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(66A) CHRISTIANITY IN GUINEA BISSAU

Chammah J. Kaunda and Luciano Chianeque

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	194,000	11.8%	300,000	13.0%	3.0%
Independents	40,300	2.5%	61,000	2.7%	2.8%
Protestants	25,100	1.5%	45,300	2.0%	4.0%
Evangelical churches	18,600	1.1%			
Roman Catholics	169,000	10.3%	245,000	10.6%	2.5%
Pentecostals/Charismatics	49,400	3.0%	80,000	3.5%	3.3%
Evangelicals	22,200	1.4%	38,000	1.7%	3.7%
Muslims	733,000	44.9%	1,099,000	47.8%	2.7%
adherents of traditional African religions	686,000	42.0%	870,000	37.8%	1.6%
Baha'is	280	0.0%	300	0.0%	0.5%
people professing no religion	20,700	1.3%	31,600	1.4%	2.8%
Total population	1,634,000	100.0%	2,301,000	100.0%	2.3%

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

Guinea Bissau is on the west coast of Africa, bounded to the west and south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the north by Senegal, and to the east and south by Guinea. Guinea Bissau came into contact with Europeans through Portuguese explorers in 1446. The Roman Catholic Franciscan order arrived in 1462. In 1532, the diocese of St James of Cape Verde was established. The diocese was responsible for mission work on the mainland but the process of evangelization was very slow. In May 1940, a Concordat¹ between the Holy See² and Portugal was signed. This resulted in the separation of Guinea Bissau mission work from Cape Verde that same year.³

The Protestant tradition came through the World Evangelical Crusade (now WEC International) from the UK in 1939.⁴ They established themselves in Bolama, the old capital of Guinea Bissau, which was then an overseas province of Portugal. Soon after their arrival in the country, they made their first convert, Ms Guilhermina Barbosa, who was known as Mimi. From that date, the work of evangelization continued with the participation of missionaries from the US and Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. The missionary work reached the regional areas of Guinea Bissau, Bassora, Biombo as well as the archipelagos of Bijagós and

¹ René Metz defines a concordat as a formal agreement or a treaty between the Holy See and a sovereign state that defines the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state with regard to the mutually concerned matters. See his, *What is Canon Law?* (first edition) (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960), 137.

² The Holy See is the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in Rome, the episcopal see of the Pope.

³ John Pobee, "Guinea-Bissau," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity, Volume 2* (E-I), eds. Erwin Fahlbusch *et al* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 2001): 487-488.

⁴ Hazel Willis, *Light Shines in the Darkness: The Story of the Evangelical Church of Guinea Bissau, 1940-1974* (Bulstrode, UK: WEC, 1996).

Cantio. Its work resulted in the creation of one the largest Protestant congregations, called the Evangelical Church. This work included medical service.⁵

The New Apostolic Church of Germany arrived in the country in the 1970s and also resulted in the emergence of the largest non-Catholic Christian tradition in Guinea Bissau.⁶ The work of the New Apostolic Church in Guinea-Bissau continues to be in the care of the German District Church of North Rhine-Westphalia.

There is also a small Anglican community of the Province of West Africa and the small Guinea Bissau mission of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which is part of the larger Sahel Union Mission consisting of a number of other West African countries.⁷

The armed struggle which started in 1963 confined evangelization to Bissau as the Christian activists were perceived as freedom fighters. Many of them were killed – for instance, in the north, Mr Mormoso, and in the south, Mr Victor Martins, who thus became Christian martyrs. During this period, many people migrated to the neighbouring countries of Guinea (aka Guinea-Conakry), Senegal and Gambia.⁸

After independence from Portugal in 1974, many Christians who had previously left the country started to return, which gave a different momentum to the work of evangelization. Missionaries started to come from all over the world: the USA, UK, Holland and Brazil.

Politically, the country became multi-party in 1990. With this change, the country saw the mushrooming of new political parties and opened up to the world to the point that new Christian denominations began to work there as well. These denominations are JOCUM (Youth with a Mission), Assemblies of God, the Baptist Church, and others. Today there are more than twenty-five Christian denominations.

Yet there is no ecumenical body in the country that can supervise all these denominations. However, the personal relationships between these church leaders are excellent on a personal level. When there is any need to speak with one voice, there is a problem within the existing denominations in the country. In 1999, civil war destroyed much of the mission work in the interior, forcing the workers to flee to the western part of the country. Despite these challenges, evangelistic work continues to thrive in the country and the Bible has been translated into three local languages.⁹

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⁵ H. Willis, *Light Shines in the Darkness*.

⁶ J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Facts on File, 2005).

⁷ Melton, *Encyclopedia of Protestantism*.

⁸ Stephanie Urdang, "Fighting Two Colonialisms: The Women's Struggle in Guinea-Bissau," *African Studies Review* 18, no. 3 (Dec. 1975): 29-34.

⁹ Pobee, "Guinea-Bissau."