Portugal

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The Adventist work in Portugal began in 1904 when an American missionary couple, Clarence and Mary Rentfro, arrived and has continued through various challenges presented by numerous regime changes over the years.
Overview

Portugal is a small country located in the extreme southwestern section of Europe, more precisely in the western part of the Iberian Peninsula. It covers about 93,212 square kilometers (36,000 square miles), and 10.3 million people populate it. The Madeira Islands and the Azores Islands, both in the Atlantic, also belong to Portugal. The country’s capital and largest city is Lisbon, with an overall metropolitan population of about 2.8 million.

The country has a long and distinguished history. Its territory has been populated since time immemorial. Its better-known history begins with the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula starting in 218 B.C. Christianity was introduced in the third century A.D. With the fragmentation of the Roman Empire, some Germanic peoples took control of the Iberian Peninsula in the fifth century A.D. After some confrontation, the Visigoths conquered all the territory and formed a united kingdom in 585 A.D. In 711 A.D., a Muslim army invaded the Visigoth kingdom and conquered it. Almost all the Iberian Peninsula fell in the hands of the Muslim invaders, who introduced their religion into the region. The last Christians took refuge in the northernmost region of the Iberian Peninsula (the Asturias region). Soon they organized a movement of conquest that gradually regained the lost territory and reintroduced Christianity. This trend of events led Afonso Henriques to establish the Portuguese kingdom in 1179 A.D. This date marks the official recognition by Pope Alexander III of the legitimacy of the new kingdom and of the new king (in the papal Bull Manifestis Probatum). The importance of this recognition shows how united were the destinies of the Portuguese kingdom and the Holy See. It also indicates the important role that the Catholic Church would have in the history of the Portuguese people.

In 1385, a new dynasty—the Avis dynasty, founded by João I—assumed the political control of the country and started the extraordinary maritime expansion of the Portuguese. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the influence of Portugal as a maritime power was felt in many parts of the world. The Portuguese established a seaborne commercial empire that would include dependencies in Africa, Asia, and South America.

In 1531, João III obtained from the Holy See a bull that authorized the establishment of the Inquisition in the country. This institution affected the spiritual life of the people for centuries. Its tight control over the country successfully prevented the penetration and development of Reformation ideas among the Portuguese people. At the zenith of its power, Portugal lost its independence, falling under the dominion of the Spanish crown from 1580 to 1640. After 1640, a new Portuguese dynasty came to power but found the country in an advanced state of decadence. The seaborne empire was recovered in part, but Portugal did not regain its dominant position on the geopolitical scene.

After the Napoleonic wars, in 1834, Portugal was transformed into a constitutional monarchy. Freed from the Inquisition and from the excessive influence of the Catholic Church in the political affairs of the country, Portugal sought economic and cultural development. Some measure of development was achieved, and liberal policies were implemented, but for some this was not enough. In 1910, the disaffected were able to subvert the liberal monarchy and proclaim the Republic. With the Republic came an aggressive attack on the remaining privileges of the Catholic Church in the country. The Church counterattacked with the alleged Marian apparitions in the small village of Fátima in 1917, using them to maintain, as far as possible, its privileged position in Portuguese society and in the collective mentality of the people.

In 1926, the Republican regime was subverted by a coup d’état, and a dictatorship was put in place. António Salazar obtained the control of the state in 1933. This was the beginning of the so-called “New State” regime, under which the Catholic Church again gained a foothold in the Portuguese political arena. In 1940, the Portuguese State signed a concordat with the Holy See. Then, after almost 50 years of dictatorship, a revolutionary movement in the armed forces put an end to the regime. The “Carnations’ Revolution” marked April 25, 1974, as the beginning point of democracy in Portugal. The Constitution of 1976 guarantees freedom of conscience and religious liberty for all Portuguese. The position of the democratic regime concerning the relations with the various religious entities present in Portugal was asserted in the important Law of Religious Liberty promulgated on June 22, 2001. Today, Portugal is a democratic country as well as a member of the European Union, which fully guarantees the respect for all human rights.
Seventh-day Adventist Origins and Pioneers

Stephen N. Haskell (1833–1922) was the first Seventh-day Adventist minister to visit Portugal. Haskell traveled around the world at the service of the General Conference during 1889 and 1890 in order to inquire about favorable conditions for the establishment of Adventist missions. In the course of this worldwide trip, he arrived in Portugal in July 1889. Haskell was impressed with the city of Lisbon, mentioning in his report for the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* the considerable degree of religious liberty guaranteed in Portugal by the constitutional monarchy.

Seventh-day Adventist work did not begin in earnest until September 26, 1904, with the arrival in Lisbon of the first missionary couple from the United States of America: Clarence Emerson (27 years old) and Mary (Haskell; 30 years old) Rentfro, with their little baby Charles Allen Rentfro. Clarence had attended Battle Creek College (1897–1898), Union College (1900) and Emmanuel Missionary College (1902) but never graduated. Mary studied nursing in the Adventist Iowa Sanitarium and graduated in 1903. After their arrival, they began learning Portuguese with a private teacher. Rentfro began selling Seventh-day Adventist literature, especially the Brazilian *O Arauto da Verdade* (The herald of truth), making missionary contacts and visits, and preaching.

May 19, 1906, saw the first fruits of his missionary labors. Mrs. Lucy Portugal (1845–1927), a middle-class Anglican believer, accepted the Seventh-day Sabbath and decided to keep it. She was the first Portuguese Seventh-day Adventist believer. In her house, a Sabbath School with 12 regular attendants started immediately. On August 16, 1906, Rentfro opened the first Seventh-day Adventist place of worship in Portugal, dedicating one part of his house in Lisbon to that end.

On June 6, 1906, Ernesto Schwantes, an ordained minister, arrived in Portugal with his family from Brazil. While waiting to go to Oporto (the second largest city in Portugal), Schwantes conducted the first Seventh-day Adventist baptismal ceremony in Portugal. On September 21, 1906, two women (Maria Morgado de Figueiredo and Lucy Portugal) and two men (António Vitor de Figueiredo and Alberto Carlos de Figueiredo) were baptized at Carcavelos beach, 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Lisbon. On the following day, Adventists celebrated the first Lord’s Supper in Portugal. On September 27, 1906, Schwantes and family went to Oporto to begin the work there. By preaching and selling literature, he was able to gather a group of half a dozen interested people. In 1907, at the beach of Aguda, near the town of Espinho, the first converts from northern Portugal were baptized: Joaquim Dias Gomes and his wife, and João Pereira do Lago, who became the first effective colporteur in the country. Schwantes returned to Brazil in the beginning of 1909.

On March 28, 1907, the influential Portuguese newspaper *O Século* published a two-page article about the work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal, the first reference to the Church in Portuguese media. At the fifth session of the Latin Union Conference, May 21 to 24, 1907, Clarence Rentfro was recommended for ordination. He was ordained in the same year.

The first piece of Seventh-day Adventist literature to be published in Portugal was *O Preceptor da Bíblia no Lar* (*The Family Bible Teacher*), in June 1907. It was a 124-page book, translated and edited by Clarence Rentfro. He also translated and published other pieces of literature that the first colporteurs sold in Portugal. In 1909 the journal *Os Signaes dos Tempos* (*The signs of the times*), with Clarence Rentfro as director and editor, began to be published.

In October 1910, Rentfro saluted the instauration of the Republic in Portugal as an advantage for the free exercise of the liberty to believe and for the spread of the Adventist work in the country. In 1911, Paul Meyer, a Swiss Adventist minister, arrived in Portugal. He was assigned the work in Lisbon while the Rentfros went to Oporto in order to sustain the work there. In the spring of 1912, a modest place of worship in Oporto was opened. The Lisbon church was organized later that year, in August. It was the first organized church in Portugal and started with 40 members.

In the yearbook of 1913, Clarence Rentfro is mentioned as the first director of the Portuguese Mission. In fact, Rentfro was present at the 1913 General Conference Session as the delegate of that mission. In 1914, the church in Oporto was organized with 22 members. In the same year, Alberto Raposo started his ministry as a colporteur in Oporto but was soon assigned to work as a junior pastor in Lisbon. Paul Meyer, who was then the senior pastor of the Lisbon church, enjoyed working with the young Portuguese pastor. Raposo was the first national minister to join the workforce of the denomination in Portugal. On March 17, 1917, Clarence Rentfro and family departed to Brazil to preside over the Mineira Mission. By this time, there were two Seventh-day Adventist churches (Lisbon and Oporto) with 102 members in the country.

Spread and Development of the Message
In April 1917, Paul Meyer assumed the presidency of the Portuguese Mission, having only Alberto Raposo as fellow pastor in the ministry. Meyer was pastor of the Lisbon church, and Raposo ministered to the Oporto church. In 1922, the António Dias Gomes, a Portuguese citizen, joined the ministerial staff. In 1920, the Adventist message reached the city of Portalegre, where a new congregation was organized in 1924, and in 1923 it reached the city of Tomar. At the end of 1923, the Portuguese Mission had 179 members. In April 1924, the Swiss minister Jules-César Guenin briefly assumed the leadership of the Portuguese Mission. His short presidency had only one highlight: the inauguration of a brand-new Seventh-day Adventist church building in Lisbon on November 28, 1924. It was located in a new neighborhood of the city and seated 600. In July 1925, Harry W. Lowe of Great Britain became the head of the Portuguese Mission.

In January 1926, with the dissolution of the Latin Union Conference, the Portuguese Mission became part of the new Iberian Mission. In October 1928, the mission had grown to 209 members and had four Portuguese licensed ministers. From October 1928 to March 1930, the Portuguese Mission was left without a president. This changed when Henri F. Neumann became its leader in March 1930. During his leadership, which extended to August 1933, the mission grew to 227 members.

From August 1933 to December 1939, the leadership of the Portuguese field was, for the first time, filled by a native: António Dias Gomes. While he was in office, the Portuguese field was raised to the status of a conference in 1935, and António Dias Gomes became president of that entity, with Pedro Brito Ribeiro as secretary-treasurer. The same year saw the beginning of the first Seventh-day Adventist elementary school, and a new church was opened in Coimbra. New companies were established in Barreiro, Ribeira de Nisa, Vila Real de Santo António, Matosinhos, and Cascais.

In December 1939, the Portuguese Union Mission was organized, with A. J. Girou as president and Pedro Brito Ribeiro as secretary-treasurer. At the end of 1939, the Portuguese Conference had 259 members and 10 ministers. The union mission incorporated the Portuguese Conference, the Madeira Islands Mission, the Azores Islands Mission, the Cape Verde Islands Mission, and the Saint Thomas Islands Mission. In May 1940, the Revista Adventista (Adventist Review), the official magazine of the Portuguese field, was founded. By the time A. J. Girou left office in February 1941, the Portuguese Union had 668 members.

From February 1941 to July 1950, António Dias Gomes served as president of the Portuguese Union. In June 1941, the Portuguese Publishing House (Publicadora Atlântico) was established, and in 1942 a new health magazine, Saúde e Lar, was started. On March 5, 1948, a new church in the northern city of Oporto was inaugurated. In April that same year, the Portuguese Bible Correspondence School was started.

From July 1950 to December 1957, Ernesto Ferreira served as president of the Portuguese Union. Evidencing the development of the work among the youth in the Portuguese Union, a delegation of the Portuguese youth was present in the Seventh-day Adventist European Youth Congress held July 24–29, 1951, in Paris. In 1952, the first National Camp of the Portuguese Missionary Volunteers was organized.

When Ernesto Ferreira became president of the Angolan Field in January 1958, Pedro Brito Ribeiro was designated acting president of the Portuguese Union until December 1958. Then Armando Casaca led the Portuguese Union from December 1958 to December 1968, overseeing a surge of growth in the Portuguese Union. The Adventist message was taken to new towns and cities of Portugal (Viseu, Lisboa-Roçadas, Amadora, Sangalhos, Vila do Conde, Arganil, Leiria, and Aveiro). By the end of his leadership in 1968, there were 35 churches organized and 3,536 members, and a new home for the elderly (referred to as a LAPI—lar Adventista para pessoas idosas [Adventist nursing home for elderly people]) had started in Pêro Negro (LAPI—Pêro Negro).

In January 1969, Ernesto Ferreira was again elected president of the Portuguese Union. At this time, a new emphasis was placed on the evangelization of the Portuguese territory through the medium of the radio. A new studio for the radio program Voz da Esperança (Voice of hope) was inaugurated, and more radio stations started to broadcast the program. At the October 1971 session of the Portuguese Union, the president reported that there had been 1,489 baptisms since 1967, increasing the membership to 4,122 believers. At this session, the Portuguese Union was dissolved, and the Portuguese Conference was re-created (as Associação Portuguesa dos Adventistas do Sétiho Dia). This new conference was made a part of the new South-European Union. Ernesto Ferreira was elected president of the new conference, and he remained in that office until October 1974. During these years, there was an increase not only in the membership but also in the construction of chapels and in the opening of places of worship across the country (Caniço, Lages, Oliveira de Azeméis, Santarem, Odivelas, Vila Franca de Xira, and Guimarães).

From December 1974 to June 1977, António Baião directed the Portuguese Conference. Evangelistic efforts were increased with the missionary programs Ação (Action) 74, Ação 75, Ação 76, and Ação 77, which took place across Portugal. In 1975, Adventist secondary schools were opened in Lisbon (Externato Infanta Dona Joana) and in Oporto (Externato Adventista de Oliveira do Douro).

In July 1977, Ernesto Ferreira came back to head the Portuguese field and served as president of the Portuguese Conference until July 1979. During this period, he promoted programs to evangelize Portugal. The outreach effort of the church was manifested in the global evangelistic campaigns called Ação 78 and Ação 79. As a result of these and other efforts, from 1977 to 1979, there were 893 baptisms, increasing the conference membership to 5,079 believers worshiping in 42 churches across Portugal.

In July 1979, a new leader, Joaquim Morgado, became president of the Portuguese Conference. The delegates of the session that elected the new leaders challenged the newly elected administration to plant an Adventist presence.
In all the main Portuguese urban centers, and three years later, 13 new churches had been organized all over Portugal.

In 1982, Joaquim Morgado was elected as president of the new Portuguese Union of Churches. From then until 1987, 1,686 persons were baptized, 15 new churches and 3 companies were organized, and 29 chapels were built or acquired.

Five years later, in July 1992, Morgado retired from office. During this last tenure, there were 1,322 baptisms, raising the union membership to 7,413 believers, and five new churches were organized and joined the union, increasing the number of churches to 77. The new president of the Portuguese Union of Churches was Joaquim Dias, who served in this capacity until July 1997. During his five-year tenure, 246 evangelistic campaigns were conducted across Portugal, which resulted in 1,338 baptisms. The new building of the Portuguese Publishing House (Publicadora Atlântico) was erected in Sabugo in 1997.

From July 1997 to June 2006, Mário Brito led the Portuguese Union. During his tenure, three events may be highlighted: First, the evangelistic campaign by satellite NET 2001: Paz para Viver (Peace to live by) aired in October 2001; second, the celebration of 100 years of Adventist presence in Portugal, which took place on October 22-23, 2004, in Lisbon; and third, between September 2003 and December 2006, 70 health expos were conducted in Portugal.

From July 2006 to April 2012, José Eduardo Teixeira served as president of the Portuguese Union. During his tenure, the presence of the church in the Portuguese media was increased. From 2008 to 2011, 95 episodes of Tempo de Esperança (Time of hope) were aired on the national TV channel RTP2. In the same period, 16 radio stations broadcasted the Voz da Esperança (Voice of hope) program. Moreover, mention must be made of a missionary book project in Portugal in which hundreds of thousands of books were given to people from 2010 onward as gifts. In 2010, the staggering number of 760,000 copies of Caminho para a Esperança (Steps to Christ) were printed and freely distributed in the country. About 350,000 copies of Um tempo para si (A time for yourself), a book on the Sabbath, were distributed in 2011, and the next year, 90,000 copies of O Grande Conflito (The Great Controversy) were given away.

In 2012, there were 9,425 members in 96 churches and 26 companies, which gave a ratio of 1 Seventh-day Adventist per 1,120 Portuguese.

In April 2012, António Rodrigues was elected president of the Portuguese Union. Distribution of the missionary book continued to be a major project for the union. Between 2014 and 2017, in addition to other evangelistic advances, 670,000 books were distributed nationwide. The TV program Tempo de Esperança continued to be aired on the national TV channel RTP2. From 2012 to 2017, 125 programs were broadcast. However, Adventist presence on the radio suffered an apparent setback during this quinquennium. The number of radio stations that aired the program Voz da Esperança was reduced from 16 to 6. But the funds thus liberated were invested in the church's FM radio station RCS in Lisbon, which had been acquired by the Portuguese Union in 2004. At the end of António Rodrigues's tenure in March 2017, membership had declined: there were 95 churches and 20 companies in Portugal with a combined membership of 9,339 believers.

In April 2017, António Amorim became the president of the Portuguese Union. After some years of slow growth or even decline, the Portuguese Church began a strong and consolidated development. In 2018 there were 93 churches, 22 companies, and 9,487 members in the Portuguese Union. The churches and companies are heavily clustered around the Great Lisbon and Great Oporto urban areas. The distribution of churches by regional areas was as follows: Lisbon Region—29 churches, Northern Region (including Oporto)—20 churches, Central Region—25 churches, Alentejo and Algarve (Southern) Regions—15 churches, and Islands of Azores and Madeira—4 churches.

Institutions

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal has created a host of institutions to support its work. These institutions cover the areas of education, social work, communications, and publishing.

There are presently five Seventh-day Adventist schools in Portugal. The Elementary School of Funchal (Escola Primária do Funchal), on the island of Madeira, was inaugurated in 1936. Escola Primária do Funchal is the oldest of the Portuguese schools that is still running. For the 2017/2018 school year, 52 students were enrolled. The Kindergarten and Elementary School of Setúbal (Colégio Adventista de Setúbal) was started in 1983. In the 2017/2018 school year, it had 42 students. The Kindergarten of Setúbal (Jardim de Infância Arco-Iris) was inaugurated in 1987. It is a state-of-the-art kindergarten, with excellent conditions, situated in a new neighborhood of the city of Setúbal. In 2017/2018, this school served 74 children. The Kindergarten and Elementary School of Lisbon (Colégio dos Talentos) opened its doors in 2008. It is the newest educational facility of the church in Portugal. In 2017/2018, there were 25 children enrolled.
The social work of the Church in Portugal is under the umbrella institution called Assistência Social Adventista (ASA; Adventist Social Services). This organization was created in January 1980. It has under its wings four LAPI institutions that assist the elderly. The nursing home and home care service LAPI Sul (located in Salvaterra de Magos) opened in February 1982. LAPI Centro (located in Leiria) started its work in July 1995. LAPI Madeira (located in Funchal) was opened in May 2000. Finally, LAPI Norte (located in Avintes) was inaugurated in June 2000. The four LAPIs serve 265 elderly persons, half of whom are Seventh-day Adventists.

In the area of communications, the Portuguese church operates Hope Media Portugal. This is an umbrella organization that includes four official channels of communication: Hope TV, available online and on YouTube; Hope Radio RCS, an FM radio station in the Lisbon metropolitan area called Rádio Clube de Sintra (RCS); Hope Bible, the Bible Correspondence School in Portugal, both postal and online; and Hope Music, a channel dedicated to the online distribution of Christian music with evangelistic purposes. Hope Media Portugal also produces video and audio content for all its channels. As a result of the work done by Hope Media Portugal, between 2014 and 2017, there were 92,264 videos watched or podcasts listened to, the Facebook and YouTube social media sites had 16,995 followers, 120 persons visited a Seventh-day Adventist church, and 20 persons were baptized.

The Portuguese Publishing House (Publicadora Servir, formerly Publicadora Atlântico) is the publishing arm of the denomination in Portugal. It was established in 1924, initially under the name Sociedade Internacional de Tratados (The International Tract Society). It has no printing press. Besides the publishing of health and doctrinal books, it publishes four magazines. The Revista Adventista (Adventist review) is the official magazine of the Portuguese Union and has been published monthly since 1940. Its current circulation is 1,500. The Sinais dos Tempos (Signs of the times) is the missionary magazine of the denomination in Portugal. It has been published quarterly since 1980 and has a circulation of 15,000. Nosso Amiguito (Our little friend) is a monthly children’s magazine published since 1996. Its circulation is 20,000. Finally, Saúde e Lar (Health and home) is a magazine dedicated to the Adventist health message. It has been published since 1942, initially every three months, and monthly since 1953. Its circulation is 3,800.

Effects of Political Developments on Seventh-day Adventist Work

The first missionaries, Clarence and Mary Rentfro, arrived in Portugal when there was a constitutional monarchy (1904). This meant that, although the Roman Catholic Church was constitutionally recognized as the state religion, all other faiths were free to worship and to proselytize. A few years after the arrival of the first missionaries, the government worked in the framework of a republic (1910). This political revolution was also religious in nature. Most of the republicans were anticlerical and even anti-Catholic. Therefore, the political influence of the Catholics diminished, leaving more room for the action of other religious groups, including the Seventh-day Adventists.

With the implementation of a dictatorship in 1926 and the organization of the Second Republic by António Salazar in 1933, the Roman Catholic Church regained its political influence. This put more constraints on the work and development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, even though the constitution of 1933 guaranteed freedom of conscience to all citizens. These constraints, for instance, made it impossible to establish an Adventist Secondary School during the 1950s and 1960s.

On April 25, 1974, Portugal was transformed into a democracy, and since 1976 the constitution has protected the rights of conscience and the liberty of belief, implementing at the same time the separation between church and state. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church lost its status as the state church. All the churches were equally recognized by the state. The Seventh-day Adventist Church became an officially recognized denomination (igreja radicada) in 2007, as prescribed by the Law of Religious Liberty (2001). As a sign of the acceptance of the church by state authorities, on March 3, 2018, the president of the republic, Dr. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, officially visited the most important Seventh-day Adventist congregation (Lisboa Central). The speech that he gave on the occasion was laudatory, thanking the church for its role as a moral agent in the community.

Challenges to Mission and What Remains to Be Done

There are multiple challenges to the mission of the Church in Portugal, and much remains to be done. First, most of Portugal remains ignorant of the Advent message. Portugal has 308 concelhos (counties), but there is a Seventh-day Adventist presence in fewer than half of them. The interior of the country and, especially, the vast southern region of Alentejo are largely untouched.

Second, eighty-three percent of the people in Portugal consider themselves Christian (although only c. 35 percent are practicing). And yet, after more than a century of work, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal has only 9,611 members, which makes a ratio of 1 Seventh-day Adventist for slightly more than 1,000 inhabitants. Of the 93 churches in Portugal, 54 have fewer than 50 members, and 29 have between 51 and 100 members. One of the first challenges is to fill to capacity the churches already in existence.

Third, the church in Portugal has to progress in the development and use of the media. Hope Media Portugal is working in that direction. The FM radio station RCS is doing a great job of bringing the Adventist message to the people of the Lisbon metropolitan area (2.8 million), but at the moment there is no FM radio station in the Oporto metropolitan area (1.8 million). If that were accomplished, nearly half the population would have radio access to the Adventist message. The establishment of a Seventh-day Adventist cable TV channel is another priority. Considering
all this, much remains to be done in Portugal, and the challenges to the church's mission remain significant.

**SOURCES**


**NOTES**


4. This section is partially based on Ferreira, *Arautos de Boas Novas*, 97–313.

5. The total retail sales of Publicadora Servir in 2017 was €786,412. In the same year, 26 colporteurs were in the field, who sold €534,417 worth of literature.