Research article

AT THE CROSSROADS OF FAITH AND SOCIAL ACTION: ETHNOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS FROM CHURCHES IN THE DRC AND ANGOLA

NGUDIANKAMA Nginamau Adrien, PhD (Theology, Anthropology and Sociology of Health), Director, Kongo Academy, USA. ORCID: 0000-0002-1428-3369. E-mail: n.adrien@kongoacademy.org

Abstract. This article explores the pivotal role of churches in providing social care in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Through ethnographic observations and comparative analysis, it highlights the contributions of historic churches, African independent churches, and revivalist churches to education, healthcare, conflict resolution, and community development. While historic churches remain the primary social actors due to their long-standing missionary legacy, independent churches and some revivalist movements demonstrate resilience and innovative approaches despite financial and structural limitations. The study also examines the challenges churches face, including governance issues, political co-optation, and intra-religious disparities, while emphasizing their indispensable role in holistic development. The findings suggest that sustainable partnerships between churches, governments, and international organizations could enhance their impact on social transformation and inclusive development in Africa. Some religious groups struggle with systemic issues that weaken their role as essential partners in community social transformation. These challenges give rise to hegemonic church governance, deeply rooted in ethnic dynamics and reinforced by a culture of loyalty to corrupt leadership, often driven by personal socio-economic survival or self-enrichment. Establishing partnerships between institutions could create opportunities for accountability, enabling religious organizations to safeguard their credibility as key partners in improving the well-being of populations.

Keywords: Social Care, Angola, Historic Churches, African Independent Churches, Revival Churches, Education, Healthcare, Conflict Resolution, Religion and Society, Faith-Based Organizations

Conflict of interest: The author declared that there is no conflict of interest.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-26-41

For citation: Ngudiankama N.A. (2025). At the Crossroads of Faith and Social Action: Ethnographic Insights from Churches in the DRC and Angola. Journal of the Institute for African Studies. Vol. 11. № 1. Pp. 26–41. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-26-41

INTRODUCTION

Marked for a long time by various scenarios of severe social insecurity, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) invite us to reflect on the contributions of churches to the well-being of populations. The theological approach of missionaries, which considered schools and dispensaries, even hospitals, as essential instruments for

the expansion of the Gospel [Soulama 2007], remains intrinsic in the postcolonial pastoral activities of churches established by missionaries, as well as those deriving from them.

Based on ethnographic observations conducted in Angola and the DRC, the thesis supported in this article is that churches, particularly historic ones, and certain African independent ones, remain the most effective allies of local governments, international organizations, and humanitarian agencies engaged in promoting the well-being and social conditions of communities. Whether in the fields of health, education, support for vulnerable populations, or conflict resolution and peace, the impact of churches is undeniable.

The selection of the cultural and geographical contexts of Kinshasa and the Kongo Central province in the DRC, as well as Luanda and Uíge for Angola, is based on three reasons. The first is linked to my cultural belonging to all these areas, where three of the languages I speak, Kikongo, Lingala, and French, are widely spoken in the studied churches. In these cultural settings, to use J. Janzen's expression, I was not "on a complicated identity terrain" [Janzen 2019: 27]. The second is my anthropological, theological, and pastoral engagements in these two countries for over a decade [Ngudiankama 2021]. This is the dynamic, expressed in a relevant and elegant manner, through Douglas' reflection on the interaction between anthropology and religions in the life of an anthropologist who is also a believer, which is "too continuous and intimate to be disentangled" [Douglas 2009:120]. The third is to enable a comparative analysis of the churches' involvement in social support for populations in the two studied countries. The comparative approach is crucial, given the migration or exodus phenomena of Angolan Christian leaders. Many of them were leaders trained in the historic churches of Congo. The proliferation of many revival churches in Angola is related to this migration factor.

The religious groups studied are divided into three main categories: Historic Churches, African Independent Churches, and Revival Churches.

The presented observations stem from ethnographic research made possible by invitations received from the Council of Christian Churches in Angola (CICA) since 2015 and the Tokoist Church since 2017 regarding Angola, as well as my travels to my home country, the DRC. These invitations and travels have provided me with opportunities to engage with numerous individuals from various religious associations, including CICA and the Council of Revival Churches of Angola (CIRA) in Angola. Furthermore, my connections in the DRC are even more extensive, further enriching my ethnographic work. These relationships are closely linked to my role as a representative of the Church of Christ in Congo in North America.

In Angola, my ethnographic research has taken me to Lobito, Benguela, and Huambo, where I met one of Angola's most prominent historic theologians and pastors, Reverend José Chipenda. His major role in the ecumenical movement in Africa and beyond is significant. His tenure as Secretary-General of the All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) was marked by his investment in promoting social justice, peace, and development across the continent[1].

[1] WCC celebrates life of African ecumenist Rev. Dr Jose Belo Chipenda. *World Council of Churches.* 18.01.2024. https://oikoumene.org/news/wcc-celebrates-life-of-african-ecumenist-rev-dr-jose-belo-chipenda (accessed: 25.03.2025)

One of the key questions of this study is how the contributions of churches to social realities are perceived both by their beneficiaries and by the actors themselves. This inquiry entails an analysis of the relevant discourse. Thus, being aware of and enriched by my habitus, in the sense of Bourdieu [1979], I adopt an anthropologist-bricoleur approach, as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, in both my ethnographic data collection and its interpretation [Ngudiankama 2001; Coffey, Atkinson 1996].

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE ANGOLAN AND CONGOLESE AREAS STUDIED: MIGRATION AND MODERNITY

Located on the southern bank of the Congo River, directly across from Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, Kinshasa and its neighbor form the closest capitals in the world. As the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa spans a vast area and is the country's largest urban center, with an estimated population of over 17 million inhabitants.

A true national and international cultural microcosm where tradition and modernity coexist, Kinshasa serves as the nerve center of the country, hosting its main political, economic, and cultural institutions. The city is characterized by significant linguistic diversity, with Lingala as the lingua franca. Kikongo, Swahili, and Tshiluba are also widely spoken for cultural, political, and historical reasons. Drawn by various economic and social opportunities, thousands of Congolese settle in Kinshasa every year, leading to rapid and uncontrolled urbanization. This phenomenon is marked by the unchecked expansion of peripheral neighborhoods to the city's outskirts and the proliferation of slums throughout its territory. Mufwene [2010] characterizes this form of urbanization without the requisite urban infrastructure as the transformation of cities into mega-villages.

With its population estimated at 7 million, the Province of Kongo Central which is in the western part of the country, borders the Atlantic Ocean and is traversed by the Congo River. As such, it occupies a key strategic position in maritime and commercial exchanges. Historically, it was one of the vast territories of the former Kingdom of Kongo, whose interactions with the Western world date back to 1482 [MacGaffey 1983; Smith 2006]. The province is home to various subgroups of the Bakongo people. Due to its access to the Atlantic, its proximity to Kinshasa, and the socio-political instability in DRC and Angola, the province has experienced progressive cultural diversification of its population. It has become a site of significant cultural heterogeneity, which has led to disorderly and sometimes oppressive urbanization. The appropriation of indigenous land by political and economic hegemonic forces, under the pretext of modernization inspired by the Western model, is a significant issue.

LUANDA AND THE UÍGE PROVINCE

Luanda, the capital of Angola, is located on the Atlantic coast in the northwest of the country. The city has developed along a strategic coastline, gradually expanding inland. Luanda is not only the largest city in the country but also one of the most dynamic urban centers in Africa. The city reflects a blend of African, European, and Brazilian cultural

influences, inherited from the Portuguese colonial period and successive waves of migration. It is home to a diverse ethnic composition, dominated by Angola's main ethnic groups: the Ovimbundu, Mbundu, and Bakongo, with Portuguese as the official language.

A symbol of Angola's modernization, Luanda boasts skyscrapers, well-kept streets, and luxury residential districts that starkly contrast with the musseques, informal settlements. The rapid expansion of these neighborhoods underscores the chaotic urbanization process, driven by factors such as rural exodus before the end of the civil war (1975–2002), the return of Angolan refugees from neighboring countries, and the economic boom fueled by oil exploitation after the war, particularly between 2004 and 2014.

The Uíge Province, located in the north of the country, shares a border with DRC. Like the Kongo Central Province, it was once part of the former Kingdom of Kongo, whose indigenous people are known as Kongo or Bakongo. Kikongo is the dominant language in the region, although Portuguese is widely used. Additionally, Lingala, a language of Congolese origin, has become widespread, including in parts of Luanda, illustrating the historical and migratory ties between Angola and its northern neighbor.

Although Uíge lags in urban development, it is striving to revitalize its agricultural sector and rebuild infrastructure damaged by the war. Many young people leave rural areas of Uíge to seek better opportunities in Luanda, driven by economic prospects despite persistent challenges such as informality and high unemployment rates.

THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS IN THE STUDIED AREAS. FROM TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS TO HISTORIC CHURCHES AND INDEPENDENT AFRICAN CHURCHES

The history of religions in the studied areas reveals a rich and diverse spiritual landscape. It traces the evolution of traditional religious systems, the establishment of historic churches, the emergence of independent African churches, and the proliferation of contemporary religious movements.

The encounter with Western culture in 1482, marked by the introduction of Catholicism in the former Kingdom of Kongo [Smith 2006; Smith, Nseyila 1982], was the starting point for the current presence of various Christian groups. This event initiated an ecumenical, even syncretic, religious experience between different religious currents, particularly traditional religions based on ancestral belief systems and Christianity.

Following this diplomatic encounter between Nzinga Nkuwu, the King of Kongo, and the Portuguese navigator Diego Cão, the Catholic Church established itself in territories that, after the 1885 Berlin Conference, took on a new status. On the Protestant side, long after 1482 and before 1885, several Christian missions of North American and European origin settled in the region, including the Livingston Inland Mission, the Svenska Mission, the Baptist Mission Society, and the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society [Smith 2006; MacGaffey 1983].

Among the most prominent figures in the Angolan and Congolese region dedicated to the Gospel was Ndonzoao Nlemvo, a renowned disciple of William Bentley[2]. He played a

[2] William Bentley (1855–1905) was a Baptist Missionary Society missionary in the Congo and author of a dictionary and grammar of the Kikongo language.

key role in translating the Bible into Kikongo and contributed to the writing of Bentley's English-Kikongo dictionary.

Throughout the colonial period until Independence, 1960 for DRC and 1975 for Angola, the studied regions witnessed a flourishing presence of Christian institutions, referred to here as "historic churches." Their evangelization methods included establishing schools, medical centers, and other development projects.

It is worth noting that during this period, prophetic Christian movements also emerged, such as Kimbanguism in Congo in 1921 and, within the Congolese space, the Tokoist movement in 1949 [Blanes 2022; Carducci, Péclard 2021], founded by an Angolan Baptist immigrant. These movements were among the first churches classified as "independent African churches." [Mudimbe 1991].

SYNOPSIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF CHURCHES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND ANGOLA

Several religious platforms exist in DRC with the most significant being CENCO and ECC. The CENCO (Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo) is the organization that brings together the country's Catholic bishops, representing various Catholic communities. The ECC (Église du Christ au Congo) is a federation of Protestant churches, founded in 1970, currently comprising more than one hundred Protestant-origin communities.

Apart from the two mentioned confessions, there is the Église de Réveil du Congo (ERC), which encompasses 6,900 churches nationwide. However, this number should be taken with caution, as field observations indicate that some of these so-called revival churches may consist of just one or two families.

Other religious communities include the Muslim Community of Congo, the Salvation Army, the Kimbanguist Church, the Black Church, and the Orthodox Church. Although precise statistics remain uncertain, estimates generally cite: 49% Catholics, 35% Protestants, 10% Kimbanguists, and a minority for other churches and religious groups[3].

The Église de Réveil and African Independent Churches, like ECC and CENCO, are coalitions that unite multiple religious institutions sharing common doctrinal points to form a legal entity with collective legal recognition. However, some, such as the Kimbanguist Church and the Salvation Army, for doctrinal and historical reasons, prefer to maintain their own, separate legal identity.

Despite their large number, all these religious institutions can be theologically grouped into the three main categories mentioned earlier: historic churches, independent churches, and revival churches.

In Angola, the historic communities, including Igreja Metodista Unida em Angola, Igreja Evangélica Baptista de Angola, Igreja Evangélica Congregacional em Angola, and Igreja Evangélica Reformada de Angola, are affiliated with CICA (Conselho de Igrejas Cristãs em Angola), the Council of Christian Churches in Angola. Founded on February 24, 1977, under the name CAIE (Conselho Angolano das Igrejas Evangélicas), CICA has

[3] Élections en RDC 2023: pourquoi l'église est-elle si influente? *BBC News Afrique*. 13.12.2023. https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/cgep8qvp5pjo (accessed: 20.03.2025)

evolved into a genuine ecumenical platform, even incorporating some independent African churches, such as the Kimbanguist Church and the Tokoist Church, which are not part of ECC in Congo.

Independent churches in Luanda are estimated to number over 1,200[4]. According to a leader of one of these churches, most of them are reluctant to affiliate with other religious platforms, except for the Kimbanguists, Bom Deus, and the Tokoists, whose presence is visible nationwide.

Revival churches, estimated at 700 to 800[5] in Luanda, are mostly integrated into the CIRA (Conselho das Igrejas do Reavivamento de Angola), a state-recognized organization.

Catholics are united under their own structure known as CEAST (Conferência Episcopal de Angola e São Tomé), in English, The Episcopal Conference of Angola and São Tomé. Additionally, there is AEA (Aliança Evangélica de Angola), which represents another federation of evangelical churches in the country.

CATEGORIZATION OF HISTORIC CHURCHES AND AFRICAN INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

The categorization of churches is necessary to assess the social contributions of each category of churches studied. Historic Churches refer to the first Christian denominations that occupied the Angola-Congo region. They are either the direct result of the work of the first Euro-American missionaries on African soil or of sister churches of Euro-American origin that came after them. On the Protestant side, Baptists, Mennonites, Methodists, and Presbyterians are considered historic churches, having established their presence, for the most part, well before World War II.

It should be noted that there are so-called second-generation historic Protestant communities, including the Salvation Army, which was established in the Congo in 1934 by the Belgian couple Mr. and Mrs. Becquet, as well as certain branches of Congolese Pentecostalism, such as the Assemblies of God.

There are also newly established Catholic congregations in DRC, including the Sisters of Malula, founded by the first Congolese Archbishop of Kinshasa, Cardinal Malula. Other notable congregations include the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Society of the Divine Word.

It is important to note that the categorization of second-generation Protestant and Catholic churches is often overshadowed by the precedence of the larger Christian family to which they belong. Nevertheless, their historical differentiation, based on their earlier presence in Angola and Congo, is significant, particularly in the history of the social works of historic churches, especially among Protestants. Their long-standing presence and historical influence are closely linked to their pioneering role in establishing

[4] These statistics were obtained by the author from the CIRA leaders in Luanda, based on the list of churches that are members of their organization. They were also confirmed by the leaders of CICA while the author was conducting a four-day webinar at the CICA office on the Church and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
[5] Ibid.

educational and healthcare infrastructures, such as schools, hospitals, training centers, and development projects in fields like livestock farming and agriculture. From these first-generation historic churches, much of the Angolan and Congolese elite of the pre-colonial and early post-colonial periods emerged.

African Independent Churches (AICs) are those founded by Africans. They are also divided into two major categories. One includes the churches that date back to the colonial period, such as the Kimbanguist Church and the Tokoist Church. These institutions are often defined as movements of resistance against colonial cultural, spiritual, social, political, and religious hegemony. The second is that of churches founded after the colonial period, such as Nzambe Malamu Church (God is good church) and Mpeve a Nlongo Church (Holy Spirit Church). These are largely Pentecostal or charismatic in nature, emphasizing healing and holistic well-being. Theologically, the Black Churches of the Congo also belong to this group. To this diverse religious landscape, we must also add the proliferation of revivalist or neo-Pentecostal churches, whose presence has intensified and reached its peak in recent decades.

Known for their rapid expansion, these churches are often founded by local charismatic leaders, many of whom were formerly members of established churches. Their motivations for founding new churches vary, including the desire to evangelize, internal conflicts within their original churches, or financial incentives, rather than strictly doctrinal disagreements. They adopt a more dynamic and media-driven approach to evangelization, attracting large numbers of followers from other churches who seek spiritual renewal and solutions to personal socio-economic challenges. Their membership statistics can vary widely from a single family wishing to establish a church to congregations with hundreds of members.

CHURCHES AND DEVELOPMENT WORK IN THE DRC: KINSHASA AND KONGO CENTRAL PROVINCE

Across sub-Saharan Africa, where Christianity is predominant, the social interventions and works of historic churches are among the most remarkable. Given their large demographic and historical presence and the continuity of the missionary pastoral theology, which sees education and medical work as essential tools for evangelization, these churches have become an unmatched force in providing social care to populations [Keough, Marshall 2004].

Angola and the DRC are no exception to this reality, as confirmed by our informants. Their testimonies often seem as if they were from the same neighborhood, city, or country, with similar phrases and analogies summarizing their views. “Whether one acknowledges it or not, whether one is Christian or not, we must recognize that without the historic churches, chaos would reign in education, healthcare, and even well-being in our country. We would be in a state of social disorder beyond explanation,” declared a group of 28 revival church leaders and pastors from historic churches during a meeting in Kinshasa[6].

[6] The author met with 28 revival church leaders and pastors, including 21 men and 7 women, at the Protestant Cathedral in Kinshasa in August 2015, conducting a two-hour webinar on church and development.

Among 340 respondents aged 16 to 70, surveyed across three revival churches in Luanda, Angola, during six separate church services, 337 stated that they had attended Catholic or Protestant primary and secondary schools in Angola or DRC. Twenty-two respondents also reported attending Catholic universities in both countries.[7]

During a meeting with CICA church leaders, the same reality was expressed. Three generations within some families have attended either Catholic or Protestant primary school in DRC or Angola. The dominance of church-run institutions in social welfare is widely acknowledged across all social strata in many Sub-Saharan African countries. Many elites of Angola and DRC owe their education to these institutions, as confirmed by three professors at the Agostinho Neto University in Luanda, who studied in DRC. Similarly, three professors at the University of Kinshasa and four medical doctors echoed the same sentiment, emphasizing that: "The Congolese intelligentsia and the entire nation owe a moral debt to the churches."[8] To substantiate this argument, one of the interviewees sang an old song from a Congolese orchestra, which says: "Ba Missioni batulongele, ba mpelo batulongele, bakintuadi batulongele, ABCD kingodi ngodi kia tusila bakulu."[9] It literally means that the Protestants have taught us, the Catholics have taught us, and the Kimbanguists have taught us ABCD, the music we received from our ancestors. This song highlights the role of three churches, Catholic, Protestant, and Kimbanguist, in teaching the Congolese people to read and write.

THE CONGOLESE AND ANGOLAN CHURCHES' HOLISTIC SOCIAL MISSION

The social role of churches extends beyond education and healthcare [Ela 2009]. As Soulama describes, churches demonstrate an "omnipresence in socio-economic work" [Soulama 2007], reflecting a holistic commitment to social welfare. This philosophy is based on a comprehensive vision of human existence, addressing all aspects of well-being: body, soul, and spirit [Ngudiankama 2001]. As a result, each religious institution mobilizes its resources, both human and financial, to address the needs of the people.

DRC

Among Congolese Catholic institutions, four major commissions embody this philosophy of action: Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace, Episcopal Commission for Legal Affairs (CEAJ), Episcopal Commission for Christian Education (CEEC), Episcopal Commission for Caritas-Development (CECD)[10].

[7] The author conducted these surveys for more than two months, from June to August 2017, with the following churches: *Igreja Cristo Vida* (Cazenga), *Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal Coluna de Fogo* (Mabor), and *Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal Getsemani* (Cazenga) in Luanda. Over 85 percent of the respondents spoke Lingala, French, and Kikongo and had studied in the D.R.C.

[8] The author regularly met and interviewed the three Angolan university professors mentioned in this paragraph between 2016 and 2017. None of them studied in Angola; they were educated in the DRC, where they grew up, as well as in Europe. The other seven individuals referenced include one sociologist, one historian, one anthropologist, and four medical doctors, whom the author interviewed in Kinshasa in 2015.

[9] Ibid.

[10] In 2016, the author held discussions with two Congolese Catholic priests based in Canada. These interviews were further enriched by three additional interviews he conducted in 2024 with Congolese Catholic intellectuals who are members of Kongo Academy in the USA.

Each of these commissions leverages its strengths to address the needs of the Congolese people. Among them, the Episcopal Commission for Caritas-Development is arguably the most significant, serving as a concrete expression of the Catholic Church's commitment to the well-being of Congolese citizens. Its mission is to enhance reflection and action for social welfare through justice, peace, charity, and solidarity. It also operates several sub-commissions focusing on health, solidarity, and development. According to the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO), the Catholic Church currently manages 18.6 thousand schools, including 12.6 thousand primary schools, 724 kindergarten schools, and 5.3 thousand secondary schools. These institutions educate over 4.3 million students, taught by 161.3 thousand teachers. These statistics cover both state-affiliated and non-state-affiliated Catholic schools[11]. Additionally, the CENCO operates over 1,500 healthcare facilities nationwide, including 152 referral hospitals, specialized centers for disabilities, nutritional centers, and centers for the deaf and mute.

With over 100 member communities, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) defines its mission around three themes: Evangelization, Education, and Diaconal Service (social work).

The Diaconal Service Department, which includes several commissions, oversees social issues such as healthcare, justice, peace, and environmental concerns. Regarding state-affiliated schools, a report from the Ministry of Education highlights that Protestants have the largest share, with 2.3 thousand primary schools and 13.2 thousand secondary schools. In comparison, the Catholic Church manages 884 primary schools and 5.4 thousand secondary schools. [12] Jean de Dieu Kawawa, National Coordinator of Protestant Schools, states that Protestants manage 26.8 thousand schools, while Catholics oversee 19.1 thousand schools This disparity is also evident in Kinshasa, where Protestants operate 812 schools, compared to 590 Catholic schools.[13]

The missionary theology that dictates, "Where a church is planted, a school, a dispensary, or a clinic must also be established," remains a core principle in the pastoral work of Congolese churches.

In many regions, Catholic and Protestant churches are the only institutions providing schools and medical facilities, ensuring that education and healthcare remain accessible to communities across the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The largest hospital in the Kongo Central province, and one of the largest in the country, is IME-Kimpese, founded in 1951 by British, American, and Swedish Protestant missionaries. Alongside it is the Kivuvu leprosarium, the largest of its kind nationwide. This hospital is the largest in the province and among the largest in the country. In addition to numerous dispensaries and clinics present in many parishes [Janzen 1978], notable reference hospitals in the Kongo Central province include Saint Luc de Kisantu, Kangu Hospital, Mangembo Hospital, Kimpangu Hospital, and Ngindinga Hospital, all under Catholic administration. On the Protestant side, there are hospitals such as Kibunzi, Luozi, IME-Kimpese, Sona Bata, Nsona Mpangu, and Kivunda.

[11] Élections en RDC 2023: pourquoi l'église est-elle si influente? *BBC News Afrique*. 13.12.2023. https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/cgep8qvp5pjo (accessed: 20.03.2025)
[12] Government Reports from the National Ministry of Education, 2024
[13] National Education Office, 2024

The provincial report of the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) indicates that the province has 7 reference hospitals, 33 health centers, 5 hospital centers, 20 health centers, 70 health posts, and 15 medical training institutes.[14]

Dr. Patrick Mangoni, who worked for a long time in Vanga, one of the most significant Protestant medical institutions in the Bandundu region, and Professor Samuel Mampunza Ma Miezi, a psychiatrist, former dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Kinshasa, and one of the co-founders of the School of Medicine at the Protestant University of Congo, affirm along with Dr. Laurent Mamba the uniqueness of the historical churches' medical work in DRC.[15]

Beyond their large presence, the health centers operated by historical churches are recognized for being affordable and accessible to the underprivileged.

The contribution of churches to higher education is also significant. In Kinshasa, Protestants own two major universities: Christian University of Kinshasa (UCEKIN) and the Protestant University of Congo. The Catholics, on the other hand, have a multitude of higher education institutions, including the Catholic University of Congo and Cardinal Malula University. It should also be noted that two of the largest Congolese universities, the University of Kinshasa and the University of Kisangani, which are now government-managed, were originally initiatives of Catholic and Protestant missionaries, respectively.

The Salvation Army, which was formerly part of the Church of Christ in Congo, is well known for its social care efforts in education, healthcare, and orphanages. Nationwide, the Salvation Army operates a total of 674 schools, including 37 preschools, 369 primary schools, and 268 secondary schools.[16] Its healthcare programs are also highly visible. Its university, William Booth University, named after the founder of the Salvation Army, is well-attended in Kinshasa.

Among all independent African churches in Congo, the Kimbanguist Church stands out. It has development programs, some of which rival those of certain Protestant communities, including women's development projects. The church operates a university in Bongolo, a major hospital in the Kimbanseke district, and several clinics across Kinshasa, as highlighted by Pastor Mengi-Zola and his wife, Florence. In Kongo Central province, at its headquarters in Nkamba, the church has established a modern city surrounded by rural villages. Its schools, covering various levels of education, are widespread throughout the province.

Revivalist churches, despite their intentions, generally do not have significant social initiatives, either in the capital or the provinces, with a few exceptions. However, some social care institutions belong to or are affiliated with leaders of these churches. L'Eglise du Combat Spirituel ("The Spiritual Welfare Church", CFMC), one of the largest revivalist churches in DRC, along with the ministry of Pastor François Mutombo, Voici l'homme, and the church "Mon âme bénit l'Éternel led by Patrice Ngoy, own clinics in Kinshasa. CFMC, in addition to its clinic, also runs social projects in the capital, including programs for vulnerable populations.

[14] 2024 Reports from the ECC Central Congo office
[15] Three of them are medical doctors with long experiences with protestant medical institutions.
[16] Statistics from the National Congolese Salvation Army Office.

Angola

The CICA encapsulates the social philosophy of its member churches through a robust mission program divided into several departments: Evangelism and Cooperation, Social Assistance and Development, Theological Education, Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation, Promotion of Moral and Civic Values, Communication, Health (HIV/AIDS, malaria), Women and Youth, Administration, and Finance.

CICA serves as a motivator, encouraging communities to engage in such programs. However, as many Angolan Protestants have pointed out, including Methodists, who own a major university in Luanda, and a few Protestant communities in the South, the social work and infrastructure of Protestant churches, such as clinics and complete secondary education cycles, are almost nonexistent. Baptist Evangelical Church in Angola (IEBA), one of the country's oldest historic churches, has barely one clinic and a Bible institute whose facilities do not reflect the longevity of this long-standing community.[17] This widespread perception of Protestant churches led another church leader to state that, in terms of infrastructure and social care projects, “there are some initiatives, but their percentage is almost invisible. It cannot be even compared to the Congo, where many of our leaders have been trained and most of us still go for medical treatment. Yet, it is not because of lack of financial resources but people of goodwill in our church leadership.”[18]

A reflection on Rev. Deolinda’s social engagement during her tenure as General Secretary of the Council of Christian Churches in Angola (CICA), from March 2013 to April 2024, sheds light on the modest contribution of the churches affiliated with the organization she led.

She was a member of the Commission for the Implementation of the Reconciliation Plan in Memory of the Victims of Political Conflicts (CIVICOP), addressing conflicts that lasted three decades. Before becoming CICA's General Secretary, she served as Director of the Department of Justice, Evangelization, Reconciliation, and Cooperation (1999–2007). During this time, CICA participated in and led numerous seminars on conflict resolution, peacebuilding, human rights, and citizenship across almost all Angolan provinces where CICA operates. They collaborated with civil society organizations and Catholic Church bodies, including the Justice and Peace Commission and Mosaiko, which is an Angolan non-profit organization dedicated to promoting human rights and fostering a culture of active citizenship. During the same period, she organized various peace and reconciliation programs, including ecumenical worship services focused on forgiveness and reconciliation, held both during and after the armed conflict.

She co-founded the Inter-Ecclesial Committee for Peace in Angola (COIEPA), a faith-based organization comprising the Episcopal Conference of Angola and São Tomé (CEAST), CICA, and the Evangelical Alliance of Angola (AEA). Through COIEPA, communities were educated on peace issues, and the three institutions issued pastoral letters to warring parties, while also organizing massive ecumenical

[17] The author conducted interviews with Baptist theology students and pastors in Luanda in 2017.
[18] The author interviewed an Angolan church leader and medical doctor during a one-month training under his supervision in Washington, DC, in 2016.

gatherings for peace in Angola, sometimes attracting over 50,000 worshippers in football stadiums.[19]

She contributed to human rights and peacebuilding manuals in collaboration with Development Workshop (NGO) and co-authored the CICA Peacebuilding Manual alongside Dr. Fidel Lumeya and his wife, Crista, missionaries from the Mennonite community in the United States. This manual became a key tool for mindset transformation and peacebuilding. Alongside the Lumeyas, she helped organize seminars to train religious leaders in conflict resolution, a strategy regarded as the best approach to equipping faith leaders with the skills to manage internal disputes while serving as catalysts for national peacebuilding.

As for health initiatives, she led CICA to be actively involved in public health promotion. She served as the coordinator for the Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) for Portuguese-speaking countries (2007–2013), a World Council of Churches program. This role involved working with churches in Angola, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau.[20]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she played a significant role in community awareness efforts, mobilizing people to adopt preventive measures (mask-wearing, handwashing, and using sanitizers) and assisting in providing food for vulnerable populations. In this context, CICA worked closely with the Ministry of Health, the Catholic Church, the Evangelical Alliance, and independent churches.[21]

Thus, the Kimbanguist Church (known as “1+26”), a CICA member in Angola, has schools across the country, several clinics, and a university project.[22] Similarly, the Tokoist Church, specifically the Universal branch, also a CICA member, runs a university, schools, food security projects, health initiatives, and a major clinic project. It is also highly engaged in justice, peace, and conflict resolution projects nationwide.

Much like what is observed in Brazil, where non-Catholic Christian communities actively contribute to social projects [Ter Haar, Ellis, 2006], these two independent churches play a substantial role in Angola's social development. Interestingly, in DRC, the birthplace of the Tokoist Church, the denomination has yet to develop visible social projects.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CHURCHES’ SOCIAL ACTIONS

The efforts of Catholic and Protestant churches in DRC in the fields of health and education far surpass those of government institutions. The strength of these communities’ performance stems primarily from their philosophy of the human person, as shaped by their evangelical mandate. The human being, created in the image of God, requires holistic pastoral care that addresses all aspects of their ecological and existential

[19] Dialogues with CICA officers following Rev. Teca’s retirement as General Secretary of CICA.
[20] Information collected by the author during his first three visits to Angola. The first visit was solely sponsored by CICA, providing the author with several opportunities to visit various CICA sites and its member churches.
[21] Rev. Deolinda Teca is known for promoting ecumenical relations to enhance the effectiveness of faith-based organizations in addressing social challenges.
[22] Author’s fieldwork observations and dialogues with Kimbanguist leaders in Luanda in 2017.

dimensions. This explains the presence of these churches' interventions, both in number and quality, across various domains, including politics, education, environment, and health.

Due to their relationships with foreign missionary societies, historic churches often hold a significant advantage in national development. As a result, they are indispensable partners in matters and projects related to the well-being of the population.

A notable example is the CENCO-ECC alliance in their efforts to restore peace in DRC and the Great Lakes region. This initiative, symbolized by the "Social Pact," could only be led by historic churches, given their internationally recognized cultural, symbolic, social, and even economic capital [Bourdieu 1979].

The early independent churches, such as the Kimbanguist Church, base their development philosophies on the internal resources of their community. The concept of "Kintwadi," meaning "being together," is central to their approach. This community solidarity has enabled major social projects, such as Nkamba City, the Kimbanseke Hospital, the women's fishing boat project, and the Lutendele farm. Although they occasionally receive aid from foreign organizations or the government, these contributions are considered secondary.

The Tokoist Church in Angola presents an interesting case. While its members are the primary source of funding for their development projects, the Angolan government is also a key ally, providing significant financial support to certain initiatives. It is widely recognized that the Tokoist Church, under the leadership of Bishop Afonso Nunes, benefits from government sponsorship. This collaboration is seen as natural, given the church's demographic importance, its potential as an instrument of social transformation, and its historical role as the only Angolan-born institution that actively fought against colonization.

Revivalist churches, such as "Combat Spirituel" [Tshiteku 2024], strive to meet the social needs of local communities by relying primarily on the contributions of their members. However, most African revivalist or independent churches from the early period, mainly the 1980s, have a lesser impact in this domain. Several reasons contribute to this, including the use of the church as a means of social comfort for its leaders. The lack of material resources and other structural challenges that prevent them from competing with historic churches.

Individually, these churches are rarely, if ever, sought out by governments or international institutions as partners for large-scale programs. Three groups of revivalist church leaders in Angola remarked that "None of our churches here have social projects comparable to those of major African independent churches like Tokoism and Kimbanguism, let alone the Catholics, Baptists, or Methodists. The reasons are a lack of finances, training, and relationships with the government and Western organizations that could support us… For this reason, we need partners to help us acquire human, logistical, and financial resources so that we can contribute to the development of our communities, just as other well-established churches do."[23]

The lack of substantial social projects, such as hospitals and complete school cycles, among historic Protestant churches in Angola is seen by many, including some of their

[23] Ibid.

leaders, as a lack of will from those in charge, as well as a culture of greed that is typical of many of them. During the oil boom period, some church members noted, "hundreds of thousands of dollars flowed into these churches."[24]

CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE INDISPENSABILITY OF CHURCHES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Historic churches, especially Catholic and Protestant, remain dominant and irreplaceable actors in promoting the welfare of populations in Angola and Congo. While they benefit from various historic advantages, including government support and strong international partnerships, many independent and revivalist churches, like in many parts of Africa, stand out for their resilience and innovation. They leverage internal resources to develop initiatives tailored to local realities. This diversity of approaches enriches Africa's social development landscape, complementing the models established by institutional churches.

It should be noted that, despite the praises for historic churches, several challenges continue to hinder the full impact of churches in general. These include corruption and exploitation within many Protestant, revivalist, and independent African churches; the rise of an ecclesiastical bourgeois elite driven by ethnic loyalty rather than collective interest; and the co-optation of religious institutions by political regimes, which exchange support for privileges, thereby compromising their prophetic and social mission.

For example, while CENCO and ECC have criticized corrupt leaders and called for their removal or stepping down from power, some corrupt religious leaders have countered these calls by invoking the principle that the Church must remain neutral. Additionally, independent and revivalist churches often face a lack of recognition or are underestimated by some leaders of historical churches and politicians as legitimate actors in social development. The reasons frequently cited include lack of academic rigor and absence of a structured theological framework.

Despite these shortcomings, churches remain crucial agents of social transformation. This is because of their closeness to individuals and communities, as well as their ethical and theological philosophy advocating for holistic well-being.

Indeed, the Church has never been absent or completely silenced in the social development arena. Modern secular ideologies, which sought to marginalize or reduce religion [Foucault 1975], have realized that development efforts are less effective without the contribution of religious institutions [Mbiti 1990]. The widespread presence of mission-based social structures and the proliferation of churches serve as a reminder of their indispensable role in the pursuit of human well-being. This underscores the fact that humans cannot be reduced to mechanical or atomistic systems or bodies [Foucault 1975] but must be approached in their full existential dimensions. Thus, to maximize their impact, both historical and emerging churches in Angola and DRC would benefit from strengthening ethical engagement, promoting transparent governance, encouraging rigorous academic and theological training, and fostering inter- and intra-faith dialogues.

[24] Ibid.

Such an approach would enhance their role as critical partners in social transformation and contribute to a truly inclusive development in Africa [Keough, Marshall, 2004].

REFERENCES

Blanes R.L. (2022). *A Prophetic Trajectory: Ideologies of Place, Time and Belonging in an Angolan Religious Movement*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Bourdieu P. (1979). *La Distinction:Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

Carducci F., Péclard. D. (2021). Être Tokoïste pour Être Citoyen. Pratiques Religieuses et Subjectivation Citoyenne en Angola. *Lusotopie*. Vol. XX. № 1–2. Pp. 1-20. https://doi.org/10.4000/lusotopie.2254

Coffey A., Atkinson P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. London: SAGE Publications.

Douglas M. (2009). A Feeling for Hierarchy. In: Heft. J.L. (Ed.). *Believing Scholars: Ten Catholic Intellectuals*. New York: Fordham University Press. Pp. 94-120.

Ela J.M. (2009). *My Faith as an African*. New York: Orbis Books.

Foucault M. (1975). *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison*. Paris: Gallimard.

Janzen J.M. (1978). *The Quest for Therapy in Lower Zaire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Janzen J.M. (2019). *Health in a Fragile State: Science, Sorcery, and Spirit in the Lower Congo*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Keough L.H., Marshall K. (2004). *Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight Against Poverty*. Washington: World Bank.

MacGaffey W. (1983). *Modern Kongo Prophets: Religion in a Plural Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mbiti J.S. (1990). *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

Mudimbe V.Y. (1991). *Parables and Fables: Exegesis, Textuality, and Politics in Central Africa*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Mufwene S.S. (2010). The Role of Mother-Tongue Schooling in Eradicating Poverty: A Response to "Language and Poverty." *Language*. Vol. 86. № 4. Pp. 910–932.

Ngudiankama A.N. (2001). *Concepts of Health and Therapeutic Options among Congolese Refugees in London: Implications for Education.* PhD Dissertation. Institute of Education, University of London.

Ngudiankama A.N. (2021). *From Kongo Central to the Americas via Europe: A Cultural Overview*. Philadelphia: Dorrance Publishing Co.

Smith R.E., Nseyila D.D. (1982). *Zaire: Perception and Perspectives*. Valley Forge: International Ministries ABC/USA.

Smith V.L. (2006). *Batie sur le Roc*. Vigil: Niagara Graphics.

Soulama K. (2007). *La Place de l'Eglise Catholique dans le Développement Socio-Économique de la Région de Banfora, de 1942 à Nos Jours*. Mémoire de Maîtrise d'Histoire. Ouagadougou: Université de Ouagadougou.

Ter Haar. G., Ellis S. (2006). The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa. *The European Journal of Development Research*. Vol. 18. № 3. Pp. 351–367. https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810600893403

Tshiteku J.N. (2024). *Le Combat des Mamans. Femmes, Thérapies et Revendications Identitaires en République du Congo*. Brescia: Morcelliana.

Научная статья

НА СТЫКЕ ВЕРЫ И СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ ПРЕОБРАЗОВАНИЙ: ЭТНОГРАФИЧЕСКИЕ НАБЛЮДЕНИЯ ИЗ ЦЕРКВЕЙ ДРК И АНГОЛЫ

© 2025 А.Н. Нгудианкама

НГУДИАНКАМА Адриан Нгинамау, PhD (теология, антропология и социология здоровья), директор, Академия Конго, США. ORCID: 0000-0002-1428-3369. E-mail: n.adrien@kongoacademy.org

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается ключевая роль церквей в оказании социальной помощи в Анголе и в Демократической Республике Конго (ДРК). С помощью этнографических наблюдений и сравнительного анализа автор исследует вклад исторических церквей, африканских независимых церквей и церквей возрождения в образование, здравоохранение, разрешение конфликтов и развитие общин. В то время как исторические церкви остаются лидерами в деле социальных преобразований благодаря своему давнему миссионерскому наследию, независимые церкви и некоторые возрожденческие движения демонстрируют достаточно устойчивый и инновационный подход, несмотря на имеющиеся финансовые проблемы и структурные ограничения. В данном исследовании подробно анализируются системные вызовы, ослабляющие роль церквей как важнейших партнеров в социальных преобразованиях. Речь идет о проблемах управления, политической кооптации и внутрирелигиозных разногласиях, которые порождают гегемонистское церковное управление, глубоко укоренившееся в этнической динамике и подкрепленное культурой лояльности коррумпированному руководству, часто движимому соображениями личного социально-экономического благополучия и самообогащения. С другой стороны, в статье подчеркивается незаменимая роль церковных учреждений в холистическом развитии общества. Результаты проведенного исследования свидетельствуют о том, что устойчивые партнерские отношения между церквями, правительствами и международными организациями могут усилить позитивные социальные преобразования и инклюзивное развитие в Африке. Партнерский характер отношений может сформировать возможности по обеспечению подотчетности, что позволит религиозным организациям сохранить свой авторитет в качестве ключевых партнеров в деле повышения благосостояния населения континента.

Ключевые слова: социальная помощь, Ангола, исторические церкви, африканские независимые церкви, церкви возрождения, образование, здравоохранение, разрешение конфликтов, религия и общество, религиозные организации

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-26-41

Для цитирования: Нгудианкама А.Н. На стыке веры и социальных преобразований: этнографические наблюдения из церквей ДРК и Анголы. Ученые записки Института Африки РАН. 2025. Т. 11. № 1. С. 26–41. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-70-1-26-41