

A brief history of Protestant education in Spain

Reformation

For many Christians, Spain is the land of The Inquisition. Few realise that in the Sixteenth Century there was a small but significant Spanish reformation movement led by a handful of Catholic monks. This led to the formation of several small congregations in Seville and Valladolid. However, they were eventually extinguished by The Inquisition. Thankfully, records indicate that at least some of their members escaped to other countries like Belgium, England, Germany and Holland.

Thus the Protestant Bible translation used by almost all evangelical congregations in present-day Spain was actually written by Casiodoro de Reina, who fled from Seville to Frankfurt and, subsequently, spent some time in London. He printed his Bible in 1569 in Geneva. The revised version was published by Cipriano de Valera in Amsterdam in 1602.

A lot of Protestant Christians died in the Sixteenth Century at the hands of the Inquisitors. This meant that, to all intents and purposes, the Iberian Peninsula was devoid of a reformation movement for the following three centuries.

Juan de Valdés School in Madrid has more than 1,000 pupils



Revolution

Then, in 1868, there was a revolution. A new, democratic government offered a constitutional guarantee of religious freedom for all. Spain was suddenly thrown open.

Before this decisive political change, Protestant leaders had started to build little communities, but had been persecuted for their 'heretical' actions (eg Pastor Ruet in 1855, and Pastor Matamoros and his followers in 1862).

The first Protestant congregation in Madrid was founded in 1869 – a year after the 1868 revolution. In other parts of the country evangelicals founded churches. Congregations tended to be poor and illiterate, drawn mostly from the lower social classes.

The Spanish public and private education system was quickly improved in the wake of the revolution. In Madrid the adult literacy rate increased from 50% in 1860 to 67% in 1900.

These educational improvements meant that more people were able to read the Bible for themselves. Evangelical churches and missions were quick to realise the importance of nurturing literacy. Thus, almost every local Protestant church in Spain – especially those in the bigger villages and cities – ran little primary schools right from the beginning.

Protestant Schools

In 1890 there were 112 Protestant churches. Of these, 111 offered daily school activities. They employed a total of 61 male and 78 female teachers, and taught 2,545 boys and 2,095 girls.¹

By 1913 Protestant education comprised one theological institute,² two secondary schools and 91 primary schools (some of them very large and in strategically important places like Alicante,



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Barcelona, Madrid and Santander) with a total roll of over 7,000 pupils.³

But, in 1936, with the commencement of the Spanish Civil War, all Protestant primary and secondary schools were forced to close. Then, in 1939, all Protestant activities were officially forbidden by the Franco regime. However, even in the face of such an oppressive and dangerous climate, most congregations continued 'underground' work.

El Porvenir is a Protestant primary and secondary school in Madrid which was founded in 1897 by the German missionary Frederick Fliedner. Like other schools, it closed during the Spanish Civil War. From 1948 to the late 1960s El Porvenir was run without the government's permission as an orphanage. Then, in 1969, the dictatorial government gave permission for the school to teach pupils in the first year of the primary school. But it was not until 1976, some months after the end of the Franco regime, that all grades were officially recognised.

Also in the late 1960s another Protestant school (Colegio Juan de Valdés) was founded in Madrid by church members and grew quickly.

Religious freedom

Today the Spanish education system has basically three school types: public, private and semi-private schools. In Spain there are only three Protestant education centres: two in Madrid – both of which are privately run by the Frederick Fliedner Foundation and have contracts with the Ministry of Education – which teach a total of 1,600 pupils; and one in Denia, on the east coast of Spain, which is a private Kindergarten run by the Spanish Evangelical Baptist Union.

Even though the Spanish Constitution has, since 1978, included the right to religious freedom, it was only in 1992 that the government signed special agreements with minority confessions (eg Islam, Judaism, Protestant Christianity). But some ten years on this agreement has not yet become a reality.

Since the political change in Spain in March 2004 the new government has stated its commitment to support the freedoms of minority faiths in Spain's increasingly pluralistic society. One example of this is the government's commitment to ensure free choice with regard to religious education in public schools.

In 2005 the Spanish state will pay 101.4 million Euros to employ 9,016 Religious Education teachers from the different creeds. 95 will be

Frederick Fliedner Foundation

El Porvenir and Juan de Valdés are both run by the Frederick Fliedner Foundation in Madrid. The Foundation also runs a Theological Seminary with a students' residence, a Christian book shop and a home for the elderly. It also runs special Diaconia programmes which help immigrant pupils and their families integrate into Spanish society.

El Porvenir School has more than 500 pupils; Juan de Valdés School has over 1,000. Both schools teach pupils aged between 2 and 16. The Foundation employs more than 100 teachers, some of whom work in both schools.

The school populations reflect the minority status of Protestants in Spain, and only a few pupils are from evangelical families. Most of the staff are Christian. The schools teach pupils a 'Society, Culture and Religion' course which compares and contrasts various religious belief systems.

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El Porvenir School in Madrid is more than 100 years old

Protestant. 40 will be Muslim. Most of the rest will be Roman Catholic. The idea is that pupils should be educated in their own faith by a practitioner of that faith.

Around 3.1 million pupils in public education receive Religious Education from Roman Catholic teachers compared with 7,816 pupils who are taught by Protestant teachers and 4,800 who are taught by Muslim teachers.

The requisite for running minority religion classes in public schools is a minimum of ten pupils.

However, as most Protestant families consider the Religious Education received in church and in the home to be more important, the demand for classes in public schools is not very high.

Nevertheless, FEREDE (the Evangelical Federation of Spain) will apply to the state to finance 54 new teachers for Protestant classes in 2006.⁴

■ Bettina Zöckler


Footnotes

¹ *Almanaque Cristiano para el año de 1890*. Madrid 1889. (Christian Almanac for 1890)

² The Theological Seminary, mentioned in the statistics, was founded in 1884 in the province of Cadiz. From that time on it has continued its struggle to survive and prosper. It was established in Madrid and has recently been incorporated into the Frederick Fliedner Foundation and moved to El Escorial. SEUT (Seminario Evangélico Unido de Teología) operates under the auspices of the Spanish Committee for Inter-Church Cooperation. It offers both 'on campus' and 'distance learning' (ie correspondence) study programmes.

³ *Almanaque Cristiano para el año de 1913*. Madrid 1912. (Christian Almanac for 1913)

⁴ Source: Press note in *El Mundo/AC Press*, Madrid, 19 October 2004.



Fundación
**FEDERICO
FLIEDNER**

VACANCIES FOR **ENGLISH TEACHERS** in two Christian schools, Madrid, Spain

The Federico Fliedner Foundation is a Protestant Christian foundation based in Madrid, Spain. It operates two maintained schools, each offering a subsidised bilingual education. The schools do not discriminate in the selection of staff or pupils, but do want to recruit more teachers who have native-speaker levels of English, are properly qualified in their subject, and Christian. We are seeking to appoint teachers for the term 2005-06 to the following posts:

- Primary Physical Education Teacher (Ref.: Physical Education EP)
- Primary Teacher (Ref.: Primary)
- Primary Music Teacher (Ref.: Music EP)
- Secondary Music Teacher (Ref.: Music ESO)

All post-holders will teach their subject in English. The annual salary will be about 23,000 euros.

REQUIREMENTS

- Qualifications: Diplomado en Magisterio (BEd), with specialisation in Physical Education, English or Music; or Licenciatura in Music (BA in Music, plus PGCE), depending upon the post. In the case of non-Spanish qualifications homologation by the Spanish Ministry of Education is required (for qualifications awarded in European Union countries this is usually automatic).
- All applicants will be required to provide their Department of Education Teacher Registration Number.
- Level of English required: Native speakers or Cambridge Proficiency.
- Experience: teaching experience, ideally in a bilingual context.

Please forward your CV, indicating the post in which you are interested, by:
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