



# Escape from Portugal-the Church in Action: The secret flight of 60 African students to France

*Charles R. Harper, William J. Nottingham*

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This is the story of the dramatic clandestine escape, in June of 1961, of sixty African students from Portugal across Spain and into France. Most were Angolan intellectuals. Some were from Mozambique and others from Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands, and São Tomé-and-Principe. Soon after the first anti-colonial armed rebellions broke out in Angola (March 1961), the student community in Portugal suffered increasing harassment by the Portuguese political police. Passports were confiscated and some arrests of suspected student leaders occurred. Many students - men and women - decided to flee Portugal illegally. It was risky business. False passports from friendly African countries had to be found, contacts set up for night border crossings into Franco's Spain, and then overland transportation to France. Some of the students, graduates of North American and British missionary schools in Africa, appealed to the World Council of Churches in Geneva to help them escape. The challenge was accepted by the French Protestant service agency CIMADE. The successful operation makes for exciting reading.

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