

20. Religion

Solomon Islanders mainly worshiped their ancestors and connected to them through following taboos, performing rituals and sacrificing pigs in shrines. There was no concept of a supreme deity or superior gods, except in Polynesian-influenced areas. The people believed in different kinds of spirits. Some were ancestors, remembered and venerated, others were 'wild' or unconnected spirits. Some of them were ancestors who had lost all of their descendants, and others had never been human at all. However, the system was not rigid and over time particular ancestral spirits became forgotten, were given lesser emphasis, or were superseded by new ones. The spirits of great ancestors were the most venerated. Animals such as sharks or frigate birds have associations with spirits in some places. There were no large orders of priests, but some men (and more occasionally women) become specialists and had important roles in religious ceremonies, performing sacrifices, prayers and incantations. Today, in most areas, only vestiges of this old religious system remain. Some parts of the Kwaio district on Malaita are famous for retaining ancestral belief systems.

The major influence from world religions has been through Christianity. After a short Spanish Catholic sojourn in the sixteenth century, the next missionary presence was another short-lived Catholic mission in 1845, after which the Catholics withdrew until 1898. The Anglican Diocese of Melanesia was established in the islands in 1861, although outreach from New Zealand into the Solomons began in 1852 when the Anglicans started to recruit students for their schools in New Zealand and later (after 1867) at Norfolk Island. They took away young men for several years before returning them to begin mission schools in the islands. The Anglican Mission presence became larger by the 1870s and some islands, such as Isabel, remain predominantly Anglican today. The Queensland Kanaka Mission arrived in the islands informally with Peter Abu'ofa on Malaita in 1894, and formally after 1904. In 1907, it became the South Sea Evangelical Mission (now Church). The Methodist Mission arrived in 1902, based in Roviana Lagoon, New Georgia, and is now part of the United Church. The Seventh-day Adventists arrived in 1914, also initially based in the Western Solomons. The Assemblies of God arrived in 1971 and other Pentecostal churches followed; today their congregations contain significant numbers. The Jehovah's Witnesses arrived in 1977, although they had some influence as far back as 1948. The Bahá'í Faith arrived in the 1950s and began to have a presence onwards from the 1990s. Islam arrived in the 1990s and 2000s but remains of limited influence.



20.1. Statue of Christ outside St Barnabas Anglican Diocese of Melanesia Cathedral, Honiara, 2016. (Daniel Evans Collection)



20.2. Catholic Fathers Jean and Donatien Coicaud and three children, probably from Malaita, 1920s. (L. M. Raucax, *In the Savage Solomons: The Story of a Mission*, Dublin: The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1928)



20.3–4. Anglican Church at Madoa, south Ulawa, outside and inside, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



20.5. Anglican Melanesian Mission house, Ngorefou, Malaita, 1906. (Anglican Church of Melanesia, J. W. Beattie Collection)



20.6. Rua Sura Catholic Mission headquarters, Guadalcanal, 1900. (L. M. Raucax, *In the Savage Solomons: The Story of a Mission*, Dublin: The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1928)



20.7. South Sea Evangelical Mission gathering, probably 1920s. (J. N. and N. C. Deck Collection, in Patricia Braga Collection)



20.8. The central church of the South Sea Evangelical Church, Honiara, 2016. (Daniel Evans Collection)



20.9. The central Wesley United Church, Honiara, 2016. (Daniel Evans Collection)



20.10. Anglican Church of Melanesia's St. Barnabas Cathedral, Honiara, 2016. (Daniel Evans Collection)



20.11. Anglican Hautabu Chapel, Maravovo, Guadalcanal, 2011. (Clive Moore Collection)



20.12. Anglican Melanesian Brother at Tabalia Chapel, Guadalcanal, 2011. (Clive Moore Collection)



20.13. Consecration of the new Anglican St. Luke's Church, Kia, Isabel, by Bishop Naramana, 2007. (Graham Baines Collection)



20.14. Bible Study Group, St. Luke's Anglican Church, Kia, Isabel, 2007.(Graham Baines Collection)



20.15. Catholic Holy Cross Cathedral, Honiara, 2016. (Daniel Evans Collection)



20.16–17. Catholic Sacred Heart Church, Visale, Guadalcanal, 2011. (Clive Moore Collection)



20.18. Shrine outside Catholic Sacred Heart Church, Visale, Guadalcanal, 2011. (Clive Moore Collection)



20.19. Catholic Church, Buma, Malaita, 2005. (Clive Moore Collection)



20.20. Seventh-day Adventist Bookshop, Honiara, 2016. (Daniel Evans Collection)



20.21. A major function of all of the Christian denominations has always been health care. This is Ato`ifi Seventh-Day Adventist Hospital, east Malaita, 2004, considered one of the best small hospitals in the country.(Clive Moore Collection)

Since the 1970s there has been a significant growth in Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups. While it is difficult to generalise, these denominations promote a personalised relationship with God, members of congregations 'speak in tongues' (glossolalia), experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and interpret prophecies. These churches are more likely to be found in the suburbs and settlements of the urban centres, with some outreach to rural areas in the provinces.



20.22. The Calvary Temple in Honiara was the first church established by the Assemblies of God (AOG) in Solomon Islands in 1974. It was the headquarters until the pastor of the Christian Life Centre was elected General Secretary of AOG in Solomon Islands. This photo is from the 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)

20.23. The Christian Life Centre in Honiara is the second church founded in Solomon Islands by the Assemblies of God. This photograph is from the 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)



20.24. Assembly of God Church, Kobito, Honiara, 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)



20.25. Christian Mission Fellowship Church, Honiara, 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)



20.26. Assembly of God Church, Kaibia, Honiara, 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)

20.27. Four Square Church, Honiara, 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)



20.28. Green Valley Prayer Centre, Honiara, 2010s. (Rodolfo Maggio Collection)