Globethics Repository



Christianity in Angola (47)

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Chianeque, Luciano Chanhelela
Publisher	Regnum Books International
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-11-15 15:33:17
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166347

(47) CHRISTIANITY IN ANGOLA

Luciano Chanhelela Chianeque

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	19,906,000	93.8%	32,359,000	95.1%	3.3%
Independents	878,000	4.1%	1,320,000	3.9%	2.8%
African initiated	501,000	2.4%			
Protestants	5,354,000	25.2%	9,245,000	27.2%	3.7%
Pentecostal	2,300,000	10.8%			
Congregational	850,000	4.0%			
Adventist	608,000	2.9%			
Brethren	500,000	2.4%			
Baptist	382,000	1.8%			
Reformed, Presbyterian	279,000	1.3%			
Methodist	213,000	1.0%			
Roman Catholics	12,508,000	58.9%	20,000,000	58.8%	3.2%
Pentecostals/Charismatics	4,488,000	21.2%	6,000,000	17.6%	2.0%
Evangelicals	3,939,000	18.6%	5,542,000	16.3%	2.3%
adherents of traditional African religions	903,000	4.3%	1,000,000	2.9%	0.7%
Muslims	213,000	1.0%	340,000	1.0%	3.2%
Baha'is	2,100	0.0%	3,500	0.0%	3.4%
Buddhists	1,700	0.0%	2,200	0.0%	1.9%
Hindus	390	0.0%	500	0.0%	1.7%
Chinese folk-religionists	170	0.0%	200	0.0%	1.2%
people professing no religion	194,000	0.9%	310,000	0.9%	3.2%
Total population	**21,220,000**	**100.0%**	**34,016,000**	**100.0%**	**3.2%**

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

Introduction

Angola is situated in the south-west part of Africa, specifically in the Southern Africa region. Before the colonizers arrived from Portugal in 1482, the cluster of people in Angola lived together in harmony. The country, called Angola today, was governed by tribal kingdoms like Mbakongo, Ndongo, Mbundu, Kwanyama, Nganguela, Cokwe and others. Some of these kingdoms paid tribute to those who were stronger than them. It is true that those tribes who were not so strong paid tribute to those stronger than them, and this was considered normal in those societies. The current borders of Angola, decided by Europeans in 1885, do not represent the true reality of our people. Some of these tribes and kingdoms spread to other neighbouring countries. Before colonial rule, the tribes and kingdoms had their social

structures in place. They developed rudimentary agriculture, hunting and fishing, as is still being done today. The education system worked, using the local social structures called *Onjango* for the education of boys and *Ochiwo* for girls. The education used here was holistic. Usually it was done from the senior people of a village to the younger generation orally. These structures taught mathematical calculations, moral values, ethics and professions through experience. Through the elders, who had knowledge of healing powers of traditional medicines, an efficient health structure was in place. Amongst the tribes of Angola, the largest is Mbundu, representing almost half the entire population.

According to the history of this country, Christianity in Angola began officially in 1491, with a Catholic mission station built in the São Salvador area (Zaire Province). João I, Manikongo of the powerful Kongo Kingdom and his son Afonso I, were converted to Christianity. The two of them were well-known figures, reigning from 1509 to 1543.[1]

> In 1878, the first Protestant missionaries, British Baptists, arrived in Angola. In 1880, they were followed by Congregationalists from the ex-American Board for Missions who arrived in Benguela. They then headed to the centre of Angola, establishing mission stations in Bailundo, Camundongo, Chilesso, Chissamba, Elende, Dondi, Galangui, Lobito, Huambo and Kuito. In 1885, Methodist missionaries arrived from America and set up their missions in Luanda, Quessua and Malanje. In 1897, the Angola Evangelical Mission was established in Cabinda, and the North Angola Mission started in 1925, in Uíge. In contemporary Angola, the Ovimbundu people are one of the most heavily Christianised groups.[2]
>
> Religious affiliation in Angola was difficult to define because many who claimed membership in a specific Christian denomination also shared perceptions of the natural and supernatural order characteristic of indigenous religious systems.[3] Sometimes the Christian sphere of the life of a community was institutionally separate from the indigenous sphere. In other cases, the local meaning and practice of Christianity were modified by indigenous patterns of belief and practice.
>
> Although Roman Catholic missions were largely staffed by non-Portuguese missionaries during the colonial era, the relevant statutes and accords provided that foreign missionaries could be admitted only with the approval of the Portuguese government and the Vatican, and on condition that they be integrated with the Portuguese missionary organization. Foreign Roman Catholic missionaries were required to renounce the laws of their own country, submit to Portuguese law, and furnish proof of their ability to speak and write the Portuguese language correctly. Missionary activity was placed under the authority of Portuguese priests. All of this was consistent with the Colonial Act of 1930, which advanced the view that Portuguese Catholic missions overseas were 'instruments of civilization and Portuguese national influence'. In 1940, the education of Africans was declared the exclusive responsibility of missionary personnel. All church activities, education included, were to be subsidized by the state. In reality, Protestant missions were permitted to engage in educational activity, but without subsidy and on condition that Portuguese be the language of instruction.[4]
>
> The important Protestant missions (or their predecessors) in place in the 1960s had arrived in Angola in the late nineteenth century. Thus, they had been at work before the Portuguese managed to establish control over the entire territory. Their early years, therefore, were little affected by Portuguese policy and practice. Before the establishment of the New State (*Estado Novo*) in Portugal in 1926, the authorities kept an eye on the Protestant missions but were not particularly hostile to them. Settlers and local administrators were often hostile, however, because Protestant missionaries tended to be protective of what they considered their charges. In those early years and later, Protestant missionaries were not only evangelists but also teachers, healers and counsellors – all perhaps in a paternal fashion but in ways that involved contact with Africans in a more sustained fashion than was characteristic of Roman Catholic missionaries and local administrators. Protestant missionaries worked at

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jo%C3%A3o_I_of_Kongo
[2] Lawrence Henderson, *The Church in Angola: A River of Many Currents* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1990).
[3] A major part of the following paragraphs is taken from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Angola.
[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_Empire.

> learning the local languages, in part to communicate better with those in their mission field, but above all in order to translate the Old Testament and New Testaments into African tongues.
>
> Protestant missionaries were much more likely than administrators and settlers to know a local language. Roman Catholic missionaries did not similarly emphasize the translation of the Bible and, with some exceptions, did not make a point of learning a Bantu language.[5]
>
> Because specific Protestant denominations were associated with particular ethnic communities, the structure of religious organization was linked with the structure of these communities. This connection was brought about in part by the tendency of entire communities to turn to the variety of Protestantism offered locally. The conversion of isolated individuals was rare. Those individuals who did not become Christians remained to a greater or lesser extent adherents of the indigenous system; unless they migrated to one of the larger towns, persons of a specific locality did not have the option of another kind of Christianity. Those members of a community who had not yet become Christians were tied by kinship and propinquity to those individuals who had converted. On the one hand, indigenous patterns of social relationships affected church organization; on the other hand, the presence of Christians in the community affected the local culture to varying degrees. Christians who could quote Scripture in the local languages contributed phrases to it that others picked up. The attributes of the Christian God as interpreted by the specific denomination sometimes became attached to the high god of the indigenous religious system and typically made that deity more prominent than previously.[6]

The involvement of the Protestant churches in the languages of their mission areas, their medical and other welfare activity, and their ability to adapt to local structures or (in the case of the Methodists among the Mbundu) to be fortuitously consistent with them gave Protestants much more influence than their numbers would suggest. For example, the leaders of the three major nationalist movements in the 1960s – the MPLA, UNITA, and the FNLA – had been raised as Protestants, and many others in these movements were also Protestants, even if their commitment diminished over time.

The Future for Angola?

In an article entitled 'Theological Education in Angola and Mozambique', I pointed out that there is a need for a new model of theological education, which at the same time is proactive, preventive and curative: one that redefines and rediscovers according to the perspective of the kingdom of God. I went further to argue for a new orientation of theological education which better empowers the gifts and ministries of fellow Christians to serve as agents for the kingdom of God, which can be seen in their daily life, and in the propagation and teaching of the Word of God. I also argued for a theological education that is closer to the people, empowering them so that they may be less vulnerable and susceptible to all sorts of distorted and false doctrines and teaching. Lastly, I emphasized that doing quality theological education was and always has been a major responsibility of the churches themselves. It is possible to get churches recommitted to a higher quality of theological education, and our responsibility is to make it better every day.[7]

I still believe that we need to revisit our Christianity in Angola and come up with the kind that embraces all its sons and daughters, regardless of their social status, sexual orientation or political affiliation. Here I look to Matthew 25 for direction and the correct answers are there: 'If you have done it to one of these little children, you have done it to me.'

Our churches are not going to overcome stigma and discrimination regarding those members challenged with HIV and AIDS-related illness in our communities if we are not able to look our fellow Christians in

[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_administration.
[6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination.
[7] Luciano Chianeque, "Theological Education in Angola and Mozambique," in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa,* edited by Isabel Phiri and Dietrich Werner, 218-222 (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013).

the eye and learn with them what we do not yet know. Christianity in Angola has to leave behind the self-pity approach in order to earn the government's favour. It is true that the Portuguese government treated Protestants in a hostile way or simply tolerated them, and they did with them what they wished. Today, our Constitution says that all denominations are equal before the law.

Christianity in Angola has a long way to go. First and foremost, those who announce it need to be completely transformed by the word they preach. These should be a catalyst. This is a big challenge. Many other challenges remain. How can we open up universities that are not going to penalize students who are Seventh Day Adventists, for instance? How can we work for the Kingdom of God and not for our own denominations? Who are we serving? How do we make our common testimony relevant for our current society in Angola? How do we distribute power? Finally, how are we influencing government officials, those who are our colleagues, family members and friends?

Bibliography

Chianeque, L. 'Theological Education in Angola and Mozambique.' In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa,* edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner, 218-222. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013.

Chianeque L. 'A Comparison of the Angolan Diaspora with Their Biblical Counterparts in the Post Exilic Period.' Unpublished Masters´ thesis. University of Durban-Westville, 2000.

Drucker, P. F. *Administrando em Tempos de Grande Mudança*. São Paulo: Thomson Pioneira, 996.

Henderson, L. W. *The Church in Angola: A River of Many Currents.* Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1992.

Johnson-Hill, J. *Seeds of Transformation: Discerning the Ethics of a New Generation.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1998.