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

By Clifton L. Holland, Director of PROLADES

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PROLADES

Apartado 1524-2050, San Pedro, Costa Rica
Telephone (506) 2283-8300; FAX (506) 2234-7682
Internet: <http://www.prolades.com/>
E-Mail: prolades@racsa.co.cr

Religion in Dominica

Country Summary

The island of Dominica is located in the Windward Islands between Guadeloupe and Martinique. It was originally inhabited by the Amerindian Caribs. Christopher Columbus was the first European to discover the island in 1493, and he claimed it for the Spanish Crown but it soon came under the French control. The small island (751 km² or 289.5 sq mi) was jostled between the French and English for 400 years. Not much care was given to colonizing or caring for the island. Much of the time Dominica was left to its own devices. It achieved independence from the British Crown in 1978.

Dominica's capital and largest city is Roseau (14,847 - 2001 census), located on the south-western coast, and the island's second-largest town is Portsmouth (2,977 inhabitants). Roseau is Dominica's most important port for foreign trade. Dominica's economy is heavily dependent on both tourism and agriculture. Cruise ship stopovers have increased following the development of modern docking and waterfront facilities in Roseau. Major exports include bananas, bay oil, vegetables, grapefruit, oranges and cocoa. The service sector is also a large part of the local economy.

According to U.N. census data, the total population of this island nation decreased from 73,795 in 1981 to 68,635 in 2001. By 2006, the population had increased to 69,625 (2006). The country's highest point is Morne Diablotins, a volcano with an elevation of 1,447 meters (4,747 ft). It is the second highest mountain in the Lesser Antilles, after volcano La Grande Soufrière on Guadeloupe. The climate is hot and humid with temperatures generally between 76 F and 86 F (25-30 C). The rainy season is July to October with the hurricane season from June to November. The island features lush mountainous rainforests, home of many rare plant, animal and bird species.

English is Dominica's official language and is universally understood; however, because of historic French domination, Antillean Creole, a French patois, is also widely spoken. There are two main ethnic groups on the island: the descendents of African slaves and the Amerindian Carib. In 2001, the island's population was 86.8 percent of Black (African heritage), mixed 8.9 percent, 2.9 percent Amerindian (Carib), 0.8 percent White, and 0.3 percent Other. The Carib or Kalinago people (about 3,300) now live on a 3,700 acre (15 km²) territory on the east coast of the island. They live in eight villages on the east coast of Dominica. In 1903, this special Carib



Territory was established by the British Crown. In 1974, the Carib Territory, along with its adjacent village of Atkinson, was given its own parliamentary representative.

There is a significant mixed minority along with Indo-Caribbean or East Indian groups, a small European origin minority (descendants of French, British and Irish colonists) and there are small numbers of Lebanese, Syrians and Asians.

Overview of Current Religious Situation

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The government generally respected religious freedom in practice.

According to the 2001 Census of Population and Housing (total population = 69,625), 61.5 percent of the population was Roman Catholic or about 43,000; Protestants totaled 29.7 percent or 20,800 (Seventh-day Adventists and Pentecostals represented about six percent each; and Baptists and Methodists about four percent each, among others: Anglicans, Christian Brethren, Church of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, etc.). Other religions were 3.3 percent or 2,300: Bahai Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Mormons, Muslims and Rastafarians, among others. About 14 percent of the population (9,800) claimed no religious affiliation. The table below gives an overview of religious affiliation in Dominica in 1981, 1991 and 2001 (census data).

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION IN DOMINICA			
	1981	1991	2001
Roman Catholic	76.9%	70.0%	61.5%
Seventh-Day Adventist	3.2%	4.7%	6.0%
Pentecostal	2.9%	4.3%	5.6%
Baptist	2.3%	2.8%	4.1%
Methodist	5.0%	4.2%	3.8%
Anglican	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%
Other/None	8.9%	13.3%	17.4%
	100%	100%	100%

Source: http://www.dominica.gov.dm/documents/dominica_statistics_at_a_glance_2005.pdf

Historical Overview of social, political and religious development

Christopher Columbus named the island after the day of the week on which he spotted it, a Sunday (*dominica* in Latin), on 3 November 1493. The Spanish Crown, in 1520, appoints Antonio Serrano as governor of Dominica and neighbouring islands, but the Carib/Kalinago defeated his armed band of men at Guadeloupe and no colonization took place. During the next hundred years, Dominica remained isolated, and even more Amerindians settled there after being driven from surrounding islands as European powers entered the region.

In 1635, France claimed Dominica and for most of the 17th century the island was a French colony. French Catholic missionaries, who sought to Christianize the Caribs, became the first European inhabitants of the island. Because the Caribs continued to harass the European colon-

ists, the French and English agreed, in 1660, that both Dominica and St. Vincent should be abandoned by their colonists. Dominica was officially neutral for the next century, but the attraction of its resources remained. During the 1690s, French woodcutters from Martinique and Guadeloupe established timber camps on Dominica to supply the French islands with wood, and they gradually become permanent settlers. They brought the first enslaved people from West Africa to Dominica. Rival expeditions of English and French foresters were harvesting timber by the beginning of the 18th century.

Largely because of Dominica's position between Martinique and Guadeloupe, France eventually became predominant and a permanent French settlement was established. Colonists cleared the forests, built mills, established plantations and imported thousands of African slaves to provide cheap labor for an economy based on sugar production. The Carib/Kalinago people fled to the most isolated parts of the island while attempting to retain their traditional way of life as their ancestors had done for thousands of years.

As part of the 1763 Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years' War, the island became a British possession along with Saint Vincent, Grenada and Tobago in the Windward Islands. The British established a legislative assembly, representing only the White population. In 1763, the population of Dominica was only 8,090 of which 1,718 were Whites, 5,872 were African slaves and 500 were free non-Whites.

British Commissioners for Land arrived in 1764 with surveyors to begin dividing the island into lots for sale. The Byres map drawn by John Byres (published 1776) became the basis for all future landholding on Dominica. The island was divided into parishes. The importation of African slaves increased rapidly as thousands of acres of land were cleared for sugar and coffee plantations. By 1788, the island's population had increased to 16,648 of which 1,236 were Whites, 14,967 were African slaves and 445 were free non-Whites.

In 1778, during the American Revolutionary War, the French mounted a successful invasion against the British on Dominica with the active cooperation of the island's multi-ethnic population. The Treaty of Paris in 1783, which ended the hostilities, returned the island to Britain subject to guarantees of the right of French settlers. French invasions in 1795 and 1805 ended in failure. The United Kingdom then set up a government and made the island a colony in 1805. At that time, the island's population had grown to 26,449 of which 1,594 were Whites, 22,083 were African slaves, and 2,822 were free non-Whites.

During the 1790s, there were numerous slave revolts in the British West Indies, including Dominica. There British military forces had difficulty in efforts to subdue the rebels because of the islands mountainous terrain that allowed runaway slaves to establish Maroon communities in the interior, which the British could not eradicate until 1814.

In 1831, reflecting a liberalization of official British racial attitudes, the Brown Privilege Bill conferred political and social rights on free non-Whites. Three Blacks were elected to the legislative assembly the following year. The Emancipation of African slaves occurred throughout the British Empire in 1834. At that time, the island's population totaled 19,222 of which only 791 were Whites, 14,387 were African slaves and 4,077 were free non-Whites.

After Emancipation, former slaves became free British citizens, able to vote if they passed the same tests (including property ownership) as Whites and Colored freedmen. Dominica, in 1838, became the first British Caribbean colony to have a legislature controlled by an African majority, with middle-class “men of color” dominating public affairs. Most African legislators were smallholders or merchants who held economic and social views diametrically opposed to the interests of the small, wealthy English planter class. Reacting to a perceived threat, the White planters lobbied for more direct British rule.

In 1865, after much agitation and tension, the colonial office replaced the elective assembly with one that had one-half of members who were elected and one-half who were appointed. White planters allied with colonial administrators outmaneuvered the elected legislators on numerous occasions. In 1871, Dominica became part of the Leeward Island Federation. The power of the African population progressively eroded.

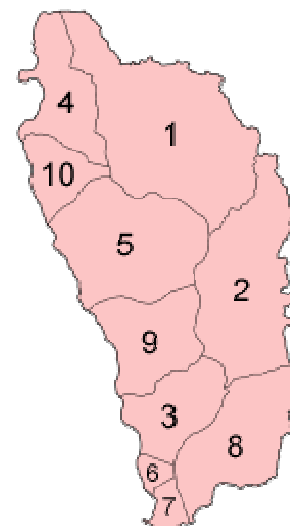
The United Kingdom reassumed governmental control of Dominica in 1896, turning it into a Crown colony. All political rights for the vast majority of the population were effectively curtailed. Development aid, offered as compensation for disenfranchisement, proved to have a negligible effect. Half a century later, from 1958 to 1962, Dominica became a province of the short-lived West Indies Federation. It was not until 1951 that universal adult suffrage was granted, which gave the right to every adult to vote in general elections without the qualifications of land and/or income that were previously required.

In 1978, the Commonwealth of Dominica became an independent nation unlike other former British colonies in the region. Dominica is a full and participating member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

However, independence did little to solve problems stemming from centuries of economic underdevelopment, and in mid-1979 political discontent led to the formation of an interim government. It was replaced after the 1980 elections by a government led by the **Dominica Freedom Party** under **Prime Minister Eugenia Charles**, the Caribbean's first female prime minister.

Dominica is divided into ten parishes:

1. Saint Andrew Parish
2. Saint David Parish
3. Saint George Parish
4. Saint John Parish
5. Saint Joseph Parish
6. Saint Luke Parish
7. Saint Mark Parish
8. Saint Patrick Parish
9. Saint Paul Parish
10. Saint Peter Parish



Chronic economic problems were compounded by the severe impact of hurricanes in 1979 and 1980. By the end of the 1980s, the economy recovered, but weakened again in the 1990s because

of a decrease in banana prices. Dominica is especially vulnerable to hurricanes because the island is located in the Atlantic Hurricane Belt. In 1979, Dominica was hit directly by Hurricane David (category 5), which caused widespread and extreme damage, especially to the banana plantations and the island's infrastructure.

Dominica is a parliamentary democracy within the Commonwealth of Nations and, since 1979, a member of *La Francophonie*, a global community of French-speaking peoples: Antillean Creole, a French-based creole language, is spoken by 90 percent of the population. The Commonwealth of Dominica is one of the Caribbean's few republics. The president is the head of state, while executive power rests with the cabinet, headed by the prime minister. The unicameral parliament consists of the thirty-member House of Assembly, which consists of twenty-one directly elected members and nine senators, who may either be appointed by the president or elected by the other members of the House of Assembly.

In the January 2000 elections, the **United Workers Party (UWP)**, led by Edison James, was defeated by the **Dominican Labour Party (DLP)**, led by Roosevelt P. "Rosie" Douglas. Douglas died after only a few months in office and was replaced by Pierre Charles, who died in office in January 2004. Roosevelt Skerrit, also of the DLP, replaced Charles as Prime Minister. Under Prime Minister Skerrit's leadership, the DLP won elections in May 2005 that gave the party 12 seats in the 21-member Parliament to the UWP's eight seats. An independent candidate affiliated with the DLP won a seat as well. Since that time, the independent candidate joined the government party and one UWP member crossed the aisle, making the current total 14 seats for the DLP and seven for the UWP.

Nicholas Joseph Orville Liverpool (b.1934) is a politician and jurist who has been as the seventh President of Dominica since October 2003. His predecessor was Vernon Lorden Shaw, who served as President from 1998 to 2003.

The Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is the dominant religion on the island. Franciscan and Dominican missionaries evangelized the islands inhabitants during the 17th and 18th centuries under French colonial governments, but they were expelled after British forces gain full control in 1782. However, by then, Roman Catholicism had become deeply rooted in the island's culture. In 2001, about 60 percent of the population claimed to be Catholics.

After the arrival of Columbus, the Roman Catholic Church had little direct impact on the inhabitants of Dominica for the next 150 years. In 1642, French missionaries of the Dominican Order, led by Fr. Raymond Breton, began a mission in an attempt to convert the Carib/Kalinago to Christianity. Breton visited Dominica regularly between 1642 and the mid-1650s. He celebrated the first Mass at Itassi (Vieille Case) in 1646 and built the first primitive church at Colihaut in 1653, but to no avail. Franciscan and Capuchin missionaries arrived later but had no lasting impact.

It was with French colonization that the Catholic Church was firmly established under the Jesuits at Grand Bay and by Fr. Guillaume Martel at Roseau who built the first church there in 1730. The Catholic mission under slavery followed the directives of the French *Code Noir*, whereby the

enslaved were to be instructed in the faith and participate in the Mass and other ceremonies of the Church, unlike the early Protestant attitude that forbade such participation.

During the early colonial period, the religious beliefs and practices of Caribs and Africans were blended with the Catholic faith of the French settlers, which produced a syncretistic religion with very strong Catholic characteristics. At the same time, to make themselves understood, the Caribs and Africans had no other choice than to blend their native languages with elements of the French language of their masters, which resulted in the creation of a new common tongue: Patois or *Creole*.

After the capture of Dominica by the British, the Crown allowed the Roman Catholic Church to continue as before, but Catholics wishing to participate in government and hold official posts had to take certain oaths denying aspects of their faith. This practice was abolished with Catholic Emancipation in 1829. In 1764, ten acres of Roseau had been granted on lease to the Catholic Church and then was given in freehold in 1864, which it still holds.

Catholicism continued to flourish in Dominica under British rule, and less than twenty years after Emancipation in 1834, the Diocese of Roseau was established by the Holy See in 1850. Under the first bishops, Monaghan, Vesque and especially Poirier, parishes were established and the first large rural churches constructed. Religious orders from France (FMI - *Fils de Marie Immaculee*) and later Belgium (Redemptorists) came to serve throughout Dominica. In 1857, the first nuns arrived to begin a school for girls and an orphanage.

In 1910, the Diocese of Roseau – a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, Trinidad – was composed of the islands of **Dominica** (30,000 Catholics, 12 parishes, 18 priests, 16 churches and four chapels); **Montserrat** (600 Catholics); **Antigua** (400 Catholics); **St. Kitts** (1,500 Catholics); **St. Croix** (4,100 Catholics); and **St. Thomas** (3,000 Catholics). The total Protestant population of the diocese was about 100,000. The Rev. Michael Monaghan was elected first bishop of the new diocese and served between 1851 and 1855.

With the exception of two parishes, which were served by secular priests, the whole diocese in 1910 was under the care of the Belgian Redemptorist Fathers and the Fathers of Mary Immaculate (Chavagne en Paillers, France), who were assisted by 14 Redemptorist Brothers. In Roseau, the Religious of the Faithful Virgin (nuns) devote themselves to the education of girls of both the lower and higher classes, while the Ladies of the Union of the Sacred Hearts conducted a high school for girls in St. Thomas. In Dominica, nearly all the schools were administered by the local government; however, religious instruction was given by priests during school hours.

During the 20th century, the construction of church buildings continued, and schools at Pointe Michel and Portsmouth were established. St. Mary's Academy and later St. Mary's Primary School provided education for boys. Nuns provided health and welfare services. The Credit Union movement initiated by Sister Alicia became the equivalent of a national banking service.

The ordination of local religious effectively began in the mid-1900s and produced two Dominican bishops, Bishop Bowers and Archbishop Felix. The effects of Vatican II from the 1960s, the introduction of the Charismatic Movement from the 1970s, the effect of the proliferation of U.S.-based Fundamentalist denominations that caused a decline in Catholic membership, the need for

vocations to support the Church, and the increased dependence on lay people are some of the influences that have impacted the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 21st century.

The current head of the Diocese of Roseau is the Rev. Bishop Gabriel Malzaire (b. 1957), who was appointed in July 2002. In 1980, the diocese reported 16 parishes with one diocesan priest and three religious priests, who were assisted by 28 brothers and 31 nuns. By 2004, there were 15 parishes with six diocesan priests and 22 religious priests, who were assisted by 29 brothers and 22 nuns. According to the 2001 census, there were about 43,000 Catholic adherents in Dominica (61.5 percent of the population), which made Roman Catholicism the dominant religion.

The Protestant Movement

The Anglican Church (1782) arrived with the British occupation. The West Indies became a self-governing Province of the worldwide Anglican Communion in 1883 because of the Church of England missions in territories that became British colonies. **The (Anglican) Church in the Province of the West Indies** is composed two mainland dioceses and six island dioceses, including Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Nassau and the Bahamas, Tobago, Trinidad and the Windward Islands (Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and Barbados); the Bishop of the Windward Islands is located on St. Vincent. In 2000, there were three Anglican churches in Dominica with about 740 members.

The Methodist Church (1787). Dr. Thomas Coke with three other itinerant Methodist preachers, John Baxter and William Hammet, arrived in Dominica, landing at Portsmouth on 5 January 1787. Coke and his party traveled on to Roseau where they met a mulatto woman – Mrs. Webley – who had been converted in Antigua under the preaching of John Baxter. She opened her house to the missionaries, and it was there that Coke preached to a packed audience.

Coke left the island a few days later but without leaving a missionary. He did not return to Dominica until the 19 December 1788, nearly two years later. When he did so, he found that a small Methodist Society had been established. Mrs. Webley had gathered and kept together a little Society of about twenty persons, some of whom had been members of Methodist Societies in Antigua and St. Kitts. Although Dr. Coke seemed to have doubted whether the Methodist venture on this island would prove successful because Roman Catholicism was strongly entrenched, he decided to appoint a missionary to Dominica.

Although the Rev. William McCornock was appointed and a few weeks later commenced his ministry, he died within six months. Malaria and yellow fever took its toll on many of the early missionaries; out of the first ten missionaries appointed to Dominica, eight died within a few years and the other two had health problems and had to leave. Sometimes, several months and even years elapsed between the death of one minister and the stationing of another. However, Mrs. Webley kept the Methodist Society going during those tough times.

The small Methodist Society in Dominica continued to experience other difficulties. Eight years after the first missionary was appointed to Dominica, the White planters and some other influential community leaders began to oppose the Methodists because of their anti-slavery stance. Then there were financial difficulties: it took such a long time for the Methodist Society

to pay for the house that had been secured as its meeting place that the original owner reclaimed possession of the property. Shortly afterwards, the house was destroyed by a hurricane.

In 1814, the denomination's leaders in England thought it best to abandon the Dominica Mission. The trouble stirred up by the planters against the Methodists resulted in a decline in attendance and membership. There were only six members left and all of them were women, and three of them could not write. However, in that year, a White planter named Daker, who had been a Methodist formerly, was converted and joined the Society and worked hard to maintain it. In that same year, also, the Society lost its minister, and it was not until 1816 that he was replaced. The new minister, the Rev. Jeremiah Boothby, and Mr. Daker decided to secure a new building for the Society. In 1817, Methodist work was permanently established in Portsmouth, and shortly afterwards a piece of land was obtained from the government for the erection of a chapel.

Meanwhile, the property in Roseau was in danger of being taken over by the mortgage holders who were pressing the Methodists for financial and other reasons. However, in 1818, the chairman of the Methodist District persuaded the Missionary Committee in London to cancel the debt. The Dominica Methodists breathed a sigh of relief. In 1822, the Roseau Methodist Chapel was built on this property, and in 1824 the work spread to Marigot after land was secured at Lasoye Point.

In 1819, the Methodist Church in Dominica was referred to as "an old wreck against which the waves are perpetually dashing." The troubles and sufferings persisted despite the efforts of the Societies. In the yard behind the Methodist Church in Roseau are the tombstones erected over the graves of missionaries and their families who died while serving on this island. Inside the church are several tablets commemorating the service of several key laymen.

During 1959, the Marigot Methodist Church was expanded to house the growing congregation, which became the largest Methodist congregation on the island. In 1960, the erection of a chapel at Clifton was completed. Congregations were also established in Layou, Castle Bruce, Wesley and Hampstead/Calibishie. The congregation at Grand Bay no longer meets. The Methodist Church established Wesley High School for girls in 1926, located in the capital city.

Today, the Dominica Circuit, with headquarters in Roseau, is part of the **Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas**. Currently, there are eight affiliated churches in Dominica: Marigot (Lasoye Point), Bethesda, Calibishi, Clifton, Ebenezer, Layou, Mount Walls and Zion. In 2001, there were an estimated 2,300 Methodist adherents on Dominica.

Pilgrim Holiness/Wesleyan Holiness Church. The beginning of the work in Antigua can be traced to the early 1900's when missionaries from Panama and several Caribbean islands, including Barbuda, came to Antigua and held revival services under the banner of the **International Holiness Church**. Antigua became a launching pad for the work in several of the islands, and eventually became the headquarters for the Northern Islands District, which included Antigua and Barbuda, Montserrat, St. Kitts, Nevis, Saba, St. Thomas and St. Croix.

In 1968, there was a merger between the **Pilgrim Holiness Church** and the **Wesleyan Methodist Church** in the USA, which resulted in the formation of **The Wesleyan Church of North**

America. The affiliated churches in the Caribbean adopted the name **The Wesleyan Holiness Church.**

The Antigua District is now comprised of Antigua & Barbuda, Montserrat and Dominica, with 17 churches on the mainland Antigua; one on Barbuda; two on Montserrat (one having been lost since the eruption of the Soufriere volcano in 1979); and two on Dominica. Today, the Antigua District comprises 22 churches with a membership of nearly 1,500 people.

The Church of the Nazarene, though present for a number of years, is still in its formative stage. There are seven churches on the island at Bataca, Gallet River (both in the Carib Territory), Roseau, Gallion, Pichelin, Bioche and St. Joseph. These seven congregations had an estimated 560 members.

Maranatha Baptist Church (1961), which has ties with other independent Baptist churches in the Virgin Islands, established the Mt. Gerizim Baptist Church in Roseau. By 2004, there were three affiliated churches with about 130 members.

The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (FMBSBC) first established ties with some of the existing Baptists on the island in 1974, but it was not until 1982 that the **Dominica Baptist Union (DBU)** was organized with three affiliated churches. By 1987, the DBU reported four churches with 175 members. After two decades of work, the DBU reported five congregations with about 200 members.

Berean Mission (1973). An independent mission agency of Fundamentalist tradition, founded in 1937 with headquarters in St. Louis, MO, engaged in evangelism, church planting, leadership development, theological education-by-extension and medical work. This Mission reported five organized churches on Dominica with about 200 members in 2000.

Christian Brethren. Although the 2001 Census mentions this group, none of the Christian Brethren/Plymouth Brethren (or any others) provides information about this tradition in Dominica.

Websites of **independent Christian churches & churches of Christ** reported five organized churches on Dominica at Roseau, Portsmouth, La Plaine, Scotts Head and Vieille Case, with an estimated 150 members.

The General Council of the Churches of Christ in Christian Union, founded in 1909 with headquarters in Circleville, OH, reported 16 affiliated churches on Dominica. This is a small denominational mission agency of Holiness tradition engaged in evangelism, church planting and support of national churches.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, East Caribbean Conference (headquarters on Barbados), reported 24 organized churches on Dominica with about 6,650 adherents in 2010. At the time of the 2001 census, the number of Adventist adherents was reported as 4,200 or 6.0 percent of the national population.

The East Caribbean Conference had its beginning in the Leeward Islands Mission, organized in 1926, which consisted of the territories of the Leeward Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Dominica, and the Dutch Islands. Over time a number of adjustments were made as the work grew, which resulted in what we know today as the East Caribbean Conference, organized in 1976. Today, this Conference includes Barbados, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In 2008, this Conference reported 115 churches with 31,871 members.

The Church of God (7th Day) is related historically to the Church of God (Seventh Day), which split into two factions in 1933: the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Stanberry, MO (later moved to Denver, CO) and the Church of God (7th Day) in Salem, WV. Elder Dugger was affiliated with the Salem, WV, and moved to Israel in 1953 to establish its world headquarters and publish the *Mount Zion Reporter*. Many of the churches affiliated with this movement use the name “Mt. Zion Church of God (7th Day).” This denomination (headquarters in Jerusalem, Israel) reports affiliated churches in the USA, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean (USVI, Antigua, Dominica, French Guiana, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Martin, Trinidad-Tobago, St. Vincent), Central and South America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, England and India. (Source: <http://www.cog7day.org/>)

Pentecostals. The 2001 census reported that 5.6 percent of the population claimed to be Pentecostal adherents. There are two principal denominations on Dominica, both headquartered in the USA: the **Church of God (Cleveland, TN) / New Testament Church of God** with one congregation at Scott’s Head, Roseau; and the **Church of God of Prophecy** with three congregations (Portsmouth, Clifton and One Hope), under Bishop Michael Greenaway, the Regional Overseer for the Northeast Caribbean, Dominica and Suriname.

Other Religions

Jehovah’s Witnesses (Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society): reported seven churches with 376 members and 1,288 adherents on Dominica in 2008. The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)** does not report any activity in Dominica.

Freemasonry. The *Grand Lodge of Dominica* (Scottish Constitution) was founded in 1822 (other sources reported 1855).

The **Muslim population** increased from 54 persons or 0.07 percent in 1981 to 139 persons or 0.20 percent in 2000. Also, some members of the **Bahai Faith** are present.

Rastafarians. A small Rastafari community is present, led by Ras Adama Taffari. The first Rastafarians to appear in Dominica was somewhere around 1972-1973 when a new generation of Dominican young people sought to express their African heritage. There are differing accounts as to who was responsible for introducing the Rastafari philosophy to this country, but some observers believe that graduates coming home from the University of the West Indies in Jamaica were foremost among those who introduced this movement.

Myalism and Obeah are reportedly practiced in secret by some Dominicans, especially those who are not active members of Christian churches. Myalism is an African-derived belief system

that development among blacks in the British West Indies during the slavery period; Obeah is the specific practice of “black magic” or witchcraft by priests, known as “obeahmen.”

Between 1999 and 2001 on Dominica, there were several panics revolving around the suspected use of Obeah, a form of Caribbean witchcraft/sorcery. One such event was a witchcraft scare in Dominica’s secondary schools in mid-1999. Some terrified parents had pulled their teenage children out of school, due to rumors that certain students intended to “sacrifice virgins” during a mass satanic ritual.

Obeah is a taboo subject in modern-day Dominica. According to Anthropologist Jeffery Manz (2007):

Public discussion of the occult (accusations of cult formation and witchcraft in the newspapers) is thus exceptional. Generally, the concealment of witchcraft from public analysis and discourse is consistent with cultural beliefs about the practice, which suggest that belief in the occult and the expression of belief through public utterance of information about the occult give occult forces their power. To this extent, the suppression of discussion about the occult is consistent with local philosophical beliefs about the role of the occult in Dominican life; protecting yourself from it requires a faith that the use of otherworldly powers cannot hurt you if you do not empower them. Local folklore is replete with examples of how protection from the occult demands a denial of sensory perceptions.

Also, six percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation in 2001 (census).

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