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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
RELIGION IN SAN ANDRES-PROVIDENCIA**

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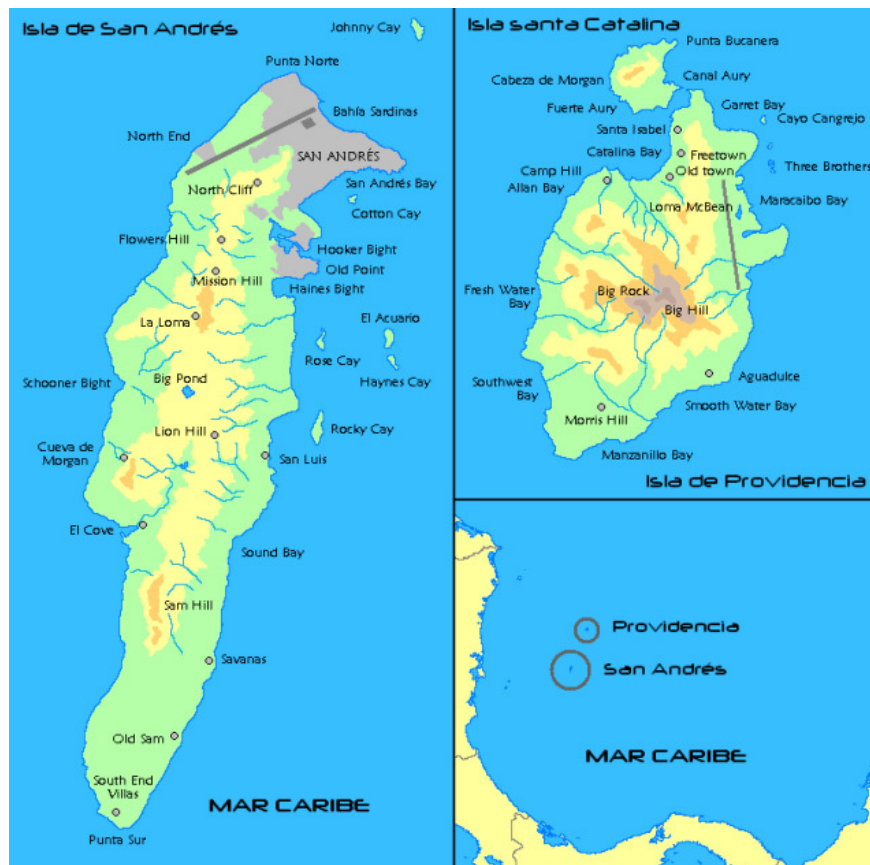
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Religion on the Islands of San Andrés and Providencia (Colombia)

Today, the Caribbean archipelago of **San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina** is a department of Colombia, with its capital in 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 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 creoles of African ancestry (freedmen) arrived from the British West Indies. Emanuel Baptist Church on La Loma hill in San Andrés was founded in 1844 by evangelical missionaries from the Southern USA. Eventually, the islands attracted the interest of the Jamaican Baptist Missionary

Society that sent missionaries there in 1860. Consequently, many of the islands' oldest churches are Baptist.

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 there, such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of Christ.

Other religions include the Roman Catholic Church (since 1947), the Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims.

Before 1960, the population of the islands was almost entirely Raizals, who are an Afro-Caribbean ethnic group, predominantly Protestant in religion, who speak San Andrés-Providencia Creole English. The natives of San Andrés-Providencia were brought there as slaves by the English Puritans, but the white people were either absorbed by the dominant creole population or abandoned the archipelago altogether, and the creoles were left to themselves. The Raizals are recognized by the Colombian Government as one of the Afro-Colombian ethnic groups under the multicultural policy established in 1991. The national government has promoted the migration of Spanish-speaking mainlanders to the islands, with Catholic missionaries stationed there since 1947. In 2005, the Raizals were 57 percent of the 60,000 or more inhabitants of the islands, with the rest being *mestizos* and creoles from mainland Colombia.

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