

Christ and the revolutionary process in Angola: a description of the stance of Protestant churches in the period of nationalism (1961-1975)

Miguel da Piedade Satjyambula 

ORCID iD <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3125-7397>

ABSTRACT

This article endeavors to elucidate the stance embraced by Protestant churches amidst the anti-colonial struggle in Angola spanning from 1961 to 1975. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the missionary expansion in Angola, particularly highlighting the advent of Protestantism in the region. Subsequently, it delves into the intricate dynamics between Protestant missions and nationalist movements, ultimately leading to the Portuguese government's reaction, characterized initially by the suppression of individuals affiliated with liberation movements and subsequently by the shuttering of numerous Protestant missions across the country. The review of pertinent scholarly literature will serve as the methodological underpinning to substantiate our inquiry.

KEYWORDS:

Protestant missions; Nationalism; Colonialism; Angola

Cristo e o processo revolucionário em Angola: uma descrição da postura das igrejas protestantes no período do nacionalismo (1961-1975)

RESUMO

o propósito deste artigo é descrever a posição adotada pelas igrejas protestantes durante a luta anticolonial em Angola (1961-1975). Pretende-se, assim, apresentar a história da expansão missionária em Angola, com especial destaque para a chegada dos protestantes neste território. Em seguida, abordar-se-ão as interações estabelecidas entre as missões protestantes e os movimentos nacionalistas, culminando na resposta do governo português, que inicialmente resultou na repressão dos envolvidos com os movimentos libertários e, posteriormente, no fechamento de diversas missões protestantes pelo país. A revisão da literatura especializada será o método utilizado para embasar o nosso estudo.

 Doutorando em Humanidades, Direitos e Outras Legitimidades (Universidade de São Paulo); Mestre em Ciências das Religiões (Faculdade Unida de Vitória, Brasil); Bacharel em Teologia (Faculdade Unida de Vitória, Brasil); Bacharel em Relações Internacionais (UNINTER, Brasil). Membro do Centro de Estudos Filosóficos e Humanísticos da Universidade Católica Portuguesa (Braga); membro do grupo de pesquisa Temáticas, narrativas e representações árabes, africanas, asiáticas e sul-americanas e de comunidades diaspóricas, da Universidade de São Paulo; membro do Núcleo de Apoio à Pesquisa Brasil África, da Universidade de São Paulo. Emails: miguelsatyambula12@gmail.com; miguelsatyambula2025@usp.br.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Igrejas protestantes; nacionalismo; colonialismo; Angola.

Kiluisi l'onyandeko y'ongeko mu Angola: ekapo ly'asongeke acilisitu (iprotestante) p'otembo y'uyaki w'elimba lyo kulyowola (1961-1975)

MBONEKERO

Ocimãho c'utokeko wulo, okusapula oposição asongeke acilisitu (iprotestante) vakwata v'yowo yofeka yo Angola ko tulo k'otembo y'uyaki wetavo colonial (1961-1975). K'oncuka eyi, ndepo tupa opalapala yefikilo l'okuvala kw'olumisionario vi veyile mu Angola, l'ocipango c'ofeka yoku kapa ovisola v'ekanda ly'asongeke protestantes. K'okuya kwofeka eyi, tukalingisa oku kapa pokati kalumisionario v'iprotestante l'olumyango lw'onjimbo y'ofeka (nacionalistas), okuyaki c'esulilo ly'ombanja p'oku sapula etuliso l'akwatise k'omboka yo governo português. Okuyapula oku, kwatwala k'oku fukila vana vakwatisile mu lyowo ly'uyaki lyo lyofeka, eye k'esulilo kwa yikila olumisionario olueke v'ofeka yosi. Etokolo l'oku setula ovingavelo pyakula (revisão da literatura especializada) eno onde yapangiwa mekonda ly'oku papala eyilukilo lyeto.

OYOLONDAKA VY'ESILILO

Igrejas protestantes; nacionalismo; colonialismo; Angola.

Introdução

While the primary focus of this article is to elucidate the role of Protestant churches in the Angolan nationalist movement, it is imperative to acknowledge that participation in colonial resistance was not confined to Protestantism alone. Conversely, numerous Catholics, both clergy and laity, were actively engaged in the struggle for national liberation. Moreover, within both Protestantism and Catholicism, factions existed that aligned themselves with the colonial government.

Henceforth, it is crucial to address this issue, as there has been significant injustice perpetrated against Catholics stemming from a propagandist narrative suggesting that Protestants aligned themselves with liberation movements, while Catholics upheld the colonial system. Within Protestantism, as cautioned by Pastor Schubert in the third chapter of his doctoral thesis, there were factions that regarded colonial rule as legitimate and divinely ordained (Schubert, 2000).

Criticism of the colonial system and advocacy for national liberation movements constituted significant grounds for persecution by the PIDE (The International and State Defense Police)¹, the Portuguese political police force

¹ The Portuguese political police between 1945 and 1969, responsible for the repression of all forms of opposition to the political regime of the Estado Novo.

active between 1945 and 1969, tasked with suppressing all forms of opposition to the Estado Novo political regime. To illustrate the fallacy of assuming uniform Catholic support for the colonial regime, it is pertinent to cite instances of persecution against certain priests. Dom Mata Mourisca, as cited by Neves (2007), provides a roster of Catholic individuals who fell victim to colonial repression, notably including several prominent figures within the church hierarchy. Among these individuals are Father Alexandre do Nascimento (Archbishop Emeritus of Luanda), Canon Monsignor Manuel das Neves, Father Manuel Franklin da Costa (formerly Bishop of Saurimo, Archbishop of Huambo and Lubango), Father Joaquim Pinto de Andrade, Father Lino Guimarães, Father Vicente José Rafael, Father Domingos Gaspar, Father Alfredo Osório, and Father Martinho Campos.

All of these priests faced persecution, with many being subjected to arrests for their support of the uprising that transpired on March 15, 1961, marking the commencement of the armed resistance against colonial rule. According to Angolan historian Carlos Pacheco, Canon Manuel das Neves emerged as a prominent leader of the 1961 rebellion, as delineated in the ensuing passage:



At the genesis of the 1961 rebellion, serving as its catalyst, stood Canon Manuel Joaquim Mendes das Neves, of mixed-race heritage, hailing from the village of Golungo-Alto and holding a secular missionary role within the archdiocese of Luanda. Among his confidants, he articulated the conviction that the moment had arrived to instigate a forceful upheaval within the Portuguese colonial apparatus, given the myriad injustices perpetrated against Africans. Nearly three hundred men heeded his call and rallied under the banner of revolt (Pacheco, 2006).

Upon scrutinizing the aforementioned passage, it becomes evident that this priest was deeply immersed in the spirit of liberation that characterized the era. Another equally significant testimony, drawn from Father Manuel Gonçalves and cited by Neves (2007), further fortifies the notion put forth by the Angolan historian regarding the pivotal role of Manuel das Neves in this milieu:

In the tumultuous atmosphere of Luanda, enduring considerable persecution from Europeans, Canon Manuel das Neves emerged as one of the foremost targets. Holding the positions of Vicar-General and Parish Priest of the Cathedral, he found himself entwined with members of both the MPLA and FNLA parties, who

were clandestinely plotting for independence. However, his involvement never transgressed legal boundaries; he confined himself to offering counsel and aid to the families of "patriots" who faced arrest. It appears likely that he played a significant role in inspiring the events of February 4th. Nonetheless, slanderous rumors circulated among the European populace, alleging that he poisoned the communion hosts, concealed weapons behind the cathedral's altar, and solicited funds for the "conspirators." Despite facing criticism and hostility, D. Moisés steadfastly maintained that his Vicar-General had committed no wrongdoing (p. 521).

Canon Manuel das Neves emerged as a towering figure in the anti-colonial resistance, earning recognition from Pastor Schubert as a genuine hero of the struggle (Schubert, 2000). However, his active participation led to his arrest and subsequent transfer to Portugal, where he was held at the Casa de Retiros de Soutelo in Braga, a Jesuit establishment, until his passing. Following Angola's independence, the Angolan government requested his remains, and his funeral was held in his homeland, where he was hailed and revered as a national hero (Neves, 2007).

While numerous instances of Catholic persecution have been detailed previously, the primary focus of this article remains the narrative of Protestant movements in the battle against colonialism. Within this framework, three groups warrant special attention: the Baptist, Congregational, and Methodist churches. Although other Protestant denominations, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists, also existed in Angola during this period, these three factions notably distinguished themselves in the struggle for liberation. Thus, before delving into their involvement in armed resistance against colonial rule, it is pertinent to briefly trace the arrival of Protestants in Portuguese overseas territories.

Beginning of the mission and the arrival of Protestants in Angola

The Christianization of Angola finds its roots intertwined with the Age of Exploration, spearheaded initially by the Portuguese and later by other seafaring nations. In 1482, Diogo Cão made landfall in Angola and forged connections with Dom Afonso I, the king of Congo. Through the agreements struck, Diogo Cão transported four Angolan individuals to Lisbon, where they received instruction in the Catholic faith and were baptized. These individuals

returned to Angola in 1491, accompanied by six Catholic missionaries aboard a caravel. According to Gabriel (1978), this marked the inception of Christianity in Angola. Notably, Muaca (1999) underscores the significance of D. Henrique, Dom Afonso I's son, who became the first black bishop of modern times and is revered as the paramount apostle of the Kingdom of Congo. Muaca highlights that the 40-year reign of Dom Afonso I represented the zenith of evangelization in the Kingdom of Congo.

Turning to the outset of evangelization in Angola, it is pertinent to note the establishment of the Diocese of Congo in 1596, serving as the first diocese in the region. Encompassing the territories of Congo and Angola, its seat was located in São Salvador do Zaire, known today as Mbanza Congo (Ferreira CC, 1996). Noteworthy religious orders such as the Jesuits, Capuchins, Franciscans, and Carmelites played pivotal roles not only in evangelization but also in the education of indigenous populations. Despite the presence of multiple religious orders, the first four centuries of evangelization in Angola yielded minimal success, attributed to various factors elucidated by Gabriel (1981), including the Dutch occupation of Luanda from 1641 to 1648, conflicts in the hinterlands—particularly those involving Queen Jinga—which not only disrupted civil life but also religious activities, the dissolution of the Society of Jesus in the region, and challenges posed by the influx of foreign missionaries.

Moreover, Monsignor Alves da Cunha, cited by Neves (2007), accentuates the lack of investment in moral formation, the absence of methodological approaches, and, notably, the dearth of female presence as fundamental hindrances to the early evangelizing endeavors in Angola. However, from the latter half of the 19th century onward, a notable shift occurred with the arrival of the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit on March 14, 1866. These missionaries revitalized the evangelization process in Angola, establishing numerous churches, schools, hospitals, missionary outposts, and more. The significance of this religious order was underscored by Pastor Henderson in his doctoral thesis, as follows:

The establishment of the Catholic Church in Angola owes much to the efforts of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. This missionary community played a pivotal role in shaping the course of the Church's history in Angola. The Holy Spirit Fathers contributed significantly to the development of the Church in Angola, emphasizing three foundational pillars: catechists, schools, and selflessness. Catechists served as instrumental figures in the

conversion of souls, while schools provided the infrastructure for nurturing a thriving Christian community. Moreover, the ethos of self-denial and renunciation served as a guiding principle, safeguarding missionaries in their divine vocation (Henderson, *A Igreja em Angola*, 1990, pp. 37, 39).

Alongside the Spiritans, the arrival of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny in 1882 marked another significant milestone in the evangelization of Angola. Their presence and contributions played a pivotal role in furthering the success of evangelization efforts in the country. In contrast to the challenges faced during the preceding four centuries, Monsignor Alves da Cunha expresses profound appreciation for this new phase of the mission in Angola, affirming:

The present-day landscape of schools, the proliferation of catechesis centers, the regular visits of missionaries, the deliberate cultivation of Christian family life, and the invaluable collaboration of missionary sisters represent a transformative process vastly distinct from the methods of old. This contemporary framework is constructing a spiritual and social edifice that far surpasses the achievements of past evangelization endeavors, which, hindered by methodological limitations and lack of experience, could never aspire to such heights (Gabriel, 1978, p. 241).



The late 19th century heralded a pivotal and multifaceted phase in the process of evangelization. The arrival of Spiritan missionaries signaled the initiation of efforts to address the longstanding challenge of foreign missionaries entering Angola, a predicament that had persisted since the earliest days of evangelization. The Spiritans undertook the task of venturing into Angolan territory, recognizing the absence of a Catholic organization in Portugal equipped for the evangelization of Angola. Consequently, their decision paved the way for greater receptivity towards additional foreign missionaries entering Portuguese territories, given the French origins of this religious order (Lourenço, 2003).

Another significant catalyst for the deployment of Spiritan missionaries was Rome's apprehension regarding the encroachment of Protestantism. The Berlin Conference of 1885 underscored the imperative of effective colonial occupation and the assurance of religious freedom throughout colonial territories, including those inhabited by indigenous populations. This imperative pressured Portugal to assert control over its colonial domains, including Angola,

to forestall their acquisition by rival colonial powers. This geopolitical context may have catalyzed the expansion of Protestant missions in Angola, coinciding with the partitioning of Africa among colonial powers at the Berlin Conference (Dulley, 2017).

While the arrival of the Spiritans in Angola was not devoid of tensions, as documented by Dulley (2017), there was a degree of apprehension within the Portuguese government owing to the predominantly non-Portuguese origins of the missionaries belonging to this religious order. Such apprehension threatened to undermine the objective of assimilating the overseas provinces into Portuguese culture. Conversely, the Protestant presence in Angola during the 19th century was predominantly represented by foreign missions. Moreover, the Protestant missionaries exhibited a notable alignment with traditional political authorities, such as the sobas of Bailundo and Bié, further heightening distrust among Portuguese authorities. Additionally, Protestant penetration initially occurred in the interior regions of Angola, where Catholic presence was less pronounced, and governmental oversight over missionary activities was comparatively challenging.

According to Henderson (1990), Protestants first arrived in Angola circa 1879, with the inaugural Baptist missionaries from England setting foot in the northern region, specifically São Salvador (now Mbanza Congo). Dispatched by the London Baptist Missionary Society (SMB), this initial cohort of missionaries received an invitation from the King of Congo (Belgian) to establish residence in the capital. Notably, Protestant endeavors in Angolan territory commenced prior to the convening of the Berlin Conference, although the conference undoubtedly facilitated greater religious freedom for both Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Pereira's (2015) account provides pertinent insights into the initiation of Protestant activities in Angola:

The establishment of the Baptist Church in Angola traces back to the city of São Salvador in 1879, when it was founded as a branch of the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), an English church entity active in the Belgian Congo. This marked the inception of Protestant missionary endeavors in Angolan territory, predating the convening of the Berlin Conference. Subsequently, the Baptist Church extended its reach by founding missions in Kibokolo and Bembe, situated in what is now the province of Uíge (p. 255).

Following the arrival of Baptist missionaries in Angola, the landscape soon witnessed the emergence of additional Protestant missions in the region. Three years subsequent to the advent of the BMS, missionaries from JACME (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) entered the fray. In contrast to their European counterparts, who predominantly operated in the northern reaches of the territory, JACME missionaries initially directed their efforts towards central Angola, as elucidated below:

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions embarked on its inaugural expedition into the heart of Africa, venturing towards the Central Highlands. By 1882, they arrived in Bié, at that time still under the dominion of the Ovimbundu kingdom. Notably, the mission's notable achievement lay in the production of a New Testament translated into the Umbundu language (Bauer, 1994, p. 228).

The suspicions harbored by the Portuguese government regarding Protestant missions were not without basis. Firstly, being composed entirely of foreigners, these missions did not adopt Portuguese as their official language; many missionaries only acquired proficiency in Portuguese at a later stage. Moreover, they displayed a keen interest in local languages from their inception, contributing significantly not only to their acceptance by local communities but also to the evangelistic success of Protestants. The central region of Angola emerged as the focal point for the second phase of Protestant missions, with various denominations establishing their presence there.

Towards the close of the first quarter of 1885, missionaries from the Methodist Episcopal Church of the USA arrived in Angola on March 20th, departing from New York. Neves (2007) reports, "The Methodists were the first Protestants to evangelize the Kimbundu tribe." William Taylor was appointed as bishop of Africa by the General Conference of the Methodist Church in the USA in 1884. In January 1885, 45 American Methodists embarked from New York for Luanda and were received by the Governor-General on March 20, 1885 (p.515). Presently, Baptist churches predominate in the northern region, Congregationalists in the central area, and the main Methodist congregations are located in Luanda.

Following these initial movements by Baptists, Congregationalists, and Methodists—which will receive closer attention—several other Protestant missions arrived in Angola. These included the United Church of Canada in

1886 in Bailundo, the Plymouth Brethren in Bié in 1890, Christian Missions in Many Lands in 1889, the Philafrican Mission in the Caluquembe region in 1897, the Evangelical League of Angola in the same year, and later the Christian and Missionary Alliance (1907), the General Mission of South Africa (1914), and the Seventh-day Adventists (1924) in the first half of the 20th century (Wheeler & Pélissier, 2009).

Protestant missions have been deeply engaged from their inception in addressing social issues within their spheres of activity. Notably, the Dondi Mission, presently situated in the municipality of Katchiungo, has left a significant imprint on the communities of Huambo, primarily through its extensive social assistance work. Fernando Santos Neves, a confidant of Pastor Henderson, lauds the Dondi Mission, stating, "The Dondi Mission deserves special mention, whose multiple assistance, school, and religious activities have constituted, for many years, an impressive testimony to the charity of Christ in favor of those most in need, materially and spiritually" (Neves F. S., 1975, p. 131).

In conclusion, the advent of Protestantism in Angola commenced with the arrival of European Baptist missions (SMB) in the north among the Bakongos. Subsequently, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (JACME) established its presence in the central plateau region in the south. Additionally, the Methodist Church established its bases in Luanda, the capital. Notably, the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola (IECA) emerged from JACME. Thus, these were the pioneering Protestant churches in Angola, with IECA remaining predominant in the central region, Baptist denominations in the north, and the Methodist Church in the capital. This historical context sheds light on the involvement of members of these organizations in the liberation movements of Angola during that era, as will be elucidated further.

The relationship of Protestant churches with liberation movements

The observation that the Catholic Church served as the official religion of Portugal sheds light on its alignment with the objectives of the Portuguese government. Given that the Christianization of overseas territories constituted a fundamental component of the colonial endeavor, it is comprehensible that

the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in upholding the colonial regime. This alignment is substantiated by Article 2 of the Concordat, which reads:

The Portuguese State ensured the Catholic Church the unrestricted exercise of its authority within its domain of competence. Catholic Missions, regarded as institutions of imperial utility with a distinctly civilizing purpose, enjoyed the freedom to expand and engage in activities intrinsic to their mission. This included the establishment and management of schools. Furthermore, missionaries, being distinct from state employees, were regarded as personnel providing specialized services of national and civilizing significance (Capoco, 2013, p. 101).

It has been established that despite the official sanction from the government allowing the Catholic Church to operate freely in Angola, there was not unanimous support within all its sectors for Portugal's civilizing project. As previously noted, numerous Catholics faced persecution by the PIDE. Conversely, Protestant churches did not garner the same reputation. Neves (2007) suggests that from their inception, Protestants demonstrated less alignment with the colonial government and were less involved in Portugal's civilizing project. This divergence arose because Protestants, upon their arrival in Angola, were merely tolerated by the government and did not receive the same level of recognition granted to Catholics. This disparity likely widened the gulf between the government's objectives and those of Protestant churches. By refraining from explicitly aligning themselves with the civilizing project, Protestants enjoyed greater freedom of conscience, as observed by Schubert (2000), thereby enabling more robust involvement with liberation movements. It is noteworthy that the lack of doctrinal unity among Protestants facilitated their adherence to the prevailing revolutionary ideologies of the time, thus partly explaining their heightened participation in nationalist movements.

While an exhaustive examination of all Protestant movements involved in the anti-colonial struggle is beyond the scope of this discussion, the participation of the three most prominent Protestant churches of that era—the Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational (IECA)—is notable. These churches wielded influence in different geographic areas, corresponding to the main political liberation movements. The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) operated predominantly in the north, while the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was more active in the capital, and the

National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) focused on the central-south region. Thus, regional and tribal considerations played a pivotal role in shaping the interaction between Protestants and nationalist movements, as underscored in Marcum's analysis.

In each region, a distinct nationalist identity emerged, influenced not only by the characteristics of the ethnic groups but also by the particularities of each Protestant movement. Although this article does not delve into the nuances of these identities, it underscores the profound connection between Protestant churches and liberation movements within the context of Angolan nationalism. This relationship was largely contingent on chance, as Cipriano (2015) highlighted, suggesting that the alignment between Protestants and nationalist movements was a result of historical circumstances.

The role played by Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, transcended mere proselytism, with education emerging as a pivotal aspect of their endeavors in Angola. Education not only fostered nationalist sentiments but also served as a conduit linking Protestant churches with nationalist movements. Scholarship programs facilitated by Protestant missions enabled numerous young Angolans to study abroad, many of whom later emerged as leaders of the main liberation movements in Angola. The pivotal role of Protestants in nurturing future leaders of anti-colonial liberation movements is evident.

Both political movements and Protestant churches shared a common desire—to effect transformative change. Despite differing objectives, both sought alterations to the established order. While political movements sought control of power vis-à-vis the Portuguese, Protestant churches sought greater religious freedom to expand their missionary activities. Collaboration with liberation movements was crucial in achieving this objective, as emphasized by Pastor Schubert (1999). The Protestant contribution to Angolan nationalism, through their educational and consciousness-raising efforts, is underscored by Schubert's assertion that a considerable proportion of militants in nationalist movements were Protestants.

The ethnic and regional dynamics also played a pivotal role in the struggle for liberation and in fostering closer ties between political movements and Protestant groups operating in these areas. In the central and southern regions

of Angola, UNITA emerged as the most influential political movement, owing to its leadership primarily comprising members of the Umbundu ethnic group. This leadership composition was instrumental in garnering local support for the liberation cause. However, UNITA lacked the necessary resources to mobilize the rural populace effectively. The long-established presence and resources of the Congregational Church in the region made it a natural ally for UNITA. Thus, the convergence between the Congregational Church and UNITA was inevitable, as reported by Schubert (1999):

UNITA may have garnered sympathy among the population of the central-southern region of the country, but it lacked a sufficiently robust communication network to effectively mobilize rural communities. However, such a network did exist within Congregationalism. Despite facing obstacles and interference from colonial authorities, the Congregational Church's ecclesiastical structures remained intact, unlike in the northern regions where they were dismantled (p. 406).

The bond between these two entities was so profound that they were virtually inseparable, with one constituting an integral component of the other. Distinguishing between UNITA and the Congregational Church during that period was almost redundant, as the church epitomized the essence of the political movement, while UNITA embodied its physical manifestation. This fusion was so profound that many religious leaders also assumed central roles within UNITA, as described by Schubert (1999):

Numerous leaders within UNITA concurrently held roles within congregational communities. The majority of pastors and catechists within the Congregational Church viewed themselves as proponents of UNITA, which regarded the church as its moral compass. UNITA endeavored to assimilate congregational structures into the envisioned state order it aimed to establish, with the church providing what UNITA lacked in terms of organizing and administering public life. Pastors and elders assumed administrative roles, while medical institutions and congregational schools formed the cornerstone of the education and healthcare system (p. 47).

The close relationship between the Congregational Church and UNITA underscores the significant role the former played not only in the genesis but also in the sustainability of the political movement. Without the support of the Congregational Church, UNITA might not have achieved the impact it did during that period, given the church's greater resources and

influence. Hence, the Congregational Church came to be known as "the church of UNITA" during that era, a testament to the depth of their collaboration.

This convergence between UNITA and the congregations was not unique, as other churches and political movements experienced similar dynamics. Protestant missions, distinct from the Portuguese colonial agenda, faced persecution and arrests of their members, both Angolans and foreigners, positioning them on the periphery of the evangelization endeavor. This peripheral status facilitated their alignment with the nationalist movements of the time (Garcia, 2003).

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the education of indigenous populations played a pivotal role in nurturing revolutionary consciousness by providing insights into colonial realities. Both Catholic and Protestant missions contributed to cultivating an intellectual elite that would later spearhead nationalist movements (Capoco, 2013). The dissemination of fundamental Christian principles such as love for others and justice by these missions further fueled the revolutionary fervor of the era, as elucidated by Rodrigues (2003):



The values espoused by the Church's social doctrine, including justice, freedom, equality, fraternity, charity, and love for others, resonated deeply with the critiques of the colonial situation articulated by native intellectuals, thereby lending legitimacy to their demands. These values, often aligned with the principles of natural rights inherent in secular thought, assumed a more universal and imperative character when advocated by a religion purporting to be universal (p.178).

The influence of Protestant churches on Angolan nationalist movements during the colonial period was profound and multifaceted. While the Catholic Church was the official religion of Portugal and closely aligned with colonial objectives, Protestant churches often operated independently, fostering educational initiatives and disseminating social justice ideals that resonated with emerging nationalist sentiments.

Protestant missions, particularly the Methodist, Baptist, and Congregational churches, played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual and ideological landscape of Angolan nationalism. This influence was evident in the education of many nationalist leaders, who received their schooling from Protestant mission schools where ideas of justice, freedom, and equality were prominently featured in the curriculum. For instance, a significant number of

leaders from the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) were educated in Methodist schools, where they were exposed to progressive ideals that would later inform their political activism (Mabéko-Tali, 2001).

Similarly, in the Center-South region, the Congregational Church played a crucial role in nurturing the intellectual elite of the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA). Meanwhile, in Luanda, the Methodist Church exerted considerable influence in shaping the perspectives of MPLA leaders. Notably, Agostinho Neto, the first president of Angola, received a scholarship from the Methodist Church to study abroad, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between Methodist missions and MPLA leadership (Schubert, 1999).

This educational factor was instrumental in forging strong bonds between Protestant churches and nationalist movements. Beyond Agostinho Neto, other influential figures such as Deolinda Rodrigues, the daughter of a Protestant pastor, received scholarships from Methodist missions, contributing significantly to the nationalist cause. Domingos da Silva, a Methodist pastor, even served as the second vice-president of the MPLA, further illustrating the close association between the movement and Methodist circles (Paredes, 2010):

The operation 'Fuga dos Cem' in June 1961, involving students in Portugal and abroad, was on the verge of failure when we relinquished control of the operation to the Protestant World Organization. At the time, we were unaware of the decisive influence that Protestant churches, particularly the American Methodist Church, had on the empowerment and emancipation of young people in Angola (p. 14).

The close relationship between Methodist members and the MPLA was profound, often misunderstood by fighters from predominantly Catholic regions. Protestant missions played a pivotal role in educating and grooming the elite of nationalist movements. Key figures from UNITA and the MPLA received their education from these missions, including members of the FNLA, the most influential political movement in the northern region.

Particularly noteworthy is the FNLA's prominence in this area, where Baptist missionaries, despite facing challenges, dedicated themselves to evangelization. Despite attempts to assimilate indigenous populations into Portuguese culture by teaching them the language, Baptist missionaries

persisted in teaching in Kikongo. In 1922, some Baptists faced convictions for alleged subversive activities, with the leader of the mission in S. Salvador publicly reprimanded and threatened with expulsion by the High Commissioner (January, 2021). This anti-bureaucratic stance mirrored that of other Protestant missions, with education being a primary objective. Providing scholarships for numerous young individuals, including future anti-colonial leaders like Holden Roberto, demonstrated their commitment to fostering education and resistance to colonization (Luís, 2021).

The presence of Protestant missions significantly influenced the mindset of nationalist political elites, fostering critical perspectives on colonialism among the youth they educated. Their educational efforts not only served their evangelistic goals but also laid the foundation for the emergence of intellectual elites deeply engaged in the struggle for national liberation. However, the Portuguese government, wary of the growing connection between Protestant groups and nationalist movements, responded with repressive measures, as we will explore further.



PIDE's persecution of Protestant churches

In the beginning of this article, we mentioned a series of persecutions carried out by PIDE against insurgent movements of the time, highlighting the arrests involving certain figures from the Catholic Church. In this section, we will explore the work of Pastor Lawrence Henderson (2013), who was also a victim of these persecutions, to illustrate that many individuals arrested by PIDE belonged to Protestant churches. This work is crucial for understanding the role of Protestant churches in the anti-colonial struggle, because, while it also reports on the arrests of Catholics, it emphasizes the significant number of arrests among Protestant members—an understandable emphasis, considering that the author is a Protestant pastor (Neves A. M., 2013).

Pastor Henderson served as a missionary in Angola from 1948 to 1969, experiencing firsthand the adversities faced by various missionaries, whether Protestant or Catholic. His account is a valuable source of information on the topic. According to Henderson (2013), although the government expressed some distrust toward Protestant missions, the relationship between the parties was generally cordial, even though the Portuguese authorities prioritized ties

with the Catholic Church. However, when it came to protecting colonial interests, the Portuguese government did not discriminate based on religion, acting against anyone perceived as a threat to national interests.

This was precisely what happened in 1957 when PIDE began its operations in Angola. The primary goal of this Portuguese security agency was to dismantle groups and movements that opposed the colonial regime, regardless of creed, race, or gender. Social class was also of little importance—once there was any connection with anti-colonial movements, repression was inevitable, as noted by Henderson (2013):

PIDE's attention was immediately focused on individuals suspected of sympathizing with anti-colonial movements and ideologies. Consequently, five individuals associated with the Angolan Cultural Organization were arrested in Lobito. These included Júlio António Afonso, a leading teacher at the Protestant school in Lobito; Isaías Canutula de Almeida, secretary of the evangelical mission in Lobito; Tomás de Cunha and Lourenço João Sequeira, from the Methodist Church in Malanje, who worked as nurses at the port of Lobito; and Alfredo Benga, a public servant. The crime these men were accused of was their contact with Africans from independent countries such as Ghana and Liberia (p. 53).



The targeting of Protestants as the primary focus of PIDE's actions indicates their significant involvement with anti-colonial movements. It is worth noting that, among those arrested, only one was a public servant, while the others had connections with Protestant missions. Another aspect to consider is the location of the first arrests, which took place in the municipality of Lobito, in Benguela, situated in the central-eastern region of the country. It is intriguing to note that, despite insurgencies against the colonizer beginning in the north, particularly among the Bakongo ethnic group where the FNLA was active, PIDE started its detention operations in the central part of the country, as observed by Henderson (2013).

Thus, the incident in Lobito marked the beginning of PIDE's operations, which quickly spread throughout the country. By 1959, two years later, Luanda became the center of activity for this Portuguese security agency. On an Easter Sunday in March of that year, according to a local newspaper, 55 people were accused of subversive activities, as described below:

On Easter Sunday, March 29, 1959, PIDE arrested a number of suspects for subversive activities in Luanda. In July, additional arrests were made, and on December 21, 1959, a Luanda newspaper published three lists containing the names of 55 people accused of engaging in subversive activities. The first list included 12 mulattos and three Africans—all Catholics. The second list comprised a mulatto, an African, and five Europeans, including a doctor who worked at the Methodist clinic in Luanda, Dr. Maria Julieta Guimarães Gandra. The third list, known as the "African list," consisted of two mulattos and one European. Out of the 55 arrested, 13 were Protestants residing in Luanda, while the other 12 lived abroad. These arrests led to the infamous "Trial of the Fifty," held in 1960, serving as clear evidence of the strength and vitality of the anti-colonial movements. In a subsequent wave of arrests in July 1960, an additional 52 people were detained, including Father Joaquim Pinto de Andrade and Dr. Agostinho Neto (Henderson, 2013, p. 55).

Based on the above citation, it's clear that Protestants were again among those detained by PIDE in the capital. This indicates a consistent connection between Protestants and revolutionary movements during this period. Regarding the 1959 arrest, it is worth noting that some key figures in Angolan political history were among the detainees, including Dr. António Agostinho Neto, the future first president of Angola, and Father João Pinto, the elder brother of Mário Pinto de Andrade, the first president of the MPLA. Despite the ongoing persecution of insurgents, the rebellions across the country continued unabated.

The independence of the Congo on June 30, 1960, served as an inspiration for Angolan nationalists, and thereafter the Congo became a refuge for many revolutionaries, especially those from northern Angola. In November and December of the same year, a peasant uprising against the colonizers took place, involving the slaughter of cattle as a form of protest against the requirement for farmers to grow cotton and sell it at low prices (Capoco, 2013). This revolt was not the only one inspired by Congo's independence, as the attack on the prisons in Luanda on February 4 was also motivated by this neighboring country's newfound autonomy (Henderson, 2013).

On March 15, 1961, one of the most significant uprisings occurred, which revealed to the world the ongoing war in Angola. This uprising resulted in a considerable number of casualties, with about 750 Portuguese and approximately 20,000 Angolans losing their lives (Silva G. B., 2021). From that point on, the lives of the colonizers were never the same, as the rebellions

spread across the territory, and the northern region of Angola, particularly in Uíge and Zaire, where there was a significant Protestant presence, became the scene of Portuguese security force actions. The revolts in these regions, according to the district's governor, Major Rebocho Vaz, were fueled by Protestant sects, as detailed in the following account:

One of the fundamental causes lies in the programs of the various Protestant sects operating simultaneously with a front for disseminating communist ideas and international doctrines. Their primary motivation was to create a division between us and the indigenous population so that the countries they represent could gain new markets or secure the raw materials they need (Henderson, 2013, p. 61).

As the Protestants became increasingly involved in the liberation movements, PIDE's persecution escalated to new levels. The focus of persecution shifted from targeting specific individuals to institutional measures, leading to the closure of numerous Protestant missions. The first mission to be shut down in Angolan territory was São Salvador, which had been the pioneering Protestant mission in the region. The State confiscated the structures built by the mission, including a church, a hospital, a school, dormitories, and residences (Henderson, 2013).

Shortly after, the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) was also forced to cease its missionary activities in Angola, as described by Henderson (2013):

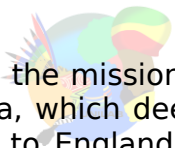
The BMS mission in Quibocolo, located about 25 km from the Congo border, was ordered to close by the government, despite the fact that the Zombos did not participate in the March 15 uprising. The missionaries pleaded with the authorities to allow them to remain at the mission, but their efforts were unsuccessful, leading to their departure. Following their exit, the Zombo population, frightened by the developments, fled en masse to the Congo, and the mission was soon destroyed (p. 62).

Several other missions affiliated with the BMS were closed, including the mission in Bembe, which was shut down in March 1961, and the mission in Calambata, also closed during the same month. Henderson (2013) noted that no missionaries suffered physical harm, as the directive was for them to leave their missions by government order, which were subsequently closed.

Some Canadian Baptist missions, like the Canadian Baptist Foreign Missionary Society (CBFMS), were also forced to cease operations. Among the

missions associated with the CBFMS, the one in Mboca, Cabinda, was closed, while the mission in Quipondo, in Zaire, faced confrontations. However, due to the medical services it provided to the local population, Quipondo managed to maintain its activities. Yet, by the end of 1962, the CBFMS had to shut down its operations in Luanda, as Henderson (2013) reported: "The Ambrizete mission was evacuated by order of the Portuguese authorities in March 1961. By the end of 1962, the Canadian Baptist Foreign Missionary Society ordered the withdrawal of all personnel, forcing its missionaries to abandon the missions in Cabinda and Quipondo" (p. 64).

In the capital city, the Methodist mission, accused of instigating the March 15 revolts in northern Angola, was compelled to shut down its operations. Several missionaries associated with this mission were expelled from the country, among whom was Archibald Petterson, the founder and director of the mission in northern Angola. He was accused of collaborating with the rebels and was the first to be expelled from Angolan territory. Regarding Archibald's expulsion, Henderson (2013) recounts the events that followed:



Shortly after his departure, the mission was looted by Portuguese settlers residing in the area, which deeply shocked the Patterson couple, who, on their way to England, had yet to grasp the full severity of the situation. Both were nearly seventy years old at the time. However, the leaders of the church founded by Archibald Patterson did not fare as well. Some pastors, such as João Gonçalves, António Duarte, and Pedro Banza, along with Timóteo Malanda, were murdered in the bush. Most of the church leaders managed to find refuge in the Congo, where they spent many years in exile, such as Manuel Coxo, Pedro Dambi, Alexandre Kiduati, Manuel da Conceição, and Daniel Geto. In the villages surrounding Uíge, where some members of the Protestant community remained, the environment was no longer conducive to their activities due to the traumatic events that had occurred (p. 66).

In contrast to the Baptist missionaries, who closed their missions without violence, the Methodist mission experienced a different outcome. Some Methodist missionaries, including Marion Washington Way Junior, Frederick Charles Brancel, and Ernest Edwin Le Master, were arrested in Luanda and later released after being sent to Lisbon, from where they were extradited to their respective countries of origin (Henderson, 2013). The account of the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time regarding these arrests and deportations warrants mention:

Superior reasons of national security made this measure imperative. In fact, documentation and testimonial evidence gathered by Portuguese authorities left no doubt about these missionaries' collusion with terrorist groups, their involvement in acts contrary to national sovereignty, their approval of the publication and distribution of subversive pamphlets, and their assistance in recruiting individuals to join the terrorist movement (Henderson, 2013, p. 67).

There are numerous stories of persecution faced by Protestant missionaries in Angola due to their involvement with movements considered terrorist at the time. It would not be surprising if the number of Protestant missionaries in Angola had dropped considerably. The report by the Secretary-General of the Evangelical Alliance of Angola on August 17, 1961, is worth noting regarding this matter:

The number of Protestant missionaries had dropped from 256 on January 1, 1961, to 167 by August of the same year, representing a reduction of 34.7%. This decrease was due to several factors. Firstly, the closure of missions in the North: Uíge, Bembe, Quibocolo, Mboca, Salazar, and Ambrizete. Secondly, the mission of the United Church of Canada (UCBWM) in Central Angola withdrew mothers and children. Lastly, visas were denied to all missionaries who, after taking their leave, intended to return to Angola (Henderson, 2013, p. 65).

Pastor Henderson, whose work is the basis of this article, was among the missionaries who were not allowed to return to Angola. In 1969, after spending time in the United States with his family, his requests to re-enter the country were denied. Consequently, unable to return to Angola, he lived for many years in Lisbon, where he authored an influential work on Protestant churches in Angola during the era of nationalism, which has since become a reference in the field (Neves A. M., 2013).

Conclusion

Thus, based on the reports presented here, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, from the beginning, Protestant missions maintained a closer relationship with the indigenous people and, consequently, with the local culture. This is evident in their use of local languages for teaching and communication, which fostered greater acceptance by traditional authorities and broader segments of local communities. Protestant missions were among

the first spaces where freedom of conscience could be exercised, as their missionaries often became early critics of the colonial system.

The involvement of Protestants in educating future leaders of the liberation movements and the participation of their adherents in uprisings throughout the country provide strong evidence that Protestant churches played a fundamental role in the process of emancipation in Angola. By embracing the local culture and languages, Protestant missions created an environment conducive to resistance and empowerment, setting the stage for their involvement in the anti-colonial struggle. The openness and alignment with local interests contributed to their significant impact on the journey toward independence.

References

- Bauer, J. (1994). *200 years of Christianity in Africa: a history of the African church*. Lisbon: Edições Paulinas.
- Capoco, Z. (2013). *Nationalism and the State: a study on the political history of Angola (1961-1991). PhD final thesis*. Lisbon: Catholic University of Lisbon.
- Cipriano, P.B. (2015). *Nation, nationality and nationalism in Angola*. Porto: Fernando Pessoa University, doctoral thesis.
- Dulley, I. (2017). Catholic and Protestant missions in the Angolan Central Highlands: continuities and discontinuities. *Missions, religion and culture: history studies between the 18th and 20th centuries* (pp. 291-314). Campinas: Edunicamp.
- Ferreira, C.C. (1996). History of the church in Angola in the 16th century. Navarre.
- Gabriel, M. N. (1978). *Angola. Five centuries of Christianity*. Braga: Literal Edition.
- Gabriel, M. N. (1981). *Patterns of faith: the ancient churches of Angola*. Luanda: Ed. Aquidiocese of Luanda.
- Garcia, F. F. (2003). *Global analysis of a war (Mozambique 1964-1974)*. Lisbon: Preface Editor.
- Henderson, L. (1990). *The Church in Angola*. Lisbon: Beyond the Sea.
- Henderson, L. (2013). *The church in Angola: a river with several currents*. Lisbon: Beyond the Sea.

January, HP (2021). The religious issue in Angola: Norton de Matos and the missions. *Religion, Society, State*, pp. 409-422.

Lourenço, PS (2003). *The Spiritan mission in Southwest Angola*. Lisbon: Gráfica Povoense Ltda.

Luís, JB (2021). The contribution of Protestant missions and Tokoism in the liberation of Angola. *Relegens Thréskeia Magazine*, pp. 128-144.

Mabéko-Tali, J.-M. (2001). *Dissent and state power: the MPLA before itself*. Luanda: Nzila.

Muaca, DE (1999). *Brief History of the Evangelization of Angola*. Luanda: Ed. Ceast.

Neves, AM (2013). *Angola: justice and peace in the interventions of the Catholic church*. Luanda: Texto Editores.

Neves, F. S. (1975). *Towards an Omnitotidimensional Ecumenism in Angola*. Luanda: Ed. Colloquia.

Neves, T. (2007). Churches and nationalism in Angola. *Revista Lusófona de Ciência da Religião*, pp. 511-526.

Pacheco, C. (May 3, 2006). *Public*. Source: Público Comunicação Social: <https://www.publico.pt/2006/05/03/jornal/a-rebeliao-de-um-sacerdote-76643>

Paredes, M. (2010). Deolinda Rodrigues, from the Methodist family to the MPLA family, the role of culture in politics. *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, pp. 11-26.

Pereira, LN (2015). *The Bakongo of Angola: ethnicity, religion and kinship in a neighborhood of Luanda*. Rio de Janeiro: Back Cover; Faperj.

Rodrigues, E. (2003). *The silent generation. The African National League and the representation of white people in Angola in the 1930s*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.

Schubert, B. (1999). Protestants in the Angolan war after independence. *Lusotopie*, pp. 405-413.

Schubert, B. (2000). *War and churches. Angola 1961-1991*. P. Schlettwein Publishing.

Wheeler, D., & Pélissier, R. (2009). *History of Angola*. Lisbon: Tinta-da-China.

Recebido em: 14/02/2026

Aceito em: 04/08/2026

Para citar este texto (ABNT): SATJYAMBULA, Miguel da Piedade. Christ and the revolutionary process in Angola: a description of the stance of Protestant churches in the period of nationalism (1961-1975). *Njinga & Sepé: Revista Internacional de Culturas, Línguas Africanas e Brasileiras*. São Francisco do Conde (BA), vol.6, nº 1, p.191-213, jan./jun 2026.

Para citar este texto (APA): Satjyambula, Miguel da Piedade (jan./jun. 2026). Christ and the revolutionary process in Angola: a description of the stance of Protestant churches in the period of nationalism (1961-1975). *Njinga & Sepé: Revista Internacional de Culturas, Línguas Africanas e Brasileiras*. São Francisco do Conde (BA), 6 (1): 191-213.

