1948-1958), in which Protestants were identified with the Liberals and suffered the consequences of that association: vast destruction of church and school property, over 120 Colombian Protestants were killed, and thousands had to flee for their lives. The Gospel Missionary Union lost the majority of its church buildings. Overall, more than 47 evangelical churches and chapels were completely destroyed, many more were damaged, and over 200 primary schools were closed. Not surprisingly, only a few mission agencies or denominations initiated work in Colombia during this period: the **Assemblies of God** (1951); the **Independent Evangelical Tabernacles of the Casanare**; the **United Evangelical Tabernacles of Colombia**; the **Church of God** (Cleveland, TN, in 1955); the **Panamerican Mission** (an independent Pentecostal denomination, founded by Ignacio Guevara in 1956); and the **Hispanic American Crusade, World-Wide Missions** and the **Society of Friends (Quakers)**.

**The Church of God (Cleveland, TN)** began its ministry in Colombia in 1955 when two Colombian Pentecostal pastors, Ricardo Moreno and Mesías Juárez, joined this denomination at the invitation of Vessie D. Hargrave, Superintendent of Latin America, and J. H. Walker, Jr, Assistant Superintendent of Latin America, at a hotel room in Bogotá. These pastors were assisted by Paul and Candita Childers. On 18 November 1956, the first Church of God was established in the city of Sogamoso, where services were held in a small shed, 16 feet long and six feet wide. Soon this small space was inadequate to hold the growing congregation of 40 members. From this beginning, new churches were established in Apulo with 22 members, and one in Villavicencio with 40 members. All of these Church of God members suffered violent opposition from Roman Catholic parish priests who led mobs of young people to threaten and harass people

as they entered or left the worship services, sometimes by throwing stones at the church building to express their anger against the presence of Pentecostals in their neighborhoods (Conn 1959: 202-204). Statistically, the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) grew from 81 members in 1958, to 219 in 1960, 775 in 1966, 2,320 in 1978, and 4,699 in the year 2000 (see table below).

**The fourth stage was characterized by the development of organized evangelistic activities nationwide and accelerated growth among some denominations (1960-1969).** The general situation in Colombia greatly improved for Protestants after 1960, as seen in the table below that reveals the membership growth of the 30 largest denominations between 1960 and 2000.

**ESTIMATED MEMBERSHIP FOR 30 LARGEST  
PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS IN COLOMBIA, 1960-2000**  
(Sorted by estimated membership in 2000)

#	DENOMINATIONAL NAME	1960 MEMBERS (1)	1966 MEMBERS (2)	1978 MEMBERS (3)	2000 MEMBERS (4)
1	Seventh-Day Adventist Church	4672	19213	59700	181446
2	United Pentecostal Church of Colombia (split in 1967 from the UPC-USA)	--	--	30000	93400
3	Foursquare Gospel Church	1524	3620	24600	46000
4	Christian Crusade Church (split from WEC in 1975) – Pentecostal	--	--	14100	45800
5	Panamerican Mission of Colombia (independent Pentecostal)	105	862	7000	27800
6	Council of the Assemblies of God	159	2660	6636	22280
7	Christian & Missionary Alliance	1571	1988	9000	21400
8	(So.) Baptist Convention of Colombia	2792	4021	10000	13200
9	Gospel Missionary Union (GMU)	764	1096	2706	12500
10	Inter-American Mission (OMS)	425	849	4000	11800
11	New Tribes Mission (Fundamentalist)	300	2900	7100	11800
12	Bethesda Missionary Center (Pentecostal)	--	--	500	11000
13	Hispanic American Crusade	164	675	2800	5850
14	Association. of Evangelical Churches of Eastern Colombia (TEAM-related) – Denom. Evangélica Alianza de Colombia	665	623	2800	5850
15	Plymouth Brethren / Christian Brethren	50	2268	2500	3000
16	Presbyterian Church-Reformed Synod (a split from PCUSA in 1993)	--	--	--	5673
17	Church of God in Colombia (CL-TN)	219	775	2320	4699
18	Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean (AIEC-LAM)	649	1200	2750	4530
19	Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)	1635	1882	4106	4500
20	United Pentecostal Church-USA	3000	15352	--	4400
21	International Charismatic Mission (MCI)			100	4330

22	Cumberland Presbyterian Church	850	833	1750	4320
23	House on the Rock Church (1987)	--	--	--	4000
24	**Tabernacle of Faith Christian Center / Centro Cristiano Tabernáculo de Fe - Medellín	--	--	200	4000
25	Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches (WEC-England)	481	1000	1200	3050
26	Pentecostal Church of God (from PR)		282	1000	2730
27	Protestant Episcopal Church	1105	1272	1620	2290
28	Assoc. of Evangelical Churches of Magdalena (Evan. Union of South American, EUSA)	361	600	1000	2010
	<b>Sample of 28 largest denominations</b>	<b>21491</b>	<b>63971</b>	<b>199488</b>	<b>563658</b>

\*\*More info is needed about the historical origin and theological orientation of this organization.

#### SOURCES:

- (1) Clyde W. Taylor and Wade T. Coggins. *Protestant Missions in Latin America: A Statistical Survey*. Washington, DC: Evangelical Foreign Missions Association, 1961; and CEDEC's 1960 study.
- (2) William R. Read, Victor M. Monterroso and Harmon A. Johnson. *Latin American Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1969; plus estimates by PROLADES; and CEDEC's 1969 study.
- (3) Daryl Platt. "El Avance de la Iglesia Evangélica en Colombia," SEPAL, 1981; plus estimates by PROLADES.
- (4) Brierly, Peter. *World Churches Handbook*. London: Christian Research, 1997; plus, corrections and estimates for 2000 by PROLADES from denominational and/or mission sources.

In 1960 and in 1969, the **Evangelical Confederation of Colombia** (CEDEC) conducted studies of Protestant work nationally and reported the following: 33,156 baptized church members in 1960 compared to 90,573 in 1969; and a total Protestant community of 165,780 in 1960 compared to 271,719 in 1969 (about 1.3 percent of the total population). A study on church growth by Donald Palmer (1974), analyzing information from the two CEDEC censuses, reveals that the Pentecostal membership increased by 560 percent between 1960 and 1969, compared to 110 percent for Adventist membership, 60 percent for the membership of older Protestant denominations, and 160 percent for the membership of independent Faith Missions.

**Palmer also reported (1974) the existence of 156 primary schools and 13 secondary schools (total 169) operated by Protestant denominations**, the largest of which were: United Presbyterians (31), Southern Baptist (29), Christian & Missionary Alliance (26) and Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (21). The Southern Baptists, the Gospel Missionary Union and the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade operated one hospital each. In terms of theological education, the Southern Baptists had their own seminary in Cali and the Inter-American Mission (affiliated with the Oriental Missionary Society, OMS) operated one in Medellín. Seven Bible institutes were operated, respectively, by the Assemblies of God (1), the Christian & Missionary Alliance (2), the Inter-American Mission (1), the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (2), and the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (1).

**Between 1960 and 1969, the following mission agencies and denominations began work in Colombia:** the Church of God (Anderson, IN - 1961), Wycliffe Bible Translators (1962),

**Overseas Crusades** (1963, now OC Ministries International, known as SEPAL in Colombia), **Campus Crusade for Christ** (1963), **Elim Fellowship World Missions** (1964), **Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada** (1967), the **Body of Christ Church** separated from the Panamerican Mission (1968, Pentecostal), the **Evangelical Covenant Church** (1968), the **World Baptist Fellowship Mission** (1968), and **FEBInternational** (1969, Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada).

**The Pentecostal Church of God, International Movement** / *Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Movimiento Internacional de Puerto Rico* began work in Colombia in 1962 after the arrival of missionary Carlos Juan Rivera Colón from Puerto Rico. The first national convention was held on 10 May 1965 in Bogotá with the participation of delegates from three organized churches: Iglesia Olaya, Iglesia Libertador and Iglesia 7 de Agosto. This denomination was legally registered with the Colombian government on 14 July 1966 under the name *Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal Movimiento Internacional*. As of May 1997, its official name in Colombia is *Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal Movimiento Internacional en Colombia* with headquarters in Bogotá, and now with eight districts and approximately 96 congregations (churches and missions), an average of 12 congregations in each district. The districts with the largest number of churches were: Central Bogotá, with 18 organized churches, four missions and 10 “preaching points;” and Antioquia, with 12 churches, seven in Medellín and five in Zona de Urabá, with an additional five “preaching points.” Statistically, this denomination reported 282 members in 1966, about 1,000 in 1978, and 2,730 in the year 2000 (see table above). If the 96 congregations listed above had an average of 100 members per congregation, the total membership in 2019 could have reached 9,600. Source: <https://iddpmicolombiarcs.wixsite.com/idiospen/quienes-somos>

During the 1960s, two factions of the **Stone-Campbell movement** (aka, Restoration Movement) arrived in Colombia: the independent **Christian Churches & churches of Christ** (1962, instrumental), and the independent **Churches of Christ** (1965, non-instrumental = *a capella*). The former group is mentioned in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Foster, *et al*, 2004:459-460) without giving any information about its historical founding in Colombia. The later group is described by Foster, *et al* (2004:462) as beginning in Colombia in 1965 with the arrival of Jaime Solar and Dr. Charles E. Krull, who were sent out as missionaries from “North American Churches of Christ.” Other Church of Christ workers arrived during the 1960s and 1970s, where work was developed in Bogotá and Medellín. Also, student short-term volunteer missionaries from several Church of Christ educational institutions come to Colombia to assist in evangelistic and church planting activities. “Work also extended to other major cities in the late-1960s in the north and central regions through evangelistic campaigns held by several U.S. evangelists, and in the south where Ed Sewell held campaigns that established seven congregations” (Foster, *et al*, 2004:462).

Although most of the U.S. missionaries left Colombia during the 1980s, national evangelists continued to hold campaigns and plant new churches. Since the mid-1980s, at least 200 congregations have been planted throughout the country. However, only 57 local “churches of Christ” (non-instrumental) were listed for Colombia in the following on-line directory: [http://www.editoriallapaz.org/directorio\\_Colombia.htm](http://www.editoriallapaz.org/directorio_Colombia.htm).

In addition, only 17 local Christian Churches & Churches of Christ (instrumental) were listed for Colombia in the *Directorio del Ministerio de las Iglesias de Cristo e Iglesias Cristianas de Habla Hispana, 2008* (published by the Spanish American Evangelistic Ministries in El Paso,

Texas): <https://www.yumpu.com/es/document/read/12166426/directorio-ministerio-2008-wwwsaeministriescom>.

**The fifth stage was an era of Charismatic Renewal and evangelical organizational development (1970-1989).** The first experiences of Charismatic Renewal in Colombia occurred in 1967 among Roman Catholics in Bogotá, as described earlier, under the leadership of **Friar Rafael Garcia-Herrerros**, who became a Charismatic through the ministry of the **Rev. Harald Bredeesen**, pastor of Mount Vernon Dutch Reformed Church in New York, and an ecumenical team of Charismatics from North America.

During the November 1969 **Latin American Congress of Evangelization**, held in Bogotá, news of Charismatic Renewal in Argentina and elsewhere reached Colombia through the participation of many country representatives, such as the Rev. Ruben Lores of the Latin America Mission in Costa Rica who spoke to the plenary session on the topic, “Sobre Toda Carne,” in which he quoted The Acts of the Apostles 2:16-21 where the prophet Joel reported that God said to him, “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...in the latter days”). Lores reported on the Charismatic Renewal taking place among Catholics and Protestants alike in the USA, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil.

The **Charismatic Renewal Movement (CRM)** suddenly appeared almost simultaneously, among Catholics and Protestants, in dozens of countries and quickly spread throughout Latin America and the Caribbean regions. During the so-called “ecumenical phase” of the CRM, tens of thousands of Catholics and Protestants met together in small groups (usually in private homes) to pray, read and study the Bible, and work together in a myriad of ways for the common good of society. Because Catholics and Protestants together received the promised “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” a strong sense of unity, peace, love and mutual respect developed in these small groups that seemed to heal centuries of hostilities, at least for a season.

In 1972, two U.S. charismatic leaders, Father Francis McNutt and Ruth Carter Stapleton, visited Bogotá and held a series of meetings that included Catholics and Evangelicals. Among the participants were a few Evangelical missionaries and national workers from a student ministry at a local university. As a result of these meetings, most of the participants rededicated their lives to God, were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, and began a ministry of healing and deliverance that impacted many university and high school campuses across the country, as well as local Catholic parishes and Evangelical churches.

However, conservative leaders in both communities, Catholic and Protestant, soon began to raise objections about the very nature of the CRM on the one hand and about the historic doctrinal differences of the other hand. Authoritarian pressures from the Catholic hierarchy to regulate and control the CRM for the purpose of avoiding doctrinal error and persuading Catholics to remain faithful to the Church produced a growing rupture between Catholic and Protestant charismatics. During the 1970s, tens of thousands of Catholics decided to leave their Church and to affiliate with evangelical Bible study and prayer groups and local congregations, where most were warmly welcomed. Although most active Catholics remained faithful to their historic Faith, the tendency was for nominal Catholics to be drawn to the evangelical fold, especially to Pentecostal churches and to newly-formed independent Charismatic churches. As a result, evangelical congregations, in general, began to grow substantially throughout the nation, especially in the larger cities.

**During the 1970s, the following mission agencies and denominations began work in Colombia: Emmaus Evangelical Church (1970); the Church of God of Prophecy (1970), a**

split from the Church of God-Cleveland, TN (later this Colombian denomination affiliated with the Church of God of Prophecy in the USA); **Emanuel Evangelical Church** (1971, a split from the Inter-American Mission Churches); the **American Baptist Association** (1971), **Baptist Bible Fellowship International** (1971); **Christian Church-Disciples of Christ** (1973, part of the Stone-Campbell Movement); the **Filadelfia Evangelical Church** (1974, a Swedish Pentecostal group); **Caravans of the People of God Biblical Christian Churches** (1974, formed by a group of Charismatic Catholics who left their Church and organized an evangelical fellowship of churches); the **Missionary Revival Crusade** (1974, a nondenominational agency based in Dallas, TX); the **Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod** (1974); the **Spanish World Gospel Mission** (1974); **The Christian Crusade Church** (Pentecostal-orientation) separated from the Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches in 1975, which were established by WEC in the 1930s; the **Bethesda Missionary Center** (independent Pentecostal), founded by Enrique Gómez Montealegre in 1975 in Bogotá; the **Church of the Nazarene** (1976), the **Presbyterian Church in America / Mission to the World** (1976); and **World Vision International** (1978, an international development aid agency).

**During the 1980s, the following mission agencies and denominations began work in Colombia:** the **Reformed Baptist Mission** (1985); **Brethren in Christ World Missions** (1985); **International Outreach Ministries** (1986); **House on the Rock Integral Christian Church / Iglesia Cristiana Integral Casa Sobre La Roca**, founded by Rev. Dario Silva Silva (1987); **Action International Ministries of Canada** (1987); and **Team Expansion** (1989).

Also, in the 1980s, the **“Light of the World” Trinitarian International Evangelical Work** from Venezuela became established in Colombia. This is an independent Pentecostal denomination founded by Captain Jaime Banks Puertas in 1968, with headquarters in Barrio Colombia Norte, Guanare, Venezuela. **Note:** not to be confused with the *Iglesia La Luz del Mundo*, with headquarters in Guadalajara, Mexico.

In 1983, the **International Charismatic Mission** (MCI) was founded by César Castellanos Domínguez and his wife Claudia in Bogotá. By 2000, the MCI had developed a large central church (weekly attendance of over 40,000) and had established large daughter churches in other Colombian cities, as well as in other countries – such as Costa Rica, where the MCI had one central church with over 3,000 in attendance weekly in July 2000.

At some point Castellanos visited the Rev. David Yonggi Cho in South Korea, who had successfully implemented a cell structure at his Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, which was estimated to be the largest Christian church in the world with about 830,000 members in 2007. After Castellanos returned to his church in Bogotá, he claimed to have received a “revelation from God” while he was in South Korea, that God would increase the size of Castellanos’ church in great measure and help him care for the growing numbers of people.

Castellanos subsequently reorganized his 600-member church into groups of 12 adults (called the G12 Vision), while his brother-in-law, César Fajardo, did the same with the youth. Between 1991 and 1994, Castellanos’ church grew from 70 to 1,200 members; and between 1994 and 1999, the church reportedly established 20,000 cell groups with a regular weekly church attendance of 45,000 people. In 2009, the MCI claimed 25,000 weekly cell groups with over 150,000 people in attendance (an average of eight people each) in Bogotá alone. Between 1990 and 2009, the MCI expanded its ministry throughout the country and established more than 200 local churches and hundreds more in North, Central and South America and Europe.

In 2000, evangelical church leaders from around the world travelled to the MCI in Bogotá to learn about the G12 Vision: “Our desire is that each person who visits us can have a personal experience with Jesus and his life is transformed. Our mission is that each member within the church can develop as a leader who can influence 12 people, and lead them to be true disciples of Jesus through the message of the Cross and the power of His Blood.”

In 2001, Castellanos formed an international G12 board of directors, with leaders from various countries. However, by 2005 some of these leaders decided to terminate their affiliation with Castellanos and his G12 Vision, which they denounced as being too authoritarian. **Defectors included Ricardo Rodríguez, who founded *Centro Mundial de Avivamiento-CMA (World Revival Center)* in 1990 (the first name of this church was *Iglesia Comunidad Cristiana de Restauración / Christian Community of Restoration Church*); and César Fajardo, Castellanos’ former Youth Pastor, who established *Sin Muros Ministerio Internacional (Without Borders International Ministry)* in 2006; both organizations are centered in Bogotá.** Nevertheless, many of the original leaders have continued to form branches of the G12 movement, following in Castellanos’ footsteps.

Meanwhile, CMA-founder Ricardo Rodríguez established his own TV station in Bogotá, called the “Avivamiento Broadcasting Network” (TV-ABN, Channel 41), which began broadcasting in June 2001. The station is owned by the *Centro Mundial de Avivamiento (CMA)*, which is pastored by Ricardo and his wife María Patricia. In December 2008, Rodríguez held a giant rally at Parque Simón Bolívar in Bogotá with an estimated attendance of 300,000 people. During that same week, about 15,000 pastors from 50 countries attended his annual “Avivamiento Leadership Conference.” Currently, CMA has 28 affiliated churches in Colombia, the USA, Argentina, Chile and Brazil: <https://www.avivamiento.com/biografia.php>

In 2006, César Fajardo – MCI-founder César Castellanos’ former Youth Pastor – and his wife Claudia left the MCI and established *Iglesia Sin Muros Ministerio Internacional (Church Without Borders International Ministry)* in Bogotá. Later, national offices were established in the cities of Armenia and Bucaramanga, and internationally in Brazil, Chile and Peru: <https://www.sinmuros.org/mi-iglesia/>

In 2008, after having spent many years holding its worship services in Coliseo El Campín (a covered stadium seating 14,000 people), the **MCI of Bogotá** moved to the new G12 Convention Center, an auditorium that holds 10,000 people seated. Today, the MCI in Bogotá has seven weekly church services, and it has 142 offices in Colombia and worldwide with an estimated worldwide constituency of about 250,000 people in 2008: <https://mci12.com/nuestra-iglesia/>

**The sixth stage of Protestant development has been a period of accelerated church growth (1990-2015) among the existing denominations.** In addition, during this period, several new denominations emerged within the national context and additional USA-based mission agencies and denominations began work in Colombia, which added to the overall growth picture of the Protestant movement in the nation:

- 1990 - Action International Ministries, USA
- 1990 - Baptist International Missions
- 1990 - Impact International
- 1990 – Worldwide Revival Center (*Centro de Avivamiento Mundial*) established by Ricardo Rodríguez, a split from MCI in Colombia.
- 1991 - Fellowship International Mission
- 1993 - Reformed Synod separated from the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia.

1993 - The Alfa & Omega Student Movement of Colombia became independent of CCCI.  
 1994 - Macedonia World Baptist Missions  
 1994 - The Sowers International  
 1995 - Bible Centered Ministries (BCM) International  
 1995 - Christ for the City International (affiliated with Latin America Mission)  
 1996 - Calvary International  
 2005 - World Reach  
 2006 - Without Borders International Ministry / *Sin Muros Ministerio Internacional* (founded in Colombia by César Fajardo, a split from MCI)  
 2010 - Evangelism Explosion III International  
 2013 - Camino Global (was CAM International, aka Central American Mission)

**In November 1993, the Alfa and Omega Student Movement of Colombia (known as MAYO),** founded by university professor Dr. Néstor Chamorro Pesantes, became independent of *Campus Crusade for Christ International*. MAYO, since it's founding in Colombia in 1963, had become increasingly charismatic and had developed strong ties to Catholic Charismatic leaders, not only in Colombia but also in Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Chile. MAYO incorporated in Colombia under the name *Confesión Religiosa Cruzada Estudiantil y Profesional de Colombia* (CRCEPC), with Chamorro as the executive director. In addition to working with students and professionals, MAYO also developed outreach programs to street gangs and inmates of jails and prisons. In 2008, there were organized chapters of MAYO in 22 Colombian cities, and Chamorro operated a professional counseling center in Bogotá, *Centro Colombiano de Teoterapia Integral*.

**Several studies were conducted by evangelical researchers on Protestant church growth in major cities of Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s,** which gives some indication of the relative size of the Protestant community in Cali, Medellín and Bogotá. However, only in the Metropolitan Region of Medellín were the surveys repeated in 1986, 1990 and 1993, which revealed the following basic information: 1986 (98 churches with 6,500 members), 1990 (111 churches with 8,069 members) and 1993 (169 churches with 14,212 members). By 1993, forty-five Protestant denominations had established local churches in the Medellín Metro Region (Valle de Aburrá). By comparison, in 1982, Bogotá only had 264 Protestant churches with about 60,720 members (SEPAL, 1982); in 1992, Cali had 105 churches with about 12,000 members (Cristo para la Ciudad, 1992); and in 1992, Medellín had 169 churches with about 14,212 members (Cristo para la Ciudad, 1993). Based on these studies, it can be concluded that the Protestant population was less than one percent of the total population in each city at the time of each survey.

**By the year 2000, the following Protestant denominations were the largest in Colombia, based on their reported total membership.**

**The Seventh-Day Adventist Church (SDA),** founded in the USA in 1863 among Sabbath-keeping Baptists, began mission work in English on the Caribbean islands of San Andrés and Providencia in 1915, and later began mission work in Spanish on the mainland of Colombia. Its membership growth and geographical expansion, despite strong opposition from Roman Catholic authorities and from the majority of Evangelical leaders, is an important lesson in organizational development with its holistic message and lifestyle.

Although the Seventh-day Adventists are classified as "Protestants" by PROLADES, they are not necessarily known to be "Evangelicals," due to their own exclusiveness as a religious group and to certain doctrinal differences (particularly, honoring the Sabbath and emphasis on certain Old Testament regulations and Bible Prophecy) that have caused many Evangelicals to consider them to be distant cousins at best. The Adventists have always placed strong emphasis on both the mind and body: teaching morality (abstinence = against the use of alcoholic beverages and tobacco) and Bible prophecy (especially regarding the Second Advent = the return of Jesus Christ to establish his earthly kingdom), and emphasizing good physical health (natural health foods and vegetarianism). This historical separation between Adventists and Evangelicals (including Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals) in Colombia, and generally throughout Latin America, has caused a mutual rejection of one another. Prior to the 1950s, this mutual antagonism was very strong, but since that time there has been greater tolerance and growing mutual understanding between the various Protestant traditions.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church of Colombia operates two medical clinics and 23 secondary schools; also, there is one institution of higher education, Colombia Adventist University, located in Medellín. The SDA's stated mission is: "'Glorify God and, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, guide each believer to an experience of personal and transforming relationship with Christ, which enables him as a disciple to share the Eternal Gospel with every person.'" Source: <https://www.unioncolombiana.org.co/es/nuestra-iglesia>

By the year 2000, the SDA-Colombia was the largest Protestant denomination (classified by PROLADES as Protestant) in the country. It reported the following statistics for the period 1960-2000: 4,672 members in 1960; 19,213 in 1966; 59,700 in 1978; and 181,446 in the year 2000. This would make this denomination the largest Protestant group in Colombia in 2000. Statistics for year-ending 2018 are as follows: 1,747 churches with 283,011 members (an average of 162 members per church). The *Operation World 2010 Database* reported 1,229 SDA churches with 295,000 members in Colombia, which seems to be erroneous compared to official SDA statistics (see table below):

FIELD NAME	CHURCHES	ENDING MEMBERSHIP
North Colombian Union Conference	993	121,261
South Colombian Union Conference	754	161,75
<b>TOTALS - YEAR ENDING 2018</b>	<b>1747</b>	<b>283,011</b>

Source: [http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=D\\_IAD](http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=D_IAD)

The **United Pentecostal Church of Colombia** / *Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia* (IPUC) was formally established in 1967 in Barranquilla after its leaders and their churches split from the **International United Pentecostal Church** based in the USA as a result of conflicts between national leaders and foreign missionaries. By the year 2000, this Oneness Pentecostal body was the second-largest Protestant denomination in the country. It reported the following statistics for the period 1970-2000: 30,000 members in 1970 and 93,400 members in 2000. The *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that the IPUC had 165,531 members in 2,107 churches in 2010, which is an erroneous report based on a comparison with the information now available on the IPUC website: 4,396 congregations (churches and missions), with an estimated 329,700 members (an average of 75 members per congregation), distributed among the 35 districts of Colombia: <https://ipuc.org.co/archivos/6117>

The **International Foursquare Gospel Church** (IFGC, Trinitarian Pentecostal) was founded in 1923 by evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson with headquarters in Los Angeles, California. It began mission work in Colombia in 1942 and was the third-largest Protestant denomination nationally by the year 2000. The IFGC-Colombia reported the following statistics: 1,524 members in 1960; 3,620 in 1966; 24,600 in 1978; and 46,000 in the year 2000.

**The Christian Crusade Church** (ICC – *Iglesia Cruzada Cristiana*) began in 1975 after its founding members separated from the Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches that were established by Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC, founded in England in 1919, interdenominational and non-Pentecostal) in the 1930s. The ICC members abandoned WEC-affiliated churches after the latter rejected the Charismatic Renewal movement, which the ICC endorsed. By the year 2000, the ICC had become the fourth-largest Protestant denomination in the country. It reported the following statistics for the period 1978-2000: 14,100 members in 1978 and 45,800 members in the year 2000.

**The Panamerican Mission / Misión Panamericana** (MPA) was founded in 1956 by Pastor Ignacio Guevara Vasquez and his wife Harriet Anderson de Guevara as an independent Trinitarian Pentecostal denomination. By the year 2000, it had become the fifth-largest Protestant denomination in the country. It reported the following statistics for the period 1960-2000: 105 members in 1960; 862 in 1966; 7,000 in 1978; and 27,800 members in 2000. The *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that the MPA had 12,000 members in 120 churches in 2010, which is an erroneous report based on a comparison with the information now available on the MPA website at: <http://cfejamundi.com/mision-panamericana-de-colombia/>

Today, the Panamerican Mission has more than 400 affiliated churches, 350 of them in Colombia and the others in Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Panama and Venezuela. Among the churches belonging to the Panamerican Mission there are several in the middle of the Amazon Jungle. The MPA also works in education, through primary and secondary schools in the departments of Antioquia, Casanare and Guaviare, and sponsors a program of Biblical studies called "Institute by Cassette." Ignacio Guevara was the pioneer of evangelizing by radio in Colombia and in other parts of South America. From April 1943, he broadcast the program "Conozca", which was the first of its kind in Colombia and the second in South America. Currently, it is still being broadcast on the "Nuevo Continente" station, which was donated to Ignacio Guevara by the North American evangelist Pat Robertson on 7 July 1972.

Through the MPA, he founded the "Nuevo Continente" 1460 AM radio station in Medellín and six community FM stations in an equal number of Colombian cities, including one at the door of the Amazon Rainforest, on the border between Colombia and Brazil.

See: <http://www.nuevocontinente.org/>

The **General Council of the Assemblies of God** (AoG, Trinitarian Pentecostal), founded in 1914 in the USA, began work in Colombia after independent missionaries Edward and Adah Wegner and some of their associates in the Department of Boyacá joined the AoG in 1942. The Wegners had begun their ministry in Colombia in 1932. During the 1950s, the arrival of additional AoG missionaries made it possible for new churches to be established in Bogotá and Cali. In 1945, the *Corporación Asambleas de Dios en Colombia* was officially incorporated. In 1958, the *Concilio de las Asambleas de Dios en Colombia* was formally established. By 1965, the work of the AoG in Colombia included five missionary couples, 22 national pastors, 14 organized churches and 93

“preaching points,” with about 1,800 adherents, in eight Departments. Between 1960 and 1970, 50 new churches were founded. Between 1970 and 1980, work was begun in other major cities. In 1970, there were 56 organized churches and 70 “preaching points,” which increased to 90 organized churches and 120 “preaching points,” with about 21,500 adherents in 1980. During the decade of the 1980s, 232 new congregations were established. Source: Luisa Jeter de Walker (2006: 108-146).

By 2000, the AoG was the sixth-largest Protestant denomination in the country. It reported the following statistics for the period 1960-2000: 159 members in 1960; 2,660 in 1966; 6,636 in 1978; 11,400 in 1994; and 22,280 in the year 2000.

**The Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA)**, a Holiness body, was founded by Albert Benjamin Simpson in the USA in New York state in 1887; it began mission work in Colombia in 1923, and the Colombian C&MA was officially organized in 1942. By the year 2000, it was the seventh-largest Protestant denomination in the country. It reported the following statistics for the period 1960-2000: 1,571 members in 1960; 1,988 in 1966; 9,000 in 1978; and 21,400 members in 2000. According to the C&MA-Colombia website: there were 157 organized churches (more than 25 members), 236 unorganized groups (fewer than 25 members), 66 ordained ministers, 32,530 baptized members, and 40,458 inclusive members in 2010. Currently, there are 250 organized churches with several unorganized churches as well as preaching points around the country: <https://www.cmalliance.org/field/colombia>

**The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board** began work in Colombia in 1941, which led to the formal founding of the **Baptist Convention of Colombia / Convención Bautista de Colombia (CBC)** in 1970. However, in 1998, the name **Baptist Denomination of Colombia / Denominación Bautista de Colombia (DBC)**, with headquarters in Bogotá, was officially registered with the government. The table above gave the following statistics for the CBC: 2,792 members in 1960; 4,021 in 1966; 10,000 in 1978; and 13,200 in the year 2000. By 2000 the DBC was the eighth-largest Protestant denomination in Colombia.

The nondenominational **Gospel Missionary Union (GMU)** - both from the USA and Canada, known in Colombia as “La Unión Misionera,” began work in 1908 in the seaport of Buenaventura and the city of Cali in the western Valle del Cauca department. On 31 March 1975, the *Evangelical Union of South America (EUSA)* merged with the Gospel Missionary Union. At the time of merger with GMU, EUSA had missionaries serving in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Bolivia. Gospel Missionary Union became known as Avant Ministries in 2003. By 1960, the GMU reported 764 church members; in 1966 there were 1,096 members; by 1978, 2,706 members were reported; and by 2000 there were 12,500 members. In 2000, the GMU-affiliated churches were the ninth-largest Protestant denomination in Colombia.

The **Oriental Missionary Society** (now, OMS International) established the **Association of Inter-American Evangelical Churches / Asociación de Iglesias Interamericanas de Colombia (ASODIEICO)**, in 1943, in Medellín and Antioquía. In 1973, representatives of **Inter-American Missionary Society (IAMS)** – Wallace Erickson, Eduardo Kamball, Roberto Hess and Vernon Young – started Compassion International’s work in Colombia. They opened seven Child Development Centers in Magangué Municipality, department of Bolívar. Statistically, the IAMS reported 425 members in 1960; 849 in 1966; 4,000 in 1978; and 11,800 in the year 2000. In 2000, the IAMS-affiliated churches, now known as *Iglesia Interamericana de Colombia*

(IGLEICO), was the 10<sup>th</sup> largest Protestant denomination in Colombia. In May 2020, more than 650 local churches (with 32,500 members?) were affiliated with IGLEICO, according to this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BxX5dYtc8M>

**The New Tribes Mission** (NTM, Fundamentalist, nondenominational; now Ethnos360) began work in Colombia in 1944 among Indigenous tribal peoples. Statistically, the NTM-related churches counted only 300 members in 1960, 2,900 in 1966, 7,100 in 1978, and 11,800 in the year 2000. In 2000, the NTM-affiliated churches were the 11<sup>th</sup> largest Protestant association of churches in Colombia. Resource: <https://ethnos360.org/about/our-heritage>

**Bethesda Missionary Center** (BMC, independent Pentecostal) was founded in 1975 by the Rev. Enrique Gómez Montealegre in Bogotá. Statistically, the BMC-affiliated churches reported only 500 members in 1978 and 11,000 in the year 2000. In 2000, the BMC-affiliated churches were the 12<sup>th</sup> largest Protestant association of churches in Colombia. Currently, the BMC website reports that it has 197 affiliated churches in Colombia; if the average congregational size is 100 members per church, then there could be 19,700 members nationally: <https://www.cmb.org.co/iglesias>

**Note:** All other Protestant denominations and church associations in Colombia had fewer than 10,000 members each in the year 2000, but some of these may have had more than 10,000 members in 2010.

**In 2010, the Protestant population of Colombia was estimated at 5.7 million, or 12.5 percent of the nation’s total population, according to the *Operation World 2010 Database*.** At that time, the Protestant community included more than 1.4 million baptized church members, about 150 denominations and 18,200 congregations (churches and missions), along with about 400 foreign missionaries (mostly from the USA.). The difference between the aggregate of “baptized church members” (over 14 years of age) and the total Protestant population nationally (adherents) accounts for those considered “nominal” in their religious commitment and attended church services infrequently or not at all.

**The *Operation World 2010 Database* reported the following statistics for Colombia:**

DENOMINATIONS - ASSOCIATIONS OF CHURCHES	MEMBERS	CONG.
Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día	295,000	1229
Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia	168,531	2107
<b>*Iglesias Caseras del Nuevo Testamento (independent churches)</b>	85,000	2833
Misión Carismática Internacional	58,333	40
Avivamiento Centro Mundial y Afiliados	46,000	6
Iglesia Internacional del Evangelio Cuadrangular	40,594	290
Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Caribe (LAM)	37,143	743
Alianza Cristiana y Misionera	31,544	471
Asociación de Iglesias Interamericanas de Colombia	30,000	222
Asambleas de Dios	29,363	294
Iglesia Cruzada Cristiana (a split from WEC in 1975)	27,000	225
Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Internacional (USA)	24,775	1032
Iglesias de la Cruzada Evangélica (founded by WEC in the 1930s)	21,000	175
Convención Bautista de Colombia	18,000	151

Misión Panamericana	12,000	120
Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, M.I.	11,000	110
Centro Misionero Bethesda	10,900	3
Asambleas de Hermanos (Plymouth Brethren)	10,750	72
Centro Carismático Mundial	10,000	5
Misión Evangélica Colombiana	9,000	30
<b># TOTALS ABOVE (20 denominations/assoc. of churches)</b>	<b>975,933</b>	<b>10,158</b>
<b># TOTALS OTHER GROUPS (126 denominations/associations of churches)</b>	<b>421,653</b>	<b>8,007</b>
<b>GRAND TOTALES (146 denominations/assoc. of churches)</b>	<b>1,397,586</b>	<b>18,165</b>

\**New Testament House Churches*: defined as a loose network of independent congregations, number over 2,000 groups with as many as 60,000 worshippers. These groups witness and minister to as many as 130,000 adherents. (Source: Mission Atlas Project, Latin America: Colombia, page 43: [http://www.worldmap.org/uploads/9/3/4/4/9344303/colombia\\_profile.pdf](http://www.worldmap.org/uploads/9/3/4/4/9344303/colombia_profile.pdf)).

**NOTE #1:** We could not find any other references to *New Testament House Churches* on the Internet or in any other published source for Colombia.

**NOTE #2:** The accuracy of these statistics is subject to verification from denominational sources in Colombia.

**\*\*Although not much is known about specific denominational growth (due to a lack of statistics and historical data) during the period 2000-2020, below are some indications of what has happened (ranked in order of verified membership size for the dates indicated).**

In 2019, the **United Pentecostal Church of Colombia (IPUC)** reported 4,396 congregations (churches and missions), with an estimated **329,700 members** (an average of 75 members per congregation), distributed among the IPUC's 35 districts of Colombia. However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* estimated only 2,107 congregations with 168,531 members, which was a serious undercount. Source: <https://ipuc.org.co/archivos/6117>

The North and South Colombian Union Conferences of the **Seventh-Day Adventist Church (SDA)** reported the following combined statistics: 1,080 churches with 251,290 members at year-end 2007 (an average of 233 members per church), up from 648 churches and 140,121 members in 1997 (an average of 216 members per church). **In June 2018 (2017 statistics)**, this denomination reported **269,154 members** in 1,699 churches (an average of 158 members per church). However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that the SDA-Colombia had 295,000 members in 1,229 congregations, which is an erroneous report (a higher membership total and a lower congregational total) based on a comparison with the SDA's official statistical website at: [http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view\\_Summary.asp?FieldID=D\\_IAD](http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=D_IAD)

The **International Charismatic Movement (MCI)** was founded in 1983 in Bogotá. By 2009, it had expanded its ministry throughout the country and established more than 200 local churches, with an estimated **membership of about 210,000** and tens of thousands more in weekly home bible studies (G12 strategy). However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that the MCI had only 58,333 members in 40 congregations, which is an erroneous report based on a comparison with the ICC's official website: <https://mci12.com/nuestra-iglesia/>

In 2008, the **Council of the Assemblies of God of Colombia** (CAGC) reported 766 congregations (churches and missions) with about 38,300 church members (an average of 50 members per church), compared to 490 congregations and 12,250 members in 1995 (an average of 25 members per church). In 2008, the work was organized in three districts nationwide (245 municipalities) with the participation of 1,200 ordained and lay pastors (with ministerial credentials). Currently (May 2020), the CAGC reports 1,204 churches, 1,356 ministers and about **90,300 church members** (an average of 75 members per church), with an estimated 356,398 adherents. However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that the CAGC only had 29,363 members in 294 congregations, which is an erroneous report based on a comparison with the CAGC's official website at: <https://www.adcolombia.org/>

**The Inter-American Church of Colombia** / *Iglesia Interamericana de Colombia* reported 650 local churches with about **87,800 members** in May 2020, whereas the *Operation World 2010 Database* estimated that there were 222 churches with about 30,000 members in 2010: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BxX5dYtc8M>

<i>Operation World 2010 Database</i>	Members	Churches
Avivamiento Centro Mundial y Afiliados	46,000	6

**The Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean** / *Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas del Caribe* (AIEC). Statistically, this denomination grew from 649 members in 1960, to 1,200 in 1966, to 2,750 in 1978, and to 4,530 in the year 2000. Its current membership is not reported on its website: <https://www.iglesiasaiec.org/convencion-de-pastores-aiec-2019/> However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that this denomination had an estimated membership of 37,143 and 743 congregations in 2010 (unverified data).

The **Christian Crusade Churches** / *Iglesia Cruzada Cristiana* (ICC) reported 429 organized churches and missions with about **32,175 members** (75 members per congregation). However, the *Operation World 2010 Database* reported that the ICC had 27,000 members in 225 congregations, which is an erroneous report based on a comparison with the ICC's official website at: <http://iglesiacruzadacristianageneral.org/iglesias-en-colombia.html>

**Note:** the website of WEC International reports that more than 250 churches with over 60,000 adherents have been established by WEC in Colombia. This report seems to include the work currently being done by WEC in Colombia, along with the work of two denominations that are now independent of WEC: **Colombian Evangelical Crusade Church** / *Iglesia Cruzada Evangélica Colombiana* (founded in 1930s) and **Christian Crusade Churches** / *Iglesia Cruzada Cristiana* (Pentecostal, founded in 1975): <https://www.weccamps.org/wec>

**Christian & Missionary Alliance** / *Alianza Cristiana y Misionera* (current report on website): 300 churches and **60,000 members**, compared to the *Operation World 2010 Database* estimate of 471 churches with 31,544 members (a serious undercount): <https://laalianzacrystiana.co/>

**Bethesda Missionary Center** (BMC, independent Pentecostal). Currently, the BMC website reports that it has 197 affiliated churches in Colombia; if the average congregational size is 100

members per church, then there would be 19,700 members nationally:  
<https://www.cmb.org.co/iglesias>

**Colombian Baptist Denomination / Denominación Bautista Colombiana** (2016): 245 churches with 18,464 members: <https://www.bwanet.org/statistics>

**Presbyterian Church of Colombia / Iglesia Presbiteriana de Colombia** currently has a membership of approximately 12,000 constituents in 55 congregations and service institutions in various cities and towns in the country: <https://www.ipcol.org/ipc/resena-historica>

**The Pentecostal Church of God, International Movement / Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, Movimiento Internacional** reported 282 members in 1966, about 1,000 in 1978, and 2,730 in the year 2000. If the 96 congregations currently listed on its website have an average of 100 members per congregation, the total membership in 2019 could have reached 9,600. The *Operational World 2010 Database* reported 11,000 members in 110 congregations for this denomination (see table below). Source: <https://iddpmicolombiarcs.wixsite.com/idiospen/quienes-somos>

<i>Operation World 2010 Database</i>	Members	Churches
Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Internacional (USA)	24,775	1032
Asambleas de Hermanos (Plymouth Brethren)	10,750	72
Centro Carismático Mundial	10,000	5
Misión Evangélica Colombiana	9,000	30

**Note 1:** Some of the denominations listed above from the *Operation World 2010 Database* have not yet been updated due to a lack of information from the respective websites or from published sources.

**Note 2:** Some denominations (such as the Assemblies of God) may be doubling or tripling their membership every decade, whereas other denominations may have grown more slowly since 2000. Much of the membership growth can be attributed to each denomination's own efforts at evangelizing their communities and planting new churches by its national leadership. Historically, the Pentecostal denominations have grown more rapidly in Colombia since the 1960s than most non-Pentecostal groups.

**However, not all Evangelicals – those born into Evangelical families or converted later in life – have remained within the Evangelical fold for a variety of reasons;** some decide to join another religious group (a marginal Christian group or non-Christian religion) or to become unaffiliated with any religious groups (some become agnostics, atheists or “nones”). Also, there is evidence that some former Evangelicals are now members of the Roman Catholic Church, Western Catholic-derived groups, Anglican-derived groups or Eastern Orthodox-related groups. Several sociological studies have been done on the subject of religious pluralism in Colombian society, which explores the issue of desertion among Catholics and Protestants and the increase in the unaffiliated population due to the process of secularization, such as:

Dr. Carlos Arboleda Mora, Profesor de la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana de Medellín: “Aspectos Históricos del Pluralismo Religioso en Colombia,” (2000), available at:  
[http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/sam/col/aspectos\\_historicos\\_del\\_pluralismo.pdf](http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/sam/col/aspectos_historicos_del_pluralismo.pdf)

Dr. Carlos Arboleda Mora, *Estudios sobre Religión en Colombia* (2000-2016), Editorial Académica Española, 2017:

[https://www.academia.edu/30994613/Estudios\\_sobre\\_religi%C3%B3n\\_en\\_Colombia.\\_2000-2016\\_.pdf?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/30994613/Estudios_sobre_religi%C3%B3n_en_Colombia._2000-2016_.pdf?auto=download)

Dr. William Mauricio Beltrán Cely, Profesor de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá: “Pluralisation religieuse et changement social en Colombie”, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris 3, enero de 2012: <http://www.scielo.org.co/pdf/thxa/v63n175/v63n175a03.pdf>

### **Pluralization of religion and social change in Colombia**

*Colombian society is currently undergoing a process of secularization, that is to say, a process in which the social spheres are different and autonomous. Based on an extensive empirical research, this paper presents such a process, which has gone hand-in-hand with cultural transformations. Among these last ones, we can highlight the reconstruction of religious affiliations. Secularization and pluralization have had paradoxical effects due to the fact that they have not provoked the decline of religion; on the contrary, they have rekindled religious practices, like competition between Catholic Church and the new religious movements regarding the loyalty and commitment of the faithful.*

**Overall, Protestant church growth in Colombia has been impacted by external historical circumstances that had a strong influence on the Catholic public’s perception of Evangelicals as well as on their predisposition to visit and participate in Evangelical activities, such as local worship services or public evangelistic crusades.** After centuries of hostility toward Protestants by Catholic clerics who instigated their parishioners to oppose Protestant efforts at all levels of Colombian society, there was a radical shift in the official attitude of the Catholic hierarchy toward Protestants worldwide, beginning in the 1960s.

First, the impact of the spirit and declarations of the *Second Vatican Council* (1962-1967) greatly affected relationships between Catholics and Protestants in a positive manner. Pope John XXII asked Catholics to obtain a copy of the Bible and read it, rather than shunning it as they had done for centuries under instructions from the clergy. Suddenly, as a result of this change of policy, the sale and distribution of the Scriptures (Bibles, New Testaments and portions) by the American Bible Society and bookstores increased dramatically in Colombia. Secondly, the Second Vatican Council declared that Protestants were no longer to be considered “heretics” rather they were to be regarded as “separated brethren,” which opened the door for the development of new fraternal relations between millions of Catholics and Evangelicals. Thirdly, the Second Vatican Council declared that priests were to give their homilies in the vernacular languages and no longer in Latin, which immediately allowed the Catholic public to acquire a greater familiarity and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures as well as of Catholic doctrine. And, fourthly, the *Charismatic Renewal Movement* brought many Catholics and Protestants closer together in a new spirit of ecumenical unity and solidarity as a result of their participation in small groups for prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, and sharing their needs and blessings – mostly in the context of the “gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

**In terms of interdenominational and ecumenical relations** among Protestant denominations and service agencies since 1980, there have been two main tendencies: (1) most conservative evangelical leaders are supportive of the vision and mission statements of the **Latin American Confraternity of Evangelicals** (CONELA), whereas (2) the more liberal and ecumenical leaders and their respective denominations are affiliated with the **Latin American Council of Churches** (CLAI) and, directly or indirectly, with the World Council of Churches (WCC).

## **Evangelical Confederation of Colombia – CEDEC & CEDECOL**

CEDEC (*Confederación Evangélica de Colombia*) was founded in 1950 to be “The united voice of the Evangelical Christian Church in Colombia; in 1980, CEDEC had a membership of 53 denominations and service agencies. In 1989, CEDEC and ACECOL (*Asociación Evangélica de Colombia*, a Charismatic-oriented confederation of churches established in the late 1960s) merged to form CEDECOL (*Concilio de Iglesias Evangélicas de Colombia / Council of Evangelical Churches of Colombia*).

## **Protestant Seminaries and Universities in Colombia**

**Biblical Seminary of Colombia / Seminario Bíblico de Colombia** (now, *Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia*): <https://www.unisbc.edu.co/inicio/quienes-somos/historia>

In 1944, two Holiness missionary societies, the Inter-American Missionary Society (Oriental Missionary Society in the USA and Canada) and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission, founded a training center in the city of Medellín for pastors of the Evangelical churches in Colombia: the Biblical Seminary of Colombia (SBC – *Seminario Bíblico de Medellín*).

In 1950, in a time of violence and in the midst of religious persecution against Protestants, the SBC hosted the I National Congress of Pastors of the Evangelical Church in Colombia. Since then, the SBC has become the venue for the vast majority of the national meetings of the Evangelical community. This close relationship between the Biblical Seminary and the Evangelical Church was further cemented when in 1962 the Evangelical Confederation of Colombia (CEDEC) suggested that the SBC join forces with other evangelical seminaries in the country, to create the United Biblical Seminary of Colombia. After years of talks, in 1967, a board of directors was created for this initiative; and, in 1968, classes were begun in two other cities: Bogotá and Cali (in the latter place with the Emanuel Bible Institute of the Mennonite Brethren). In 1970, the Caribbean Division was opened, in Sincelejo, in collaboration with the Association of Evangelical Churches of the Caribbean.

The changes of the previous decade allowed the next two to be institutional growth and expansion at the level of infrastructure and academic programs. The physical plant was expanded with new residential units for students and teachers, a greater number of offices, classrooms, and a large building for the chapel and the library. The educational offering was expanded at two different levels from that offered previously: in 1984, the Evening Bible Institute (later the Ministerial Institute of Medellín) was started; and, in 1989, the Master's program in Sacred Theology and Bible was begun. Thus, two great needs of the Evangelical Church were answered: the formation of lay leaders and the preparation of teachers for bible institutes and evangelical seminaries in Colombia and Latin America.

The 1990s were a time of self-evaluation and projection. The faculty was expanded and diversified and the number of students increased. The objectives and educational philosophy of the institution were reviewed, the curriculum was renewed, and the initial steps were taken towards transforming the Biblical Seminary into an institution of higher education, within the framework of national legislation in this regard. It was generally recognized that, given the reality of the Evangelical Church and of society, it was not enough to offer educational degrees with ecclesial validity (the framework given by the 1991 Constitution), but university degrees with academic validity, endorsed by the Ministry of National Education.

By this time the SBC was already nationally recognized as reflected in the following quote: “Faced with the need to better prepare the ministers of the Church, several seminaries have been founded that offer studies at the university level. The best known is the Biblical Seminary of Colombia, which operates in Medellín. Many ordained ministers of almost all denominations operating in the national territory have received biblical theological preparation in this Seminary.” (Bucana, 1995: 203)

The SBC's search for approval as a higher education institution ended with obtaining legal recognition in 2000 as the **Biblical Seminary University Foundation of Colombia**, granted by the Ministry of National Education. With this government recognition, an historic change began in higher

education in Colombia: the first non-Catholic denominational university institution in the country had been recognized: the Biblical Seminary University Foundation of Colombia / *Fundación Universitaria Seminario Bíblico de Colombia* (FUSBC).

**Baptist Theological Seminary of Cali** / *Seminario Teológico Bautista de Cali* (now, *Fundación Universitaria Seminario Teológico Bautista Internacional*): <https://www.unibautista.edu.co>

The Baptist Theological Seminary (STB) was founded in 1952 in Santiago de Cali, Colombia, by the **Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board** as an international training center for Baptist pastors and future Latin American theologians. The first classes of the new seminary were held in the educational building of the First Baptist Church of Cali in 1952. Then, in 1953, after the first buildings were constructed on the new property on the outskirts of Cali, the new international seminary became a reality. Anderson states that “growth followed, and since that time, the International Seminary has maintained an average enrollment of about eighty students from about eight countries” (2005: 348). However, in more recent times, the STB has prepared far more Colombian students and pastors than those from other countries. In 2003, the “Unibautista Fundación Universitaria Seminario Teológico Bautista” obtained legal recognition from the Colombian government to offer academic degrees at the university level.

**Reformed University Corporation** / *Corporación Universitaria Reformada* (CUR)

Barranquilla, Atlántico, Colombia: <https://www.unireformada.edu.co/>

An Institution of Higher Education founded by the Presbyterian Church of Colombia, with legal status granted on 14 May 2002, by the Ministry of National Education. This institution offers 18 university degrees, including Theology, Psychology and Music.

**School of Bible and Theology** / *Escuela de Biblia y Teología*

Sponsored by the Presbyterian Church of Colombia

Barrio Palermo, Bogotá (instalaciones del Colegio Americano)

**The Reformed Theological Seminary** / *Seminario Teológico Reformado de Colombia* was founded in 1987 by the Rev. Kim Wui-Dong in Bogotá to train Korean pastors and missionaries for work in Colombia; classes are offered in Korean and Spanish: <https://www.strc.com.co/contactanos/>

**Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia** / *Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia*

Sponsored by the Mennonite Christian Church of Colombia

Bogotá, DC: <https://www.imcol.org/index.php/seminario>

**Assemblies of God Biblical Seminary of Colombia** / *Seminario Bíblico Asambleas de Dios de Colombia*

Sponsored by the Council of the Assemblies of God of Colombia:

<https://seminariobiblicoad.org/landing/index.html>

**NOTE:** Most of the Protestant denominations and independent church associations in Colombia have leadership training programs, including formal or informal Bible Institutes.

## Other Religions

In 2007, 4.5 percent (830,200 people) of the total population was affiliated with religious groups other than those already listed.

### Anglican-Derived Jurisdictions

The **Continuing Anglican movement**, also known as the **Anglican Continuum**, encompasses a number of Christian denominations, principally based in North America, with an Anglican identity and tradition but that are not part of the official international Anglican Communion (aka, Church of England), led by the Archbishop of Canterbury in London, England.

The churches and denominations that are part of the Continuing Anglican movement generally believe that traditional forms of Anglican faith and worship have been unacceptably revised or abandoned within some churches and provinces of the Anglican Communion but that they, the Continuing Anglicans, are preserving or "continuing" both Anglican lines of apostolic succession and historic Anglican belief and practice.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continuing\\_Anglican\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continuing_Anglican_movement)

Some of the denominations listed below may be part of this **Continuing Anglican movement**, whereas others may be more liberal or progressive. Rapid social change and the dissolution of British cultural hegemony over its former colonies fueled disputes regarding the role of women, the parameters of marriage and divorce, and the practice of contraception and abortion. More recently, disagreements regarding homosexuality have strained the unity of the Anglican Communion as well as its relationships with other Christian denominations.

#### INDEPENDENT ANGLICAN-DERIVED JURISDICTIONS:

Anglican Apostolic Universal Church in Colombia / *Iglesia Universal Apostólica Anglicana en Colombia*: [https://www.iglesiaanglicana.org/?page\\_id=51](https://www.iglesiaanglicana.org/?page_id=51) / [https://www.iglesiaanglicana.org/?page\\_id=32](https://www.iglesiaanglicana.org/?page_id=32)

Anglican Catholic Church, Missionary Diocese of New Granada / *Iglesia Católica Anglicana, Diócesis de la Nueva Granada*: <http://www.iglesiacatolicaanglicana.co/>

Anglican Catholic Missionary Church of Colombia / *Iglesia Misionera Católica Anglicana de Colombia*: <https://www.facebook.com/www.iglesiamisioneracatolicaanglicanadecolombia.co/>

Anglican Church in America - Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC) / *Iglesia Anglicana en América - Comunión Tradicional Anglicana*: <https://www.anglicanchurchinamerica.org/about-us>

Anglican Communion John Paul II Universal Apostolic Church / *Iglesia Universal Apostólica Juan Pablo II en Comunión Anglicana*: [http://diversidadhumanaysexual.blogspot.com/2012\\_07\\_22\\_archive.html](http://diversidadhumanaysexual.blogspot.com/2012_07_22_archive.html)

Anglican Episcopal Church of Traditional Rite, Jesus My Liberator / *Iglesia Episcopal de Rito Tradicional Jesús Mi Liberador – Iglesia Anglicana Mundial* (WAC – World Anglican Communion): <https://sinmordaza.com.co/carta-publica-de-la-asamblea-general-del-cabildo-interreligioso-de-colombia-a-varias-autoridades-del-estado-colombiano/>

Anglican Orthodox Church / *Iglesia Ortodoxa Anglicana* (IOA):  
[https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimiento\\_anglicano\\_de\\_Continuaci%C3%B3n](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimiento_anglicano_de_Continuaci%C3%B3n)

Anglican Priestly Church “Missionaries of The Cross” / *Iglesia Sacerdotal Anglicana "Misioneros de la Cruz"*: <https://www.dateas.com/en-us/explore/registro-publico-de-entidades-religiosas-de-colomb/iglesia-sacerdotal-anglicana-misioneros-de-la-cruz-4010>

Apostle Saint Paul Priestly Order of Spirituality & Anglican Rite / *Cofradía Sacerdotal San Pablo Apóstol, de Espiritualidad y Rito Anglicano*:  
<http://www.cofradiasacerdotalsanpabloapostol.org/Cofrades/>

Charismatic & Catholic Anglican Church in Colombia / *Iglesia Anglicana Católica y Carismática en Colombia*: <https://iglesiaanglicanacatolica.com/quienes-somos/>

Hands of God Episcopal Church Anglican Catholic / *Iglesia Episcopal Manos de Dios Anglicana Católica*: <https://www.facebook.com/iglesiaepiscopalmanosdedios/>

Holy Church Ecumenical Province of Colombia / *Santa Iglesia Ecueménica Provincial de Colombia*:  
<https://iepc-catolicos-anglicanos.webnode.es/album/fotogaleria/arzobispo-iglesia-ecumenica-jpg/>

San Charbel Anglican Rite Mission / *Misión San Charbel Rito Anglicano*:  
<https://www.facebook.com/sancharbelmisionanglicana>

Reformed Church of Anglican Confession / *Iglesia Reformada Confesante Anglicana*:  
<https://iglesiaanglicanadecolombia.jimdofree.com/ven-a-la-iglesia-anglicana/nuestro-obispo/>

The Old Anglo Catholic Church - The Latin-American Anglican Church / *Iglesia Anglicana Latino-Americana - Iglesia Antigua Anglo Católica*: <http://theanglican.net/>

Traditional Anglican Church by Action of the Holy Spirit in Colombia / *La Iglesia de Tradición Anglicana bajo la Acción del Espíritu Santo en Colombia*: <https://www.anglicanatradicional.org/>

Traditional Episcopal Church of Colombia / *Iglesia Episcopal Tradicional de Colombia*:  
<https://www.dateas.com/es/explore/registro-publico-de-entidades-religiosas-de-colomb/iglesia-episcopal-tradicional-de-colombia-1191>

**The various Eastern Orthodox jurisdictions** in Colombia have an estimated 8,000 adherents. During the 1930s, a wave of Middle Eastern immigrants (Maronite Christians) arrived in the **Peninsula of La Guajira** from Lebanon, Syria, Jordon and Palestine, countries formerly under the Ottoman Empire, and established themselves mostly in the municipality of Maicao, on the border with Venezuela. Other jurisdictions are known to exist in Colombia:

Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church (Western Rite, Saint Tikon)  
Eastern Rite Christian Church  
Greek Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople)  
Holy Orthodox Church in Colombia  
Old Apostolic Church in The Orthodox Faith in Colombia  
Orthodox Apostolic Catholic Church of Colombia

Orthodox Church in America  
Orthodox Church in Colombia, Patriarch of Serbia  
Russian Orthodox Church (Patriarch of Moscow) - Colombia  
Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch in Colombia  
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of The Divine Face, Patriarch of Kiev

**Marginal non-Protestant Christian** denominations include: the **Jehovah's Witnesses** (first arrived in 1895) reported 2,016 congregations with 138,068 members and 457,022 adherents in 2008; the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** (founded in 1966 and by 1971, twenty-seven congregations had been established in 10 cities) reported one temple and 265 congregations with 163,764 members in 2007; the Philadelphia Church of God; Universal Life- the Inner Religion; the Christadelphians; the Light of the World Church (from Mexico); Unity School of Christianity; Mita Congregation and Voice of the Chief Cornerstone (both from Puerto Rico); Israelites of the New Universal Covenant (from Bolivia and Peru); Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and the God is Love Pentecostal Church (from Brazil); and Growing in Grace Ministries International (Miami, Florida).

Another of these groups is the controversial **New Apostolic Church (NAC)** with international headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland (worldwide, in 2007, there were 408,960 members, 7,569 ministers and 1,419 congregations). This denomination separated from the *Catholic Apostolic Church* in Europe in 1863. The focus of the New Apostolic Church doctrine is the expectation of the imminent return of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The denomination is led by "apostles" who have been called to ministry by their prophets. As the highest spiritual authority of all New Apostolic District Churches on earth, the "chief apostle" (currently, Jean-Luc Schneider, since 2013, a Frenchman) directs the NAC as a whole in all spiritual matters. There are dozens of NAC congregations throughout Colombia, with its headquarters in Bogotá.

Colombia website: <http://www.ina-colombia.org/>

International Headquarters website: <http://www.nak.org/en/about-the-nac/>

## **Non-Christian religions**

The very diverse **Jewish community**, which numbered about 10,000 in the mid-1970s, had shrunk to around 5,600 by the mid-1990s due to the unstable economy and violence (kidnappings and murders) against Jews, which led to emigration to Israel, Central America, the USA and elsewhere. Currently, the Jewish population is estimated at about 4,200. During the early part of the 20th century, a large number of Sephardic immigrants came from Greece, Turkey, Syria and North Africa.

Before, during and after World War II, Jewish immigrants began arriving from Europe. The Jewish community in Colombia is composed of three main groups: the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim and the Germans. Although most Jews in Colombia are not observant and generally not active in Jewish religious life, there are nine official synagogues in the country: Bogotá has four, Cali two (*Unión Cultural Israelita and Centro Israelita de Beneficiencia*), Barranquilla two (*Sinagoga Shaare Sedek - Comunidad Hebrea Sefaradita and Casa Lubavitch*) and Medellín one (*Casa Lubavitch*). The majority of the Jews reside in Bogotá, where the *Centro Comunitario Israelita* (founded in 1928) is located; other Jewish organizations in Bogotá include Congregation Adath Israel, Synagogue Israelita Montefiore, the Sephardic Hebrew Community (reorganized in

1943, mostly of Syrian, Turkish and Moroccan origin), the Colombo Hebrew School, and the Friends of Lubavitch.

Since World War II, a much more diverse religious situation has developed, with the arrival of as many as 50,000 Muslims from the Middle East. **Islam** is represented by the Islamic Center of Santafé de Bogotá, the Islamic Center of Maicao, the Islamic Center of Isla San Andrés, the Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education, and Subud. The **Baha’i Faith** spread rapidly during the 1970s, partially due to a mass movement into the Baha’is among the Guajiros.

Within the small **Chinese** community of Colombia there are those who practice traditional Chinese religions, which include ancient folk religion (animism), Ancestor Worship, Confucianism, Daoism (or Taoism), and Chinese New Religions (such as Falun Gong and Xiantianism), as well as some schools of Buddhism. A small Taoist commune exists in a mountainous region of Santander Department. **Buddhist** organizations in the country include: the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition; Yamantaka Center (FPMT); the Buddhist Center of Bogotá; and the Osho Rajneesh Movement. **Japanese religions** include the Aikido Association of Colombia, Sukyo Mahikari, and Tenrikyo.

**Hindu and Sant Mat organizations include:** the Rosa Yoga Brahm Center; the World Spiritual University of Raja Yoga Meditation; the Brahma Kumaris Association; the Sukyo Mahikari Religious Congregation of Colombia; the Krishnamurti Foundation; the Sawan Kirpal Ruhani Science of Spirituality; the Vaisnava Mission; the Sir Sathya Sai Baba International Organization; Satyananda Ashrams; Followers of Maitreya; the Vishwa Nirmala Dharma Religion; Sri Chaitanya Saraswat Mat (Sant Mat); Eckankar (Sant Mat); Supreme Master Ching Hai Meditation Association (Sant Mat); the Divine Light Mission (now, Elan Vital); Transcendental Meditation (known as TM); and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The Vrindavan Institute for Vaisnava Culture and Studies (founded by Srila B.A. Paramadvaiti Maharaj) has several centers in Colombia: Bogotá (2), Barranquilla, Bucaramanga (2), Cali (2), Cartagena, Cúcuta, the Varsana Ecological Gardens in Granada-Cundinamarca (the principle temple of VRINDA, led by Swami B.V. Bharati), Ibagué, Manizales, Medellín (2), Neiva, Pasto, the Gambhira Mandir in Santa Marta, the Temple of Prama Vardhana in Pereira (founded by Srila Guru Maharaj), Popayán, Ubaté and Villavicencio.

**The Ancient Wisdom tradition** is represented in Colombia by the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC), Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua (FRA), Builders of the Adytum, the Grand Universal Fraternity-Mission of Aquarius (founded in Venezuela), the Universal Christian Gnostic Movement of Colombia, the Universal Christian Gnostic Church, the Wisdom Center of Gnostic Studies, the Samael Aun Weor Universal Christian Gnostic Church, the New Acropolis Cultural Center, and the Universal White Fraternity.

Some of these groups trace their origin to the teachings of “**Samael Aun Weor,**” born Víctor Manuel Gómez Rodríguez (1917-1977), a spiritual teacher and author of over sixty books of esoteric spirituality. He adopted the name “Samael Aun Weor” in 1954; the meaning of “Aun Weor” in Hebrew is "Light and Strength," according to Gómez Rodríguez; he considered himself “A messenger or avatar, in the most complete sense of the word, is a courier, a man who delivers a message.” Gómez Rodríguez was a Colombian who officially founded the “Universal Christian Gnostic” movement in Mexico after settling there in 1956.

On October 27, 1954, *Aun Weor* received what is referred to as the "Initiation of Tiphereth", which, according to his doctrine, is the beginning of the incarnation of the Logos or "Glorian" within the soul. He states that in his case the name of his Glorian has always been called "Samael" through the ages. From then on, he would sign his name Samael Aun Weor. Thus, he states that this union of Samael (the Logos) with Aun Weor (the human soul) is the Maitreya Buddha Kalki Avatar of the New Age of Aquarius. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samael\\_Aun\\_Weor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samael_Aun_Weor)

**Freemasonry in Colombia. What is Freemasonry?** “Essentially, it is a philosophic, philanthropic, mystical, esoteric and progressive institution,” according to its leaders. It allows into its membership persons of all religious creeds, without distinction, as long as they are tolerant and respectful of the opinions expressed by others; this means that members cannot be fanatical, egotistical or superstitious. An essential requirement is to believe in the existence of a Supreme Being who is called “The Great Architect of the Universe”—Masons are monotheists.

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09771a.htm>

In France, **Freemasonry** had a distinct political character and had a strong influence of the development of “democratic thought” as a foundation for the French Revolution and, later, for the Italian and American revolutions. Its political perspective in Europe and Latin America challenged the Roman Catholic Church, which led to the condemnation of Freemasonry in the papal bulls of 1738 and 1751; in 1917, the Roman Catholic Church declared that “whatever Catholic who becomes affiliated with a Masonic lodge will be automatically excommunicated.” Since the 1730s, there were Masonic lodges in the British colonies of North America and many revolutionary leaders—such as Gen. George Washington and the majority of his high command and the politicians Thomas Jefferson and John Hancock, among others—were Masons; also, in Latin America, the revolutionary leaders José de San Martín and Simón Bolívar, among others, in the XIX century were Masons. Today, Freemasonry plays an important role in the political and economic life of many leaders and nations, especially in the USA and Latin America. Although the Masons say that their movement is secular and not religious, its heritage as a secret society based on Gnostic and occult wisdom means that these societies are quasi-religious with a worldview that requires members to make a very serious commitment and an oath of loyalty to the brotherhood (men only): <http://www.corazones.org/apologetica/grupos/masoneria.htm>

Although there were many Freemasons in Colombia during the Independence movement and, later, in the various Liberal governments and especially among educators. Each Grand Lodge has numerous affiliated Lodges. Grand Lodges and Grand Orients are independent and sovereign bodies that govern Freemasonry in a given country, state, or geographical area (termed a *jurisdiction*). There is no single overarching governing body that presides over worldwide Freemasonry; connections between different jurisdictions depend solely on mutual recognition.

The historical process of Colombian Freemasonry begins when the territory of *Gran Colombia* (1819 to 1830, which encompassed much of northern South America and part of southern Central America) was dissolved in 1830. The Masonic Lodges, which had been under the obedience of the Grand Oriente de Caracas, resolved to found a Supreme Council of Great Inspectors General of the 33rd Degree, which was established in Cartagena on 18 June 1833 under the name “Consejo Supremo Neo Granadino,” with a patent letter that was granted by the Grand Oriente of France. In 1833, the “Consejo Supremo Neo Granadino” of Grade 33 granted a patent letter to “Logia Hospitalidad Granadina N° 1” and later had under its authority the Masonic Lodges in Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, the Caribbean Antilles, and Peru. The first records of Masonic lodge activity in the city of Santa Marta, Colombia, date to 1833 with the founding of Lodge “Filantropía Granadina.” Then, in 1840, there is the registry of the Lodge

"Unión Fraternal" and, in 1864, the Lodge "Estrella del Atlántico." The "Logia Beneficencia" was founded in Cartagena in 1824 (Carnicelli, 1975).

By 1864, the following Masonic Lodges existed in obediece to the Supremo Consejo Neo Granadino del Grado 33 of Cartagena: Hospitalidad Granadina N° 1 de Cartagena; Unión N° 9 de Cartagena; Fraternidad Bogotana N° 16 de Bogotá; Filantropía N° 4 de Riohacha; Luz del Tolima N°17 de Ambalema; Unión Fraternidad N° 20 de México; Luz del Carmen N° 21 de El Carmen de Bolívar; Estrella del Atlántico N° 23 de Santa Marta; El Siglo XIX N° 24 de Barranquilla; Manzanilla N° 25 de Colón, Panamá; Caridad N° 26 de San José, Costa Rica; Unión Momposina de Santa Cruz de Mompox, Colombia.

Colombian Freemasonry was composed, at that time, by very few Lodges, governed under dependency relations by the "Supremo Consejo Neo Granadino del Grado 33" of Cartagena. In Bogotá, there was also another Grade 33 body, called the *Colombian Supreme Central Council*, which brought together Lodges from the interior of the country, also under its dependency, whose members were considered irregular by the Neo-Granadino Supreme Council.

Adapted from: <http://granlogianacionaldecolombia.com/la-masoneria/historia-en-colombia/>

Below is a table about the formal establishment of the existing Masonic Grand Lodges in Colombia.

Geographical Area	Grand Lodge Name	Founded	# Lodges
Barranquilla	Muy Respetable Gran Logia Nacional de Colombia-Barranquilla (National Grand Lodge of Colombia): <a href="http://granlogianacionaldecolombia.com/">http://granlogianacionaldecolombia.com/</a>	1918	10
Cartagena	Serenisima Gran Logia Nacional de Colombia-Cartagena de Indias (National Grand Lodge of Colombia, Cartagena): <a href="https://serenisimagranlogiacartagena.com/">https://serenisimagranlogiacartagena.com/</a>	1920	19
Bogotá	Gran Logia de Colombia-Bogotá, D.C. (Grand Lodge of Colombia-Bogotá): <a href="https://gldecolombia.org/">https://gldecolombia.org/</a>	1922	48
Occidental	Gran Logia Occidental de Colombia-Cali (Grand Lodge of Western Colombia-Cali): <a href="https://glodc.com/">https://glodc.com/</a>	1935	22
Oriental	Gran Logia Oriental de Colombia "Francisco de Paula Santander" (Grand Lodge of Eastern Colombia, "Francisco de Paula Santander" based in Cúcuta): <a href="https://www.granlogiaorientaldecolombia.com/">https://www.granlogiaorientaldecolombia.com/</a>	1945	5
Santander	Gran Logia de los Andes-Bucaramanga (Grand Lodge of the Andes-Bucaramanga): <a href="https://granlogiadelosandes.com/">https://granlogiadelosandes.com/</a>	1972	5

Sources: LaBounty, Lars, ed. *2012 List of Lodges*. Springfield, Illinois: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Company, 2012; also see: Carnicelli, Américo (1975). *Historia de la masonería colombiana, 1833-1940*, Bogotá, Artes Gráficas; and information available at: <https://serenisimagranlogiacartagena.com/historia-de-la-masoneria-en-cartagena-de-indias/> / <http://granlogianacionaldecolombia.com/glnc/orientes-en-colombia/>

The **Neo-Pagan tradition** is present in Colombia in various Wiccan groups that have been formed since the 1970s. **Wicca** is a school of magic founded in England by *Gerald Gardner* (1884-1964) that constitutes an amalgamation of rituals and practices said to be from ancient non-Christian societies in Europe, mixed with Gnostic, Masonic and Rosicrucian elements. Mr. Larrsen Heidindómr, a priest of the Wicca community, is President Pro-Témpore (2020-2021) of the General Assembly of the Inter-Faith Council of Colombia:

<http://cabildointerreligiosodecolombia.mex.tl/inicio.html> Also, see: <http://wiccacolombia.com/> / <https://wiccastore.co/> / <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-16407570>

**The Satanist Family** is present in Colombia, in groups such as *Los Lobos en Contra de Cristo* (The Wolves against Christ) and *Los Cabras* (The Goats), according to sociology professor Carlos Arboleda Mora in Medellín. In April 1998, the Administrative Department of Security (DAS, a police intelligence unit) reported the existence of Satanist sects in eight of Colombia's departments and some of their alleged activities: sadomasochism, profanation of cemeteries and Catholic churches, animal sacrifices, suicide by poison, and the attempted assassination of several Catholic priests using poison.

Resources: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-4953334/> / <http://newlcc.tripod.com/> / <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-820801/> / <http://www.prolades.com/cra/regions/sam/col/medellin-directorio.pdf>

The **Psychic-Spiritualist-New Age-UFO traditions** are represented by: the Astrologers Association; the Colombian Spiritist Confederation; the Theosophical Society; the Anthroposophical Society; the Ancient Church in Colombia; the Basilio Scientific School; the Center of Prayer, Growth and Spiritism; the Light of Your Destiny Esoteric Center; and the CIMA Movement of Spiritist Culture (*Movimiento de Cultura Espírita CIMA*), which was founded in 1958 by David Grossvater (1911-1974) as “Centro de Investigaciones Metapsíquicas y Afines” (CIMA) in the city of Maracay, State of Aragua, Venezuela; it is a member of the *Confederación Espírita Panamericana-CEPA*, founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1946. Other groups include the Spiritual Magnetic School of the Universal Commune; the Ascended Masters; the Raelian Movement; the Rama Mission of Sixto Paz Wells; the Age of Aquarius Movement; the Church of Scientology-Dianetics; the Unification Church (Rev. Sun Myung Moon), and the Silvan Method. Also, the Hermetic Philosophical Institute (founded in Santiago, Chile, in 1970 by Darío Salas Sommer, a.k.a. “John Baines”) established a branch in Bogotá in 1996.

**Traditional Amerindian religions** have survived in Colombia, especially in the more remote areas of the country. Many members of the Indigenous communities practice various forms of their traditional animistic systems, while others practice “popular Catholicism” (syncretistic) that blends Catholic and pre-Colombian beliefs, especially in the central highlands (for example, the Quechuas), whereas the tribal peoples in the remote tropical rainforests continue to practice traditional animistic belief systems. Also, the cult of Maria Lionza (a nature goddess of Amerindian and Afro-Venezuelan origin), which is similar to Santería, is practiced by some Venezuelan immigrants and Colombians.

**Popular Catholic religiosity** (syncretistic) is practiced by a majority of the Hispanic white and *mestizo* population. Among practitioners of Amerindian religions (animist) and “popular Catholic religiosity” there are “specialists” who practice witchcraft (*brujería*), shamanism (*chamanismo*) and folk healing (*curanderismo*). *Mestizo* folk healers and others have discovered

the ritual use of hallucinogenic substances that some practitioners of traditional animistic religions have utilized for centuries in the Amazonian lowlands.

## **Ecumenical-Interfaith Groups**

### **THE INTER-FAITH COUNCIL OF COLOMBIA / *Cabildo Interreligioso de Colombia***

The national Inter-Faith Council (founded about 2014) stated that, in compliance with the duties set forth in Article 95 of the National Political Constitution of the Republic of Colombia, it pledges to be faithful to its statutory commitment to defend religious, conscientious and religious liberties in the country and fight against all forms of religious discrimination.

Official website: <http://cabildointerreligiosodecolombia.mex.tl/inicio.html>

Members of the Council are:

Rabbi Dr. RICHARD GAMBOA BEN-ELEAZAR. Secretario General del Cabildo Interreligioso de Colombia.

LARRSEN HEIDINDÓMR. Presidente Pro-Témpore (e) 2020-2021 de la Asamblea General del Cabildo Interreligioso de Colombia. Sacerdote de la Comunidad Wicca en Colombia.

Rev. JUAN MANUEL CASTRO CORTÉS. Delegado Departamental para el Valle del Cauca. Superior General de la Misión Anglicana San Charbel.

Rev. SAYURIS PATRICIA DE LA CRUZ CASTRO. Delegada Departamental para el Atlántico. Presbítera comisionada de la Iglesia Episcopal de Rito Tradicional Jesús Mi Liberador para el Cabildo Interreligioso de Colombia.

Rev. ROY CONTRERAS. Delegado Departamental para Cundinamarca y el Distrito Capital de Bogotá. Prior de la Cofradía Sacerdotal San Pablo Apóstol, de Espiritualidad y Rito Anglicano.

Magíster HÉCTOR CADENA. Académico e Investigador Musulmán.

Arzobispo Dr. SPENCER GARNICA LEVER. Arzobispo de la Iglesia Episcopal de Rito Tradicional Jesús Mi Liberador – Iglesia Anglicana Mundial (WAC – World Anglican Communion)

Monseñor EDWIN LEONARDO AVENDAÑO GUEVARA. Obispo Presidente de la Fraternidad Apostólica de Cristo Sacerdote.

Licenciada MÓNICA CANO. Presidenta de la Asociación de Familias para la Paz Colombia – AFPC.

Monseñor MILLER GARCÍA. Arzobispo Primado de la Iglesia Católica Ecueménica de Cristo Colombiana.

Monseñor GUSTAVO ADOLFO NAZARI ESCOBAR. Arzobispo Primado de la Iglesia Cristiana del Buen Pastor, adscrita a la Comunión Ecueménica Mundial. Director Académico de la Asociación de Capellanes de Paz y Derechos Humanos.

Monseñor EDGAR BURBANO. Obispo Presidente de la Iglesia Misionera Católica Anglicana de Colombia.

The INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF COLOMBIA, as the voice of the conscience of the Colombian People, ratifies before the public opinion its commitment to peace based on social justice, human dignity, and ethical and moral rectitude.

SOURCE: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/310579270/Carta-Abierta-del-Cabildo-Interreligioso-a-la-Conferencia-Episcopal-de-Colombia>

## **Those with no religious affiliation or not specified**

According to a 2017 survey by Latinobarómetro, about 11 percent of the population were atheist or agnostic, or they did not respond to the question about their religious affiliation (“nones”).

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