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(53) CHRISTIANITY IN CAPE VERDE

Max Ruben Ramos

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	466,000	95.1%	552,000	94.4%	1.1%
Independents	33,800	6.9%	43,000	7.4%	1.6%
African initiated	1,700	0.4%			
Protestants	17,500	3.6%	25,000	4.3%	2.4%
Adventist	8,700	1.8%			
Holiness	7,700	1.6%			
Roman Catholics	454,000	92.6%	507,000	86.7%	0.7%
Pentecostals/Charismatics	36,000	7.3%	45,000	7.7%	1.5%
Evangelicals	9,800	2.0%	13,000	2.2%	1.9%
Muslims	13,500	2.8%	18,000	3.1%	1.9%
adherents of traditional African religions	5,500	1.1%	7,000	1.2%	1.6%
Baha'is	750	0.2%	1,000	0.2%	2.0%
Jews	62	0.0%	65	0.0%	0.3%
people professing no religion	4,300	0.9%	6,500	1.1%	2.7%
Total population	490,000	100.0%	585,000	100.0%	1.2%

Source: Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell TS

The historical, social, political and cultural accommodation of Christianity in Cape Verde is inseparable from the process of European colonization. The occupation, settlement and spatial organization of this archipelago by the Portuguese in the 1460s established a slave regime. Europeans, Portuguese in particular, and enslaved Africans deported from the neighbouring Guinea Coast constituted its population. Although Cape Verde was only officially inscribed in the proclaimed *Respublica Christiana* with the papal bull of 1533, establishing the Diocese of Santiago, churches were being constructed from 1450 and clergymen were sent to the territory as a prerogative granted by the Pope to the King of Portugal.¹ Catholic missions were supported by the slave trade and priests participated in the human traffic by commercializing slaves and using them for domestic tasks.

Among slaves, conversion to Christianity was compulsory and, as happened in other African countries, they simultaneously attended the Catholic mass and African religious practices. At the start, the presence of the Catholic Church was restricted to two islands, Santiago and Fogo. This Catholicism was characterized by irregular contact between Catholic priests and enslaved Africans in those islands, a transitory and seasonal presence in the rest of the islands, and a scarcity of clergymen in the archipelago. This scenario started to change from 1866 onwards with the establishment of the first Catholic seminary in the island of

¹ Maria Emília Santos and Maria João Soares, "Igreja, Missionação e Sociedade", in *História Geral de Cabo Verde, Vol. II*, coord. Maria Emília Santos (Lisboa, Praia: Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga – Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical, Instituto Nacional de Investigação Cultural, 2001): 359-508, 364.

São Nicolau, dedicated to graduate local priests and civil servants. During the 1940s and 1950s, the islands experienced a consolidation period of the Catholic catechism following two events that marked a definitive turning-point of Catholicism in Cape Verde: the signature of a Concordat in 1940 and the Missionary Agreement in 1941.² The first became a pivotal political instrument by reinforcing the role of the Catholic Church in the public sphere of Cape Verdean society.

The second event opened the archipelago to three Catholic missions: the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, the Salesians and the Capuchins. During this time, one of the most interesting Christian movements emerged from the rural areas of Santiago Island: the *rabelados*.³ This religious movement emerged in the 1940s as an insurgence against new practices introduced by priests of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, which intended to ban some practices taken as legacies from African funeral traditions and religious practices of the Santiago Catholic liturgy.⁴ The constitution of the *rabelados* community, led by charismatic leaders such as Nhonhô Landim or Nhô Fernando, combined the insurgence against the church and the colonial state. Conflicts of this nature extended in various ways during the post-independence period. The *rabelados* way of life, with its millenarian, prophetic and 'anti-modern' approach and the persecution it suffered, illuminates the overlapping of the religious and political struggles of colonialism. Led by Spiritans and colonial authorities during those decades, this persecution was an attempt to control religion in the public sphere, and it also targeted the Protestant church already established in the islands, with big temples in the core of the villages and cities, the Church of the Nazarene. This church, born in the USA, was established at Cape Verde in the 1900s by João José Dias, a Cape Verdean migrant in the USA, at a time when others religions, except Catholics, were prohibited.⁵

In 1936, Nazarene missionaries from the USA followed Dias. Despite early persecution, the Church of the Nazarene spread to all the islands, gained prestige among the civil authorities and the Cape Verdean society, and became the best-known Protestant church in the islands. In the 1950s, American Nazarene missionaries organized the Nazarene Seminar in the island of São Vicente, where many local pastors were trained. Many exercised their pastorate in Cape Verde; others were sent off as missionaries abroad. In 2009, one of these pastors, Eugénio Rosa Duarte, was elected General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene.

Throughout the twentieth century, other Christian denominations emerged in the archipelago: in 1933, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, led by another Cape Verdean migrant from the USA, António Gomes,⁶ in the 1950s, the Evangelical Baptist Church, led by Manuel Ramos⁷; and, in 1958, the Jehovah's Witnesses. More recently, with the independence of the country in 1975, another phase of Christianization began with the emergence of other Christian churches. Two of them, the New Apostolic Church and the

² Cf. Frederico Cerrone, *História da Igreja de Cabo Verde* (Mindelo: Gráfica do Mindelo, 1983): 47.

³ See Edith Laserra Muñiz, and Bargados, Alberto López, *Fidjos de Rabelado: Arte y lógicas de contestación en la isla de Santiago de Cabo Verde* (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2012).

⁴ Cf. Muñiz and Bargados, "Fidjos de Rabelado", 42-43.

⁵ See Francisco Xavier Ferreira, *Primórdios do Evangelho em Cabo Verde* (Edição do autor, 1972); João Mateus Monteiro, "The Church of the Nazarene in Cape Verde: a Religious Import in a Creole Society". PhD Thesis (New Jersey, Drew University, 1997); Filomena Ramos Lima, "História da Igreja do Nazareno – Uma Igreja Centenária em Cabo Verde (1901 – 2001) – Uma Perspectiva Educacional". Dissertação de Mestrado – (Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2009). The proclamation of the Portuguese Republic in 1910 allowed, a few months later in February 1911, the introduction of the laws that ensured religious freedom. In the same year, the Christian Rationalist doctrine started to be diffused in the archipelago, mainly in São Vicente Island, gaining sympathy and followers in the Catholic circle. See João Vasconcelos, *Histórias do Racionalismo Cristão em São Vicente, de 1911 a 1940* (São Vicente: Comissão Organizadora da Comemoração do 1º Centenário do Racionalismo Cristão em Cabo Verde, 2011).

⁶ See Karl Marx Monteiro, *O que dizer dos Adventistas em Cabo Verde? – Um estudo de caso* (Praia: Tipografia Santos, 2012).

⁷ See Manuel Ramos, *A Origem dos Baptistas em Cabo Verde* (Mindelo: Gráfica do Mindelo, 1996).

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were established at Cape Verde in the 1980s. From the 1990s onwards, the South-South missionary enterprise was established, with the arrival of the Assembly of God, God is Love Pentecostal Church and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, from Brazil; Deeper Life Bible Church and Redeemed Christian Church of God from Nigeria; and the Bom Deus Church from Angola.

According to the census of 2010, the vast majority of Cape Verdeans identify themselves as Christians, in particular with the Catholic Church. Recently, this church saw its influence in the public sphere reinforced with the signature of a Concordat in 2013 between the Cape Verdean state and the Vatican City, and with the recent appointment of the first Cape Verdean cardinal, the bishop of the Santiago Diocese, Arlindo Furtado. The alliance between the state and the Catholic Church, increasing the institutional privileges of the latter, was contested in some religious and secular Cape Verdean circles. But the authorities justified it as the recognition to the role of the Catholic Church in the constitution of Cape Verdean identity. These facts testify to the status that is given to the Catholic Church and to Christianity in general, despite its controversial implications for the process of building the secular state.

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