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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:  
RELIGION IN THE TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS**

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## Religion in the Turks and Caicos Islands

### Country Overview

The Turks and Caicos Islands are two Caribbean island chains located north of Haiti and southeast of the Bahamas. Though separated by some distance, they were earlier a part of Britain's Jamaica colony. Together the islands include a mere 193 square miles of land, which was home to 19,878 residents (2000 Census). Cockburn Town, the capital since 1766, is located on Grand Turk Island. The two distinct island groups are separated by the Turks Passage, which reaches a depth of more than 2,200 meters or 7,200 feet.

The eight main islands and more than 299 smaller islands have a total area of 616.3 square kilometers (238 sq mi), primarily of low, flat limestone with extensive marshes and mangrove swamps and 332 square kilometers (128 sq mi) of beach front. The weather is usually sunny and relatively dry, but experiences frequent hurricanes. The islands have limited natural fresh water resources; private cisterns collect rainwater for drinking. The primary natural resources are spiny lobster, conch and other shellfish.

The majority of the Turks and Caicos islanders are black descendants of the early Bermudan, British Loyalist and slave settlers and "salt-rakers" dating back 300 years. In 2000, the race-ethnic composition of the population was African/Negro/Black 88.0 percent, White 8.0 percent, East Indian 1.3 percent, mixed 2.5 percent, and other 0.67 percent (2000 Census). The official language of the islands is British English and the population also speaks Creole, which is similar to Bahamian Creole.

The Turks and Caicos immigrant population is a rapidly expanding group of Haitians, Dominicans and Cubans as well as many residents from all over the world. The majority of the immigrants are Canadian and U.S. citizens, but there are also residents from South Africa, Europe, Oceania, South America and Asia. Due to its close proximity to the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola, large Haitian Creole and Spanish-speaking communities have developed in the territory due to immigration, both legal and illegal, from French Creole-speaking Haiti and from Spanish-speaking Cuba and Dominican Republic. The Turks and Caicos Islands have become a destination and transit point for illegal Haitian immigrants bound for The Bahamas and the USA.



### Overview of Social and Political Development

The first inhabitants of the islands were Arawakan-speaking Taíno people who migrated from Hispaniola sometime between 500 and 800 AD. Together with Tainos who migrated from Cuba

to the southern Bahamas around the same time, these people became the Lucayans. Around 1200 AD, the Turks and Caicos Islands were resettled by Classical Taínos from Hispaniola. Soon after the Spanish arrived in the islands in 1492, they began capturing the Taínos of the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Lucayans as slaves to replace the largely-depleted native population of Hispaniola. The southern Bahaman Islands, including the Turks and Caicos Islands, were completely depopulated by slavery or had succumbed to European-borne diseases by the mid-16th century, and remained so until the late 17th century.

The first documented European to sight the islands was Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León in 1512 while on his way to the Bahamas archipelago. During the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the islands passed from Spanish to French and then to British control. The islands remained virtually uninhabited until 1678, when a group of Bermudans settled and began extracting salt and logging trees. Salt traders cleared the land and created the salt-drying basins that still exist on many islands. The majority of the salt went aboard commercial ships to supply the cod-fishing industries of New England and the Maritime Provinces of Canada.

For the next few hundred year's salt became the backbone of the local economy. Bermudians in particular would arrive each year during the salt harvesting season. The ships they sailed in were copied and became the Caicos Sloops, which were the only means of transportation between the scattered islands and the rest of the Caribbean. During the 17th and 18th centuries pirates of many nationalities used the islands as hideouts and preyed upon the passing Spanish treasure ships bound for Europe. By 1725, Grand Turk was seasonally occupied by 1,000 men raking salt, fishing for turtle and salvaging from wrecked ships. In 1767, Andrew Symmer, who was appointed as the first English King's Agent on Grand Turk, established a code of regulations governing salt raking.

Between 1753 and 1783 the islands were occasionally occupied by the French, but this ended with the Treaty of Versailles signed in 1783 between France and Great Britain. Following the U.S. War of Independence (1775–1783), the Bermudans on the Turks and Caicos Islands were joined by a group of British colonial loyalists, who established cotton plantations. The loyalists brought their slaves with them but the cotton plantation era was short-lived. The island's soil was unable to support cotton growing long-term and most royalists eventually left the islands, especially following the devastating hurricane of 1813. However, some of the planters left their slaves behind and eventually they too became "salt-rakers" and ancestors of the native inhabitants today.

In 1841 the *Trouvadore*, a Spanish ship engaged in the slave trade, wrecked off the coast of East Caicos, one of the larger Caicos Islands. One-hundred and ninety-two Africans survived the sinking and made it to shore where, then under British rule, the slave trade was illegal. These survivors were apprenticed to trades for one year then settled mostly on Grand Turk Island. An 1878 letter documents the "Trouvadore Africans" and their descendants as constituting an essential part of the "labouring population" on the islands.

It was the production of salt that guaranteed the survival of the Turks and Caicos islanders. In the late 19th century, attempts were made to grow sisal for rope fibers and harvest sponges from the Caicos Bank. These efforts soon failed. At the end of World War II in 1945, salt was still the only income producer and the islanders were struggling economically.

Politically, British dominion was firmly established by 1787. In 1799, both the Turks and the Caicos island groups were annexed by Britain as part of the Bahamas colony. British rule was administered from the Bahamas until 1848. Then, in 1874, the islands became a dependency of Jamaica until 1962, after which they became linked to the Bahamas again. In 1973, the islands became a separate UK Crown Colony with a dedicated government and governor. The Turks and Caicos Islands became autonomous by steps, with direct involvement of the British government ending in 1988.

The Turks and Caicos Islands remain an Associate Member State within the British Commonwealth. The islands are divided into six administrative districts (two in the Turks Islands and four in the Caicos Islands), headed by district commissioners. For the House of Assembly, the Turks and Caicos Islands are divided into 15 electoral districts: four in the Turks Islands and eleven in the Caicos Islands. As a British territory, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is the sovereign, represented by a governor appointed by the monarch on the advice of the Foreign Office.

Providenciales International Airport is the main entry point for the Turks and Caicos Islands. Altogether, there are seven airports, located on each of the inhabited islands. The territory's main international marine ports and harbors are on the islands of Grand Turk and Providenciales.

Until the 1960s, Providenciales was inhabited by less than 500 people and there were no automobiles and few roads. In 1966, Provident Limited secured an agreement with the government granting it 4,000 acres of Providenciales land in exchange for building roads between the three settlements and an airstrip. Provident Ltd then sold lots and built the Turtle Cove hotel and marina. In 1966, the first car arrived on Providenciales, which remained a low-key destination until 1984 when Club Med built a new resort on Grace Bay beach. These activities sparked the continuing surge of development that has resulted in Providenciales becoming one of the prime vacation destinations in the Caribbean.

Providenciales is now the most well-known of the Turks and Caicos Islands and is the center of the tourism industry with a wide range of hotels, restaurants, attractions and facilities. Middle Caicos and North Caicos represent the best of the environment, with lush green woodlands, the biggest cave network in the Caribbean on Middle Caicos, cottage pond and flamingo pond in North Caicos and a vast range of plant life and birdlife. North Caicos is also a popular resort destination with several new projects under development. South Caicos is the center for fishing, with lobster and conch exported from the islands; it is the location of historic Cockburn harbor and the natural phenomenon of the boiling hole. Parrot Cay and Pine Cay are privately-owned islands and are home to the exclusive resorts of Parrot Cay Resort and Spa and the Meridian Club.

Development is also underway in previously uninhabited West Caicos (future home of a Ritz Carlton hotel and community), Ambergris Cay (site of the exclusive Turks and Caicos Sporting Club), and Dellis Cay (where a major lifestyle resort to be run by The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group has been announced). In 2006, the Grand Turk Cruise Centre opened on Grand Turk serving Carnival Cruise Lines, Radisson Seven Seas, Crystal, Silverseas and Oceania Cruises.

The salt production industry, the islands' economic mainstay for nearly three centuries, ceased in 1964 and was replaced by tourism, offshore financial services and fishing. The primary agricultural products include limited amounts of maize, beans, cassava (tapioca) and citrus fruits. Fish and conch are the only significant export, with some \$169.2 million of lobster, dried and fresh conch, and conch shells exported in 2000, primarily to the UK and the USA. In more recent years, however, the fishing industry has declined. The territory used to be an important transshipment point for South American narcotics destined for the USA, but due to the ongoing pressure of a combined U.S., Bahamian and Turks-Caicos effort this trade has been greatly reduced.

In 2006, the GDP was based on the following: Construction 48.7 percent; Financial Services 29.6 percent; Hotels & Restaurants 23.3 percent; Wholesale & Retail Trade 20.9 percent; and Health & Social Work 10.8 percent. Most capital goods and food for domestic consumption are imported. The islands import food and beverages, tobacco, clothing, manufacture and construction materials, primarily from the USA and the UK. Imports totaled \$581 million in 2007. The tourism industry is the main source of foreign income.

### **Current Religious Affiliation**

According to the CIA's *The World Factbook* (2011), religious affiliation in 1990 was Baptist 40 percent, Anglican 18 percent, Methodist 16 percent, Church of God 12 percent, and other 14 percent. The total Protestant population (adherents) was about 80 percent, compared to Roman Catholic adherents 11.4 percent, and others/none 8.9 percent. The 2000 census reported the following statistics:

### **2000 CENSUS OF POPULATION: TURKS & CAICOS**

| RELIGIOUS CATEGORIES    | ADHERENTS     | PERCENT     |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| All Baptists            | 7,108         | 35.8        |
| All Church of God       | 2,323         | 11.7        |
| Roman Catholics         | 2,272         | 11.4        |
| Anglican                | 1,984         | 9.9         |
| All Methodists          | 1,849         | 9.3         |
| Seventh-day Adventists  | 1,198         | 6.0         |
| Jehovah's Witnesses     | 355           | 1.8         |
| Others                  | 2,789         | 14.0        |
| <b>TOTAL POPULATION</b> | <b>19,878</b> | <b>100%</b> |

### **Overview of Religious Development**

The traditional religion (animism) of the Arawakans (Tainos and Lucayans) was destroyed, along with the conquered people, by Europeans (Spanish, French and British) during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Christianity entered the islands following British settlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Anglican Church in The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands can be traced to the earliest English settlements, but it was in 1729, with the arrival of the first Royal Governor, Woodes Rogers, that the Church was established by law in The Bahamas. According to Rogers' Royal Instructions, the Bishop of London, Edmund Gibson (1723-1748) became technically Bishop of

the Bahamas. On 6 September 1734, the entire Bahamas was erected into one parish, that of Christ Church. In 1768, St. John's Parish was created as a second Parish, which was made up of Harbour Island and Eleuthera. The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (formerly the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel) was in those early days generous in providing missionaries and priests especially from 1733-1807 and from 1836 until modern times. In addition the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and Dr. Bray's associates contributed generously to the building up of the Anglican Church in The Bahamas.

When the Diocese of Jamaica was created in 1824, The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands were incorporated in this Diocese. An Act of The Bahamas Legislature of 30 January 1826 recognized the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Jamaica, Christopher Lipscombe, over the clergy in The Bahamas. Bishop Lipscombe visited the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands four times in 1826, 1830, 1834 and 1839. The Bahamas was elevated to an Archdeaconry in 1844 by Bishop Aubrey George Spencer, second Bishop of Jamaica who also appointed the Rev. John McCammon Trew as Archdeacon of the Bahamas. The Archdeacon lived in The Bahamas from 1844 to 1857, when he returned home to Ireland. Bishop Spencer visited the Bahamas five times in 1845, 1847, 1848, 1850 and 1852. The Lord Bishop of Kingston, Reginald Courtney, was the last Bishop from Jamaica to visit The Bahamas.

The people in the Bahamas were not satisfied with the occasional visits of the Bishops from Jamaica. Bahamians began to see the need for a bishop of their own. In 1848, The Turks and Caicos Islands seceded from the Bahamas and later came under the jurisdiction of Jamaica, although remaining under the Archdeaconry of the Bahamas. On 4 November 1861, the Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Islands were erected into a separate diocese. Dr. Charles Caulfield, the successor of Archdeacon Trew was consecrated the first Bishop of Nassau in Lambeth Palace (The London Residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury) on 24 November 1861. The new bishop arrived in Nassau in May 1862 and the town of Nassau, by the same Letters Patent, became a city.

The Anglican Church now claims approximately 10 percent of the islands' relatively small population. The churches in these islands are included in the Church in the Province of the West Indies (Anglican): St. Monica's Anglican Church on Providenciales, St. George's Anglican Church on South Caicos, and St. Mary's Anglican Church on Grand Turk.

Baptists have had the most success overall in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Their work originated with missionary work from Jamaica, The Bahamas and England. The first Baptists in the archipelago were from The Bahamas. Sharper Morris, a freed slave from the USA residing in Nassau, visited the Turks Islands in 1830, evangelized the inhabitants and formed a congregation of about 50 converts, whom he aided in their struggle for identity and freedom of worship. Sometime later, the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) of London sent Ebenezer Quants to pastor the Baptist church on Grand Turk. Another BMS missionary, J. Henry Pusey, served on Grand Turk from 1880 to 1910. In 1892, the BMS turned their Turks Mission over to the Jamaica Baptist Missionary Society (JBMS), but it continued to help the mission financially.

The JBMS has sponsored missionary work in the Turks and Caicos Islands in cooperation with the Turks & Caicos Islands Baptist Union, General Conference. Here is a report from the 1950s (Source: [http://www.jbu.org.jm/jbu\\_news.php?news=61](http://www.jbu.org.jm/jbu_news.php?news=61)):

In September 1955, the missionary fervour of Lindsay P. Moncrieffe led him to Turks and Caicos Islands. “Jamaica Baptist Missionary Society asked me if I wanted to serve in Turks and Caicos Islands and I accepted. It was my calling. I took over from the Rev. Glen Walters whose service on those islands had ended.” In Turks and Caicos, Mr and Mrs Moncrieffe spent 5 years. He pastored 13 churches.

What does the Rev. Mr Moncrieffe remember most about his mission in Turks and Caicos Islands? “The 13 churches were on six islands and for transportation we had to rely on sailboats to get from one island to the other,” Mr Moncrieffe recounted. “Sometimes, while on my journey there would be no winds to propel the boat and I would be at sea for three days, trying to get to my destination. We just had to wait until the winds picked up. Another challenge was that if you miss the tide, the boat could run aground. When that happened (usually in shallow water), you had to get out and help to push the boat. It was rough going but I enjoyed it.”

Today, the Baptists represent the largest religious community, with 10 local churches and about 36 percent of the population, which includes several Baptist denominations: the Turks & Caicos Islands Baptist Union, General Conference; the Baptist International Missions International (BIMI); and several independent Baptist churches. During the 1960s, BIMI missionaries were the only independent Baptist pioneers in many of the Caribbean island nations; Jim Cooper, Ken Touchton and Jack Harvey planted churches in the Turks & Caicos Islands and later in the Bahamas.

In 1982, the Jamaican Baptist Union invited the Rev. and Mrs. Edwin Perimons of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (FBMSBC) to settle in the Turks & Caicos Islands to help in the development of church work. The Perimons were veterans of FBMSBC’s work in the Caribbean and served in the Turks & Caicos Islands until their retirement in 1989. At that time there were three national pastors serving 13 local churches on various islands with about 3,000 baptized members.

The British Methodists, now the fifth-largest religious group in the islands, first came in 1800 as part of the last stages of their spread through the Caribbean islands that began in 1787. Their work was later incorporated in the Bahamas, Turks & Caicos Islands Conference (with offices at Rhodes Memorial Methodist Church in Nassau, Bahamas) of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas in 1967, with headquarters in St. John’s, Antigua. There are three Methodist churches in the Turks & Caicos Islands at Providenciales, South Caicos and Salt Cay.

Through the twentieth century, other Protestant denominations came to the islands, including the following: the Seventh-day Adventist Church with two churches (Washington, DC); Church of God of Prophecy with three churches (Cleveland, TN); New Testament Church of God with two churches (Church of God, Cleveland, TN); the Church of God in Christ with one church (Memphis, TN); and two Pentecostal Baptist churches, Abundant Life Ministries International (Full Gospel) on Leeward Highway, Providenciales, and the Pentecostal Baptist Church in Lower Bight, Providenciales. Also, there are at least three nondenominational churches, one of which may be Christian Brethren/Plymouth Brethren.

The Roman Catholic Church had 2,272 adherents in 2000 or about 11.4 percent of the population. There are only two local churches: Our Lady of Divine Providence Catholic Church on Leeward Highway, Providenciales, and Holy Cross Catholic Church on Grand Turks. Also, the Holy

Family Academy Catholic School in Tucker Hill, Providenciales, founded in 2006, provides Pre-Kinder to 7<sup>th</sup> Grade education.

Prior to 1984, the Turks and Caicos Islands were part of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Nassau in the Bahamas. In 1984, it became a *Missio Sui Iuris* and the first Ecclesiastical Superior was Archbishop Lawrence A. Burke S.J. During that time the islands were served by a number of priests who stayed anywhere from a few months. In the three years prior to 1998 the islands were served by a priest who came for about eight months of the year. The remaining six months of those last three years there was no priest present on the islands. In July 1998, at the request of the Holy See, the Archbishop of Newark provided two priests to serve on a full-time basis the Catholic community of the Turks and Caicos Islands. In the Fall of 1998 the Archbishop of Newark, The Most Reverend Theodore E. McCarrick, assumed responsibility as Ecclesiastical Superior of the Roman Catholic Mission *Sui Iuris* Turks and Caicos Islands.

On 9 October 2001, The Most Reverend John J. Myers succeeded Theodore Cardinal McCarrick as Archbishop of Newark and as Ecclesiastical Superior of the *Missio Sui Iuris* Turks and Caicos Islands. Presently serving the *Missio Sui Iuris* Turks and Caicos Islands as Vicar General is the Reverend Monsignor Ronald J. Rozniak, P.A., Protonotary Apostolic of the Archdiocese of Newark.

## **Other Religious Groups**

The Jehovah's Witnesses had three local churches with 355 adherents in 2000, or 1.8 percent of the population. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) had one church on Lower Bight Road, Providenciales.

According to the Caribbean Development Bank (Country Poverty Assessments: Turks & Caicos Islands, Standard of Living Assessment, May 2000), the following religious groups were also present in the islands in very small numbers: Muslims, Rastafarians and Spiritual Baptists.

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