

LATIN AMERICAN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM -
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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN COLOMBIA**

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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).

In 2008, Colombia had an area of 439,735 square miles (land and water) and a population of 44.9 million, making it the third-most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico; 74 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 country's capital, Santafé de Bogotá (founded in 1538), 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 2.4 million. The Medellín Metropolitan Area, located in the fertile Aburrá Valley (where most of the nation's premiere coffee is produced), contains more than 3.2 million people. 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; and 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 (1.8 million) and Cartagena (1.2 million). 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. 324,200), 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 2.1 million in 2005 and was the nation's third-largest city.

According to the CIA World Factbook, the majority of the population (58 percent) is *mestizo* (mixed European and Amerindian ancestry); 20 percent is of white European ancestry (predominantly Spanish, along with some Italian, Portuguese and German ancestry); 14 percent is *mulatto* (mixed European and black African ancestry); four percent is Afro-Colombian (black African ancestry only); three percent is *zambo* (mixed Amerindian and black African ancestry); and one percent is Native Amerindian.

Black Africans were brought as slaves during the Spanish colonial era, mostly to the coastal lowlands to work on plantations. Large Afro-Colombian communities are found today on the Caribbean Coast (Department of Bolívar) and Pacific Coast (Departments of Chocó, Valle del Cauca and Cauca).

Today, there are an estimated 450,000 Amerindian peoples, representing more than 80 ethnolinguistic groups, in Colombia. Most inhabit the upper extremities of the Amazon River basin in the eastern regions that border Brazil. According to Wycliffe Bible Translator's *Ethnologue* (2009), the largest Indigenous groups are: the Paéz (an estimated 138,500 in the Central Andean Range near Popayán, Department del Cauca), Wayuu (135,000 in the Guajira Peninsula), Emberá (about 71,000 in the departments of Chocó, Risaralda, Caldas, Antioquía and Valle), Guambiano (23,500 in the Central Andean Range near Popayán, Cauca), Guahibo (23,000 in the savanna regions of Casanare, eastern Meta, Vichada, Guaviare and Guainia), Awa (20,000 in the Pacific slopes of the Andes, from the Ecuadoran border north) and Kogi (about 11,000 in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta). Most of the language groups of less than 10,000 people live in isolated areas of the eastern lowlands.

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 19th and early 20th 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 the 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 large 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.

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 20th 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 in 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 20th 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 Uribe's "democratic security" strategy, 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.

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 and Justice (MOIJ) 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 MOIJ 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 MOIJ, 1,775 applications failed to meet constitutionally established requirements and thus were not approved. Although the MOIJ has statutory authority over recognizing religious entities, there is no government agency to monitor or enforce laws governing religious freedom.

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) argues that approximately 15 percent of the population is Protestant, while the Colombian Catholic Bishops' Conference estimates that 90 percent of the population is Catholic.

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 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.

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 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 17th 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 16th century. After 1590, the Spanish Crown started to grant titles of landownership 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-16th 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 17th century had replaced Amerindians in the mines. The mining industry continued to depend on

black slave labor into the 18th century. Despite the decline of the mining industry, African slavery remained the key form of labor. However, from the second half of the 17th century through the 18th 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 18th 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 17th 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 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 19th 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 19th 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 19th 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 21st 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 (2002-2006), with 62 percent of the vote. Uribe (current 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. He is now the 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.

The Roman Catholic Church

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) en Nueva Granada. The Diocese of Santa Marta became a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Santafé en 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 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 16th and 17th 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 he 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 17th 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 18th century, the Church authorities ran into trouble with leaders and sympathizers of the Independence movement in the early 19th 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. 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 persons 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; Medellín, with two suffragans: Antioquia and Manizales; and Popayan, with two suffragans: Garzón and Pasto. There were also two vicariates Apostolic: Casanare and Guajira; 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 19th 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 20th 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 tradition 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 pastor 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 Garcia-Herrerros** (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 Antioquia.

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 county.

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-16th 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 contained 13 archdioceses and 75 dioceses with 3,831 parishes that were served by 5,661 diocesan and 2,259 religious priests (total of 7,920), who were assisted by 278 permanent deacons, 4,163 religious brothers and 15,178 religious sisters (nuns). The head of the Metropolitan See of Colombia is Cardinal Pedro Rubiano Sáenz, 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 was 35.9 million people.

Independent Western Catholic jurisdictions in Colombia include the following: (1) 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; (2) the Priestly Society of Saint Pius 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), and in Barranquilla; and there are several 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): the House of Father Anthony, Casa Misionera San Francisco Javier, and Orden Misionera de San Andrés Apóstol.

The Protestant Movement

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 (1990-2009).

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 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 19th century.

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 islands of San Andrés and Providencia. 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 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 Scandinavian Alliance Mission (1918) in Cucúta, later known as The **Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM)**; 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; the Protestant Episcopal Church began work in 1923 among English-speakers in Cartagena and Santa Marta; and the **Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1927)** in Cali.

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; the first missionaries later associated with the U.S. Assemblies of God arrived in Sogamoso in 1932; the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (now WEC International) arrived from England 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 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; 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 Pentecostal Assemblies of Jesus Christ (1945 merger in North America, renamed the United Pentecostal Church), a “Jesus Only” or Oneness Pentecostal denomination, entered Colombia in 1936 and soon became the largest non-Catholic religious organization in the country (see table below). However, in 1970 more than 90 percent of its members became independent of the U.S. headquarters when the **United Pentecostal Church of Colombia** was organized.

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*. 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), later known as the Oriental Missionary Society and OMS International; the Evangelical Lutheran Church and 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 third stage of Protestant missions in Colombia was between 1948 and 1960, during *La Violencia* and its early aftermath. Continued Conservative opposition to reforms and modernization culminated in the terrible 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 – 1954), the Panamerican Mission (an independent Pentecostal denomination, founded by Ignacio Guevara in 1956), the Hispanic American Crusade, the Christian Brethren, World-Wide Missions and the Society of Friends.

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	4,672	19,213	59,700	181,446
2 United Pentecostal Church of Colombia (split in 1970 from the UPC-USA)	--	--	--	93,400
3 Foursquare Gospel Church	1,524	3,620	24,600	46,000
4 Christian Crusade Churches (split from WEC in 1975) – Pentecostal	--	--	14,100	45,800
5 Assemblies of God	159	2,660	6,636	30,000
6 Panamerican Mission of Colombia (independent Pentecostal)	105	862	7,000	27,800
7 Federation of Evangelical Ministries**	800	3,100	8,000	22,000
8 Christian & Missionary Alliance	1,571	1,988	9,000	21,400
9 (So.) Baptist Convention of Colombia	2,792	4,021	10,000	13,200
10 Gospel Missionary Union (GMU)	764	1,096	2,706	12,500
11 Inter-American Mission (OMS)	425	849	4,000	11,800
12 New Tribes Mission (Fundamentalist)	300	2,900	7,100	11,800
13 Bethesda Missionary Center (Pent.)	--	--	500	11,000
14 Hispanic American Crusade**	164	675	2,800	5,850
15 Evangelical Alliance of Colombia (TEAM) – Iglesias Alianza Evang.	665	623	2,800	5,850
16 Plymouth Brethren / Christian Brethren	50	2,268	3,500	5,720
17 Presbyterian Church (Reformed Synod, a split from PCUSA in 1993)	--	--	--	5,673
18 Association. of Churches of Eastern Colombia**	--	--	3,000	5,200
19 Church of God in Colombia (CL-TN)	219	775	2,320	4,699
20 Assoc. of Evang. Churches of the Caribbean (AIEC-LAM)	649	1,200	2,750	4,530
21 Presbyterian Church (PCUSA)	1,635	1,882	4,106	4,500
22 United Pentecostal Church-USA	3,000	15,352	30,000	4,400
23 International Charismatic Mission	--	--	100	4,330
24 Cumberland Presbyterian Church	850	833	1,750	4,320
25 House on the Rock Church (1987)**	--	--	--	4,000

26	Tabernacle of Faith**	--	--	200	4,000
27	Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches (WEC-England)	481	1,000	1,200	3,050
28	Pentecostal Church of God (from PR)	--	282	1,000	2,730
29	Protestant Episcopal Church	1,105	1,272	1,620	2,290
30	Assoc. of Evan. Churches / Magdalena (South American Evan. Union?）**	361	600	1,000	2,010
	Sample of 30 largest denominations	22,291	67,071	211,988	601,298

****More info is needed about the historical origin and theological orientation of these groups.**

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 sources.

In 1960 and 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 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. Severn 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), 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), the independent Christian Churches and Churches of Christ (1962), Wycliffe Bible Translators (1962), Overseas Crusades (1963, now OC Ministries International), 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 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 Bredesen**, 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**accent?? 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 campus across the country, as well as local Catholic parishes and Evangelical churches.

However, the conservatives 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); 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 Bethesda Missionary Center (independent Pentecostal), founded by Enrique Gómez Montealegre in 1975 in Bogotá; the Christian Crusade Churches, a national Pentecostal denomination founded by Silvio H. Barahona in 1975, a split from the Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches (founded by WEC in the 1930s); the Church of the Nazarene (1976), the Presbyterian Church in America/Mission to the World (1976); and World Vision International (1978).

During the 1980s, the following mission agencies and denominations began work in Colombia: the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC) separated from the Colombian Evangelical Crusade Churches (1982), which WEC founded in the 1930s; the Reformed Baptist Mission (1985); Brethren in Christ World Missions (1985); International Outreach Ministries (1986); Action International Ministries of Canada (1987); and Team Expansion (1989).

Also, in the 1980s, the “Light of the World” Trinitarian International Evangelical Work from Colombia became established in Colombia; this is an independent Pentecostal denomination founded by Jaime Banks Puertas in 1968, with headquarters in Barrio Colombia Norte, Guanare, Venezuela.

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 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, Colombia, to learn about the G12 Vision. In 2001, Castellanos formed an international G12 board of directors, with leaders from various countries. However, by 2005 some of these leaders decided to cut their affiliation with Castellanos and his G12 Vision, which they denounced as being too authoritarian. **Defectors include César Farjardo, Castellanos’ former Youth Pastor, who established *Sin Muros Internacional (Without Borders International)*, and Ricardo Rodríguez, who founded *Centro Mundial de Avivamiento (World Revival Center)*, both centered in Bogotá.** Nevertheless, many of the original leaders have continued to form branches

of the G12 movement, following in Castellanos' footsteps. Currently, the MCI in Bogotá claims to have established 55,000 cell groups with about 550,000 members worldwide.

Rodríguez has even established his own TV station in Bogotá, called the "Avivamiento Broadcasting Network" (TV-ABN), which began broadcasting in June 2001. The station is owned by the Centro Mundial de Avivamiento, which is pastored by Ricardo Rodríguez 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."

The sixth stage of Protestant development was an era of accelerated church growth (1990-2009). During the 1990s, several other new denominations emerged within the national context, and additional USA-based mission agencies and denominations arrived: Baptist International Missions (1990); Impact International (1990); the Reformed Synod separated in 1993 from the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Colombia; Macedonian World Baptist Missions (1994); The Sowers International (1994); Christ for the City International (1995, affiliated with the Latin America Mission); BCM International (1995); and Calvary International (1996).

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 (11 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; in 1992, Cali had 105 churches with about 12,000 members; and in 1992, Medellín had 169 churches with about 14,212 members. 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.

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 its 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 became 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*.

In 2007, the Protestant population of Colombia was estimated at 5.0 million, or 11.2 percent of the nation's total population. At that time, the Protestant community included more than 2.0 million baptized church members, 150 denominations and about 400 foreign missionaries (mostly from the U.S.). Projecting the figures from the table above for the period 1960 to 2000 regarding Protestant church membership, we arrive at an estimated 2.0 million baptized church members among 22,222 local congregations (average of 90 members per church) among a total Protestant population of about 5.0 million. 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.

Although not much is known about specific denominational growth (due to lack of statistics) during the 2000s, there are some indications of what has happened. In 2008, the Assemblies of God reported 766 congregations (churches and missions) with about 38,300 baptized church members, compared to 490 congregations and 11,800 members in 1995. 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). The Colombian Union Conference of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church reported the following statistics: 1,080 churches with 251,290 members at year-end 2007, up from 648 churches and 140,121 members in 1997. This seems to indicate that some denominations are doubling or tripling their membership every decade. Much of this membership growth can be attributed to each denomination’s own efforts at evangelizing their communities and planting new churches.

However, 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).

Other Religions

In 2007, 4.5 percent (830,200 people) of the total population was affiliated with religious groups other than those already listed. One these groups is the **New Apostolic Church** with international headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland (worldwide, in 2007, there were 408,960 members, 7,569 ministers and 1,419 congregations). This denomination is a pre-Pentecostal charismatic church that separated from the Catholic Apostolic Church in Europe in 1863. The focus of the New Apostolic 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 prophets; it emphasizes the activity of the Holy Spirit as the focal point of church life, and freely exercises the gifts of prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues. This denomination has dozens of congregations throughout Colombia, with its headquarters in Bogotá.

During the 1930s, a wave of Middle Eastern immigrants (Maronite Christians) arrived in the Peninsula of **La Guajira** from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine, countries formerly under the Ottoman Empire, and established themselves mostly in the municipality of Maicao, on the border with Venezuela. Today, **Eastern Orthodox jurisdictions** in Colombia (with an estimated 8,000 adherents) are the following: the Orthodox Church, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Divine Providence Mission Congregation in Medellín); the Mercian Orthodox Catholic Church; the Orthodox Apostolic Catholic Church of Colombia; and the Greek Orthodox Church of Colombia.

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).

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 religions (including Ancestor Worship, Confucianism and Taoism) and Buddhism, and there are many other **Buddhist** organizations in the country: 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 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 Sri 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 by of the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC), Builders of the Adytum, the Grand Universal Fraternity-Mission of Aquarius, 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.

Also, there are numerous Satanist groups in Colombia, 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.

The **Psychic-Spiritualist-New Age movements** 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; the CIMA Movement of Spiritist Culture (*Movimiento de Cultura Espírita CIMA*, 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, and is a member of the *Confederación Espírita Panamericana-CEPA*, founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1946); 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. 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 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.

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