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Christianity in Mozambique (79)

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(79) CHRISTIANITY IN MOZAMBIQUE

Felicidade N. Chirinda

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	12,572,000	51.7%	19,957,000	54.7%	3.1%
Independents	3,140,000	12.9%	4,800,000	13.2%	2.9%
African initiated	2,971,000	12.2%			
Orthodox	800	0.0%	800	0.0%	0.0%
Protestants	3,266,000	13.4%	5,400,000	14.8%	3.4%
Pentecostal	1,351,000	5.6%			
Baptist	458,000	1.9%			
Adventist	400,000	1.6%			
Reformed, Presbyterian	357,000	1.5%			
Holiness	243,000	1.0%			
Anglicans	135,000	0.6%			
Roman Catholics	5,291,000	21.8%	8,400,000	23.0%	3.1%
<i>Pentecostals/Charismatics</i>	4,694,000	19.3%	5,900,000	16.2%	1.5%
<i>Evangelicals</i>	2,487,000	10.2%	3,679,000	10.1%	2.6%
adherents of traditional African religions	7,411,000	30.5%	9,768,000	26.8%	1.9%
Muslims	4,186,000	17.2%	6,500,000	17.8%	3.0%
Hindus	38,600	0.2%	50,000	0.1%	1.7%
Chinese folk-religionists	4,400	0.0%	8,000	0.0%	4.0%
Baha'is	2,900	0.0%	5,000	0.0%	3.6%
Buddhists	2,100	0.0%	4,000	0.0%	4.4%
Jews	240	0.0%	200	0.0%	-1.2%
people professing no religion	104,000	0.4%	170,000	0.5%	3.3%
Total population	24,321,000	100.0%	36,462,000	100.0%	2.7%

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

Introduction

The interest in investigating the way in which Christianity was introduced and developed in Mozambique has gradually grown, mainly among foreign researchers. Their major interest has been to understand the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church, the decolonization process, regional integration in Southern Africa, and Church history during the liberation struggle and the post-Independence context in Mozambique.¹

¹ Robert Neil Faris, "A Changing Paradigm of Mission in the Protestant Churches in Mozambique: A Case Study of

The Birth of Christianity and its Impact

Christianity was introduced to Mozambique in 1498, by Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer.² Da Gama was on his trip of discovering the maritime route to India when, in January 1498, he arrived at the port of Inhambane in the south of Mozambique; in March that same year, he berthed at the port of Ilha de Moçambique, where the first Christian worship service and Holy Communion were held. This is considered to have been the beginning of Christianity in Mozambique. Islam had already been established in the region. The two religions lived in confrontation and hatred; therefore, the local people were forced to choose the religion that could protect them, by giving them their land and wealth.

It is a fact that the major Portuguese intention in Africa and India was commerce and trade in gold and spices. That is why twenty-three merchant-ships were sent to Vasco da Gama, during his presence on the east coast of Africa, so that he could establish a strong Portuguese presence in the region. Because of the way in which Christianity was introduced into the country, historians affirm that the Portuguese arrived with guns in one hand and with the Bible and the Cross in the other. The guns terrorized the population because they were used for coercion, for domination and for the destruction of people's lives, including their rich culture.³

In spite of the above, Mozambique owes to the Roman Catholic Church the introduction of Christianity. When missionaries like the Jesuits and Dominicans arrived, they established the first mission in 1560 and initiated evangelization of the natives in Zambezia, Manica, Sofala and Tete. They were successful in converting many people, including King Monomotapa. These conversions were undertaken through the efforts of Gonçalo da Silveira. This missionary used to be accompanied by soldiers in his evangelistic work, because of confrontations with Muslims. This fact caused suspicion and the population convinced King Monomotapa that da Silveira was a spy. In March 1561, da Silveira was assassinated under the orders of the King.⁴ The spread of Christianity was thus full of betrayal, bloodshed and injustice, because the evangelistic work was mixed with greed for power and money, an image that damaged the Christian faith and relationships at that time.

As mentioned above, Catholicism remained for more than two hundred years the main Christian religion in Mozambique. However, in spite of all the privileges that the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed, it could not provide the native population with more than a rudimentary education.⁵

The Impact of Protestantism

During the second half of the nineteenth century, South Africa became a privileged destination for many people, including Mozambican citizens. The main reason that caused people to migrate to South Africa was the discovery of gold and diamonds, whose industry provided job opportunities to Mozambicans who became workers in the mines. The other reason was the war that devastated Southern Africa. Many immigrants were contacted by Protestant churches to be converted, and those who were converted

Eduardo Mondlane" (PhD Thesis 2007), 12.

² Antonio Garcia, SJ, "Pêro de Covilhã, o Primeiro Católico Europeu a Visitar Sofala" em *História de Moçambique Cristão*, 17-28; A.C. Saunders, *Historia Social dos Escravos e Libertos Negros em Portugal (1441-1555)* (Lisboa, Portugal: Temas Portugueses 1982), 75.

³ Justo L. González, "O Reino Vândalo da África" em *História Ilustrada do Cristianismo – A Era dos Reformadores até à Inconclusa*- 2 ed.rev. (São Paulo: Vida Nova, 2011), 230-231; Simão Chamango, "Chegada do Evangelho em Moçambique" (Maputo, 1987), 8.

⁴ Jan Butselaar, "Os Portugueses em Moçambique" em *Africanos, Missionários e Colonialistas*, 20; António Garcia, "Pêro de Covilhã, o Primeiro Católico Europeu a visitar Sofala 1489 e, Gonçalo da Silveira, Proto- Mártir de Moçambique e da África Austral" em *História de Moçambique Cristão*, 17-32; 91-93.

⁵ Faris "A Changing Paradigm of Mission in the Protestant Churches in Mozambique," 12.

introduced the Protestant faith to Mozambique. During their holidays or home visits, they started their own churches. Some of them were later followed by white missionaries who had started the historic churches. Others developed as African Independent Churches (AIC's).⁶ The Portuguese colonial regime did not welcome the proliferation of Protestants. At the beginning, they considered those who attended these Protestant churches as ignorant people, so their activities were restricted to the south of Mozambique, and this was interpreted as these Protestant churches being pushed to the margins,⁷ and when they started building schools, hospitals, agricultural settlements and providing theological training, the hatred only increased. Protestants were persecuted, imprisoned and assassinated⁸ but, much of the time, the reasons were not disclosed. The Protestants recognized that working as individual churches was dangerous. Therefore, they agreed to work ecumenically, and in 1948 they launched the Christian Council of Mozambique.

Ecumenism

The Mozambicans received from the institutions under the Christian Council an education that provided them with an alternative identity. This identity identified them as human beings created in God's image, as Christians and as Mozambicans. The conditions were created for them to use artistically their vernacular languages in the fight against injustice with pride. Theological training challenged their inferiority complex. Ecumenism was also a tool by which the church interacted locally and internationally with others. African Christians learned how to listen and critically analyze and question social and religious issues. Critical analysis allowed them to understand their roles as peace-makers and to foresee the future of their country and the church. Many Mozambicans, women and men, gave their lives in order to liberate their country not only from colonialism, but also from oppression and injustice.

Mozambique became independent in June 1975, becoming a Popular Republic. After Independence, churches experienced new forms of marginalization. They had to face the Marxist-Leninist ideology in order to defend and to remain accountable for their Christian faith. Many Christians found themselves in a dilemma of loyalties between their faith and the political party, while others felt a strong sense of betrayal.⁹ As usual in such crises, religion had to find its place in the new social order. This made church leaders unite their efforts in reflecting on the kind of relationship they needed to maintain with the state. The answer was given in Paul's letter to the Romans (13:1-7), and it reinforced the affirmation of the church reformers Luther and Calvin.¹⁰ The church was also challenged by a new war between Mozambicans, when the National Movement of Resistance (RENAMO) was created, forcing the country to face a new war that lasted for sixteen years. This war was supported by the apartheid regime of South Africa and other countries from abroad. Mozambique's infrastructure and people's lives were destroyed; the country was bleeding and badly wounded. Many people had abandoned religion and the church, but they came back and

⁶ Jan Butselaar, "Três Povos, Três Culturas" (8, 16); Patrick Harries "Cristianismo" em *Junod e as Sociedades Africanas* (Maputo: CIEDIMA, 2007), 75-95; Teresa Cruz e Silva, "A Missão Suíça, Religião e Sociedade" em *Igrejas Protestantes e Consciência Política no Sul de Moçambique: O Caso da Missão Suíça. (1930-1974)* (Maputo: CIEDIMA, 2001), 40.

⁷ Charles Biber. "Cent Ans au Mozambique: Le Parcours d'une Minorité" (Lausanne, 1992), 9.

⁸ Teresa Cruz e Silva, "Porquê Mataram Manganhela?" em *Zedequias Manganhela – Uma Biografia Contextualizada. (1912-1972)* (Maputo: Norprint 2014), 114.

⁹ Felicidade Naume Chirinda "Positive Impact of Autonomy and Identity Formation" in *Autonomy of the Igreja Presbiteriana de Moçambique – Pastoral Concern for Liberation*. (PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2012), 79-84; Faris "A Changing Paradigm of Mission," 12.

¹⁰ Félix Abena Mbembe, "Luther, Calvin et les enjeux de la cohabitation entre l'Église et l'État" en *Eglise et Pouvoir Politique en Afrique" Perspectives Théologiques et Historiques*. Simon K Dossou (éditeur scientifique) (Éditions CLÉ, Yaoundé and CETA, Nairobi 2013), 151-156.

a new revival was started, while the church continued to work ecumenically. So the Christian Council of Mozambique suggested its envoys meet with Renamo in the diaspora, while internally it was in dialogue with the government. The church worked tirelessly in mobilizing the community for prayer and worship, and in civic education for young people and adults. A ceasefire was achieved in 1990 followed by a long process of discussion that ended with the signing of a peace agreement at Sant'Egídio in Rome, which opened the door to co-operation between the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. In 1994, the first democratic elections took place.¹¹ A new social order was established and the churches found their place in the secular state.

The Church Facing New Challenges and Opportunities

As demonstrated above, the number of new churches and Christian associations has increased in recent years. This compelled us to ask why this increase and what it meant for the development of Christianity in Africa.

The political changes after the 1992 Peace Agreement transformed the country from a centralized economy to a market one. This new situation created opportunities for civil society – that is, it increased involvement in social issues that had been reserved for the state. The churches gained a new vision and worked ecumenically as never before.¹² Thus, they were able to mobilize the whole community thoroughly, in order to continue the pacification of the country, as well as gathering and destroying the weapons (the *Transformação de Armas em Enxadas* [TAE] Project. In English "Transforming Guns into Hoes"). This also mobilized society to embrace the new social order positively. The churches were also involved in health issues, especially the struggle against HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, as well as in the defence of our planet, through their involvement in issues of climate change as well as in the Extractive Industry Programme, by preventing conflict between the companies and the population living in the surrounding areas. The Christian Council of Mozambique is a good example of the defence of the population's rights.¹³

These new trends helped the Protestant church to recognize and to affirm working together with the Catholic Church as well as with Muslims and Hindus. This is the example of the Electoral Observatory, composed of different religious institutions and national NGOs. While the churches were making efforts to reduce political intolerance, the RENAMO leader Afonso Dhlakama decided to go back to the bush in October 2013. The Christian churches, Muslim leaders and national NGOs were organized by the Electoral Observatory to initiate a new dialogue with Afonso Dhlakama. They travelled many times to Gorongosa in order to meet him. The dialogue was multi-faceted, because the team also met the Republic President Armando Guebuza, the leaders of the Mozambican Parliament, the senior leaders of Renamo in Maputo and the wider community, in order to mobilize them for peaceful participation in elections and for their monitoring. This is one of the powerful examples of how the new trends pressed the churches and religious leaders into exercising their pastoral care and counselling ministries.

During this critical period, religious leaders created another ecumenical faith-based organisation called the Council of Religions in Mozambique or COREM. One of its objectives has been to address the issue of physical health, such as the prevention of infant and mother deaths, malnutrition, child abuse, premature

¹¹ Iraê Baptista Ludinin, "Participação Política do Cidadão numa Sociedade em Mudança: desafio das abstenções nas eleições de 2008 e de 2009 em Moçambique" em *Moçambique Democrático Espelhado nas Eleições Autárquicas, Presidenciais, Legislativas e Assembleias Provinciais de 2008-2009* (Maputo, CIEDIMA, SARL 2012), 14; Nicholas Otieno and Hugh McCullum, *Journey of Hope – Towards a New Ecumenical Africa* (Geneva: WCC Publications 2005), 84.

¹² Otieno and McCullum, "Journey of Hope," 87.

¹³ Ludin, "Moçambique Democrático," 44.

marriages, concerns on education and other issues around physical, spiritual and psychological health. When President Armando Guebuza and Afonso Dhlakama signed the ‘Hostilities Cessation Agreement’ on 5th September 2014, religious leaders announced the creation of a network for reconciliation and peace: RRRP (Religious Network for Reconciliation and Peace). This new network challenged the religious community in Mozambique to demonstrate the relevance of its unity and willingness to address and assure reconciliation, peace and dignity for all citizens.

The Place and Role of Christianity in Mozambique Today

My experience as a theologian and clergywoman shows that Christianity in Mozambique is a blessing to society. My affirmation is sustained by the calls and appeals that are made by society in general, which urge the church to take the lead against violence, road accidents, murder, HIV and AIDS, land conflicts, kidnapping, human trafficking and the trafficking of human organs – besides other issues that dehumanize and humiliate human society. Such appeals include leadership accountability as an indispensable ingredient for reconciliation and peace, while they serve to remind religious leaders that they are an integral part of society and have to contextualize their theology.

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