

Mission Atlas Project

Europe

Belgium

Name:

Kingdom of Belgium

Population:

Belgium counted a population of 10,161,164 (as of 2001). This population total translates to 336 persons per sq km (870 sq mi) and makes Belgium the second most densely populated country in Europe, after the Netherlands. The largest concentrations of people live in the industrial areas of *Brussels*, *Antwerp*, *Liege*, and *Ghent (Gent)*, as well as in the narrow industrial region between *Mons* and *Charleroi*.

The population of Belgium shows definite signs of declining numbers of people. The estimated population “growth” is – 0.07% by 2020 and – 0.20% by 2025. The projected population in 2010 is 10,135,688 and by 2025 9,917,861.

The people of Belgium are primarily of two ethnic groups, Flemings or Flemish (Teutonic origin) and the Walloons (Celtic origin, probably with an admixture of Alpine elements.) The Dutch-speaking Flemish, 54.7%, mainly live in the north and west, and the French-speaking Walloons, who compose 32.3% of population, live mainly in the south and east. There are, however, 0.7% of German who live in districts adjoining Germany, and 0.32% of Jews who live mainly in Antwerp. Besides, these there are roughly 12% of foreigners living in Belgium as guest workers. Some 97% of the population is classified as urban.

Land Area:

The total land area of Belgium consists of 30,518 sq km or 11,783 sq mi. One of the Low Countries, Belgium is often called the *Crossroads of Europe* and had been a battleground for centuries. The *Schelde* and *Meise* rivers are the main waterways of the nation. The land is divided into ten provinces and *Brussels*, the Capital.

Physically, Belgium is divided into three regions: the *coastal plain*, the *central plateau*, and the *Ardennes highlands*. The coastal plain extends inland 16 to 48 km (10 to 30 mi) on the northwest. Along the North Sea is a low-lying area consisting mainly of sand dunes and polders.

The central plateau is a gently rolling, slightly elevated area, irrigated by many waterways and containing a number of wide, fertile valleys with a rich, alluvial soil. The Ardennes highlands, a densely wooded plateau averaging 460 m (1,500 ft) in elevation, extends across southeastern Belgium and into northeastern France.

Economy:

Belgium is one of the most highly industrialized countries in Europe, largely because of its geographical location and transport facilities. Its location, near the industrial regions of France, Germany, and the Netherlands, has helped Belgium to become not only a trade center but also one of the first European countries to be industrialized in 1800s, importing great quantities of raw materials that are processed mainly for export. Belgium has had a strong manufacturing economy, fed by large coal deposits. In recent periods the service economy showed rapid growth.

About three-quarters of Belgium's exports go to other European Union (EU) countries. Belgium's economy is, therefore, dependent upon its neighbors and the nation is understandably a strong proponent of integrating European economies. In the early 1990s a growing budget deficit, forced the government to initiate an austerity program that cut spending while raising taxes, as well as beginning a program to transfer some state-owned enterprises to the private sector. The budget in 1998 anticipated revenues of \$109.5 billion and expenditures of \$114.4 billion. Gross domestic product in 1999 totaled \$248.4 billion.

Society:

Since Belgium won independence from the Netherlands in 1830, the country has remained divided by Dutch-speaking *Flemings* of northern Belgium and French-speaking *Walloons* of the south and this ethnic tension has become one of Belgium's most pressing domestic problems throughout the twentieth century. Rivalry is so intense that each group insists on having its own regional government in addition to national rule. Industry is also concentrated mainly in the Flemish north, but the government is encouraging investment in the southern region of Walloons. By law *Brussels*, the capital, is bilingual. Its street signs and official documents are printed in both languages.

The population is culturally Catholic but rapidly secularizing. Although 90% would be classified as Catholic and 71% have been baptized, Mass attendance has plummeted to 11% of the population. In 1998 a survey revealed 37% of Belgians were unchurched and only 57% claimed to be Catholics. The Church faces four major crises—declining commitment, waning influence, lack of students in seminaries, and mass defections. The number of priests has nearly halved since 1960, and their average age is 64. The charismatic movement brought some new life, but has had little lasting influence.

Language:

In 1963 a law was passed establishing three official languages within Belgium: Dutch was recognized as the official language in the north, French in the south, and German along the eastern border. In the city and suburbs of Brussels, both French and Dutch are officially recognized, although French speakers are the larger group. In the country as a whole, strictly Dutch speakers make up about 56 percent and French speakers 32 percent of the population. Less than 0.7% of the people speak German, while some 11 percent speak more than one language. In 1971 a constitutional change was enacted giving political recognition to these three linguistic communities, providing cultural autonomy for them, and also revising the administrative status of Brussels.

Urbanization:

Belgium estimates that some 97% of the population lives in urban areas. The chief cities and their populations (as of 1999) are *Brussels* (954,460), *Antwerp* (447,632), *Ghent* (224,632), *Charleroi* (202,020), and *Liege* (187,538).

Literacy:

Sources estimate that some 98% of population age 15 and over can read and write.

[Http://cia.org](http://cia.org)

<http://lcwebs.loc.gov>

<http://encarta.msn.com>

Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World* 21st edition. Gerrards Cross, UK: WEC International, 2001.

Historical Aspects

Belgium has a long and colorful history. People have lived in what is now Belgium since prehistoric times. The nation stands in a position to occupy a strategic influence in current European history.

Early History

During the 100's B.C., Celtic tribes called the *Belgae* settled in the area. Roman forces led by *Julius Caesar* defeated the *Belgae* during the 50's B.C. The area then became part of the region that the Roman called *Galia (Gaul)*. Roman rule brought the development of cities, local industries, and an excellent system of roads.

Middle Ages

Rome's successor in Western Europe was the kingdom of the *Franks*, which originated in Belgian Gaul and expanded into Germany, eventually extending from the Pyrenees Mountains eastward across the Alps and southward as far as Rome itself. The Franks were led by *Charlemagne*, who united all of western Europe through conquest during his reign from 768 to 814. When the Frankish kingdom was divided in 843, Belgium was incorporated in the *duchy of Lorraine*, which was part of *Francia Orientalis* (the East Frankish Kingdom, or Germany). In the extreme west of this kingdom arose the county of *Flanders*, which was a fief of the kings of France. In 1384 Flanders was united with *Burgundy*, and by the mid-15th century the dukes of Burgundy ruled the greater part of the Belgian and Dutch Netherlands. While owing allegiance to the French crown, Burgundy's aim was to found a powerful state between France and Germany. But, this effort was disrupted by the death in 1477 of the last Burgundian ruler, *Charles the Bold*.

Hapsburg rule

In 1477, the marriage of *Mary of Burgundy*, daughter of Charles the Bold, and *Maximilian* of Austria brought the Low Countries (Now Belgium and the Netherlands) under the rule of the *Hapsburg* family of Austria. Their grandson, *Charles*, inherited the Low Countries. Charles ascended the throne of Spain in 1516 and later became *Holy Roman Emperor Charles V*.

After Charles, King of Spain, became emperor of the Holy Roman Empire he adopted a plan to combine the whole region into one strong state and to limit old freedoms, which restricted the power of the crown. Charles resisted the new Luther's teachings and set up Courts of Inquisition after 1552.

In 1549 Charles decreed that the Netherlands be formally joined to the possessions of Spain. However, in 1555 and 1556, Charles gave the Low Countries, Spain, and Spanish territories to his son, who became *Philip II of Spain*. Charles' brother, *Ferdinand*, received Austria and became Holy Roman Emperor.

Philip considered himself defender of the Roman Catholic faith, and suppressed Protestantism in the Low Countries. He also forbade all trade between his subjects and the outside world, centralizing the region's administration at the expense of the local nobles and cities. In 1566, the Low Countries rebelled. Philip sent the *Duke of Alba* from Spain with thousands of Spanish soldiers. The duke governed cruelly and imposed harsh new taxes. Many local nobles and Protestants left the region. *William I, Prince of Orange*, led the local forces that opposed the Spaniards.

The Inquisition leveled severe pressure on non-Catholics in the region of Belgium. Over 600 congregations felt the heavy hand of the inquisitors. The record of Christianity from the days when it first obtained the power to persecute is one of the most ghastly in history. The total number of Manichaeans, Arians, Priscillianists, Paulicians, Bogomiles, Cathari, Waldensians, Albigensians, witches, Lollards, Hussites, Jews and Protestants killed because of their rebellion against Rome clearly runs to many millions; and beyond these actual executions or massacres is the enormously larger number of those who were tortured, imprisoned, or beggared. The historical aspect of the inquisition in Belgium and other areas has been extensive. One writer, Joseph McCabe, is convinced that had the inquisition not prevented leaving the Church, Roman Catholicism would have shrunk long ago into a sect. Without question, the Protestant Church in Belgium still has not totally recovered from the tragedies of the inquisition.

http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/joseph_mccabel/religious_controversy/chapter_23.html; Joseph McCabe. *The Story of Religious Controversy*; Johnstone.

The Protestant-Catholic conflict lasted until 1648. Local forces held the northern part of the Low Countries while Spanish ships controlled the sea. The north, which later became the Netherlands, declared its independence in 1581. Spain finally recognized it in 1648. The local forces lost to the Spaniards in the south, however, which remained under Spanish control. The split between the north and south damaged the south's economy. Trade decreased, partly because Flemish shipping was prohibited on the *River Schelde* from Antwerp to the sea. Also many people migrated to the new republic in the north. In the rest of the 1600's, the area began to lose its economic strength.

By the middle of the 1600's France emerged as the most powerful state in Europe. Under the rule of *Louis XIV* (1659-1715), the French made sustained efforts to extend their control over the Spanish Netherlands. The strong presence of France was feared not only by the Spanish, but also by the Dutch, who had no desire to see powerful France next to their own border. England also opposed French expansion, especially after *William III*, ruler of the Dutch, accepted the English throne. As a result, what is now Belgium became an important pawn in the next major European conflict, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). A settlement concluded at Utrecht in 1713 gave France part of Flanders, including Dunkerque and Lille. The bulk of the territory, however, became the

Austrian Netherlands, with a stipulation that its fortresses on the French border be garrisoned by the Dutch.

During the War of the Austrian Succession in 1744, the country was occupied by the French, but it was restored to Austria by the *Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748*. Except for this invasion, Belgium's Austrian era was initially peaceful. The tranquility of Austrian rule was disrupted in 1781 when the Austrian emperor, *Joseph II*, decided to raze the border fortresses and reopen the Schelde estuary. The Dutch mounted an effective blockade and again closed the river to trade. Then, in 1787, as part of his effort to centralize the administration of the far-flung Hapsburg domains, Joseph II abolished provincial autonomy in the Austrian Netherlands. The loss of local control led to a general uprising, which coincided with the outbreak of the French Revolution. Most of the Austrian garrisons were forced to capitulate, and on January 11, 1790, a Belgian republic was proclaimed. However, Austria regained control of the area by the end of the year.

French and Dutch Rule

French armies invaded Belgium in the early 1790's and eventually drove out the Austrians. Belgium, thus, became part of France in 1795. The French ruled the area for 20 years. The people rose up and the Austrian Netherlands declared themselves to be "*The United States of Belgium*." This declaration marks the first time the name "Belgium" had been used since Roman times. The revolutionaries carried the *Brabant* colors of black, yellow and red, which remain the national colors to this day.

During the time of French domination, the French legal and educational systems replaced the existing systems and the French language became dominant. The regime installed by the French was generally unpopular, but Belgium profited from French rule. It expanded in area after France conquered the prosperous city of Liege and annexed it to Belgian territory. Economically, after the French opened the *Schelde River* to shipping, *Antwerp*'s trade revived. New markets were also opened for local industry.

In 1814 Austria, Prussia, Russia, Great Britain, and the other allied armies who were fighting against *Napoleon Bonaparte* occupied the country. The next year, 1815, Napoleon met his final defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in central Belgium.

Independence and Neutrality

The peace settlement adopted at the *Congress of Vienna in 1815* again united Belgium and the Netherlands, established the Kingdom of the United Netherlands, and empowered a Dutch king, *William I*. Catholic Belgium, however, did not want a Protestant ruler, even though the country prospered under the Dutch. The outbreak of a revolution in France in *July 1830* inspired a Belgian uprising in August. Dutch troops were driven from Brussels, and on October 4 a unique coalition of Catholics and Liberals proclaimed Belgian independence. The great powers- Austria, France, Britain, Prussia, and Russia – accepted Belgian independence, and the Dutch were forced to recognize Belgium. The next month, the European powers signed an agreement guaranteeing Belgium as an “independent and perpetually neutral state.”

In 1831, Belgium chose as its king *Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld*, whose political skills enabled him to wield considerable power at home, and to become an influential figure among Europe's rulers. The new country adopted a liberal constitution that guaranteed such rights as freedom of religion and freedom of the press.

Under Leopold I and then his son *Leopold II*, Belgium flourished both economically and culturally. It was Leopold II who acquired the Congo, which remained a part of Belgium until its independence in 1960. *Albert I*, whose reign was dominated by World War I, succeeded Leopold II in 1909.

The World Wars

On August 4, 1914, one week after the war began, German troops crossed the frontier into Belgium, and swept through the country into France. Belgium's neutrality was blatantly ignored. By late November, most of the country fell under extremely harsh German occupation despite Belgians' heroic resistance. The Belgian government went into exile in France. Nearly a million Belgians fled to Britain, France, and the Netherlands. Once again, the country became the scene of many bloody battles between the Central Powers, led by Germany, and the Allies, led by Britain and France. In September 1918, Allied forces began the liberation of Belgium, which became complete when the Germans surrendered in November.

Leopold III, who like his father was soon confronted by war, succeeded Albert. Without warning or ultimatum, Germany attacked Belgium for a second time on May 10, 1940. The Belgian army surrendered 18 days later. *King Leopold III* remained in German-occupied Belgium, but the Belgian cabinet moved the government to London. In September 1944, Allied forces liberated the country. In December, the Germans invaded southeastern Belgium, but the Allies repelled the attack and won a major victory at the Battle of the Bulge. World War II caused less physical destruction in Belgium than did World War I. However, the loss of life among civilians was much greater in World War II.

Post-war Belgium

Belgium became one of the first countries in Europe to recover economically. However, Belgium faced a major crisis over what was called the "royal question." Many Belgians criticized King Leopold III for staying in Belgium during the war. Some even accused the king of having cooperated with the Germans. In 1950, when he saw popular feeling against him was quite substantial, Leopold gave the royal authority to his oldest son, who officially became *King Baudouin*. Baudouin was a popular king. Many Belgians believe that the king helped keep the country from splitting apart.

In the post-war period, Brussels has gradually taken on its role as the 'capital' of Europe. It is the headquarters of the European Community and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as gaining a reputation as the foremost European center of international business. In 1957, Belgium formed, with the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the *Benelux Union*.

Contemporary Belgium

China and Belgium established diplomatic relations on October 25, 1971 and bilateral relations have been smoothly developing. Starting from the 1980s, the two nations have increased high level exchanges. The heads of states of the two countries exchanged visits. In the 1990s, many Chinese leaders visited Belgium, including Vice Premier *Zhu Rongji*(1991), Chairman Li Ruihuan of the CPPCC (1994), and Vice Premier *Li Lanqing* (1998). The Belgian leaders who visited China include Prince Albert in 1993, *Prince Philip* and *Deputy Prime Minister Maystadt* in 1997, *President Swaelen* of the Senate and *Vice President Lenssens* of the Chamber of Representatives in 1998, *Prime Minister*

Dehaene in 1998, and *President De Decker* of the Senate in 1999, with the Delegation of the European Parliament.

Belgium has become the 6th largest trading partner of China in Western Europe. By the first half of 1999, the trade volume between the two countries totaled US \$1.239 billion, up 4.4% over the previous period. China mainly imports complete sets of equipment, hardware and minerals, and precision instrument. from Belgium, and introduces Belgian technologies. Belgium's imports from China include textiles, garments and shoes. As one of the first Western European countries that granted China governmental loans, Belgium had provided China with loans worth a total of \$118 million by the end of 1999. By the end of October 1999, Belgium had invested in a total of 307 projects in China, with a contracted value of \$688 million and the actual investment of \$320 million. Most of the investment went to high-tech productive enterprises, particularly *Shanghai Bell Telephone Company* and *Xi'an-Janssen Pharmaceutical* that have yielded impressive economic returns.

The cooperation between China and Belgium in this aspect relates to such fields as soil amelioration, breeding, pesticide, mineral selection, environmental protection, hydrogeology, wind energy, solid tide, and nuclear energy. The exchange resulted in cultural relations also. China exhibited unearthed relics, national costumes, and arts and crafts in Belgium. Belgium held exhibitions on tapestries, woodcuts, and oil-painting photos in China. The theatre troupes of the two countries have also exchanged visits. China has 1070 students in Belgium while 23 Belgian students are studying in China.

<http://www.chinaembassy-org.be>

Belgium took another step toward integrating with Europe in May 1998, when it officially agreed to replace its national currency with a new single European currency, the *euro*. The Euro was introduced in 1999 and will entirely replace the Belgian currency, along with the currencies of other European nations participating in the single currency, in 2002. In 1999, Belgium banned all advertisement of tobacco products and has witnessed a decline in smokers from some 40% to less than 30%.

<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/35408.stm>.

The continuing secularization of Belgium is seen in recent decisions on euthanasia. On October 25 2001 in Brussels, a large majority of senators voted in favor the country's euthanasia bill. The euthanasia bill is ostensibly hedged about with safeguards. Foreshadowing such a poll, *Guy Verhofstadt*, Belgium's Prime Minister since 1999, referred in a May 2000 speech, to his desire that Parliament would take full responsibility with regard to ethical issues, on the basis of everyone's individual conscience and conviction on issues such as e euthanasia. Opinions on the euthanasia issue have been rising in Belgium for some years. The BBC reported on November 24, 2000, basing its announcement on data from Brussels' Free University and from the University of Ghent, that one Belgian death in every 10 during the first four months of 1998 was the result of euthanasia. The Euthanasia bill has not yet become law in Belgium.

Belgium, though one of the smaller countries in the European Union, is leading the push for greater integration and hopes in Europe. *Guy Verhofstadt* is seeking to influence the future shape of EU institutions. Verhofstadt and his ministers have indicated their willingness to press for greater harmonization of taxes and the imposition of a specific EU-wide tax to finance the union's activities. Belgian Finance Minister *Didier Reynders* also desires common minimum standards of energy taxation across the EU. The Belgians

want to make a priority of developing a "social Europe" with workers consulted about redundancies and the sale of big company subsidiaries.

<http://encarta.msn.com>, <Http://belgium.fgov.be/history>, <http://www.bankingmm.com/features/belgium.htm>,
Encarta Ency.

Peoples/ People Groups

Indigenous Peoples

Flemish

Over 5,580,000 *Fleming or Flemish* speak Dutch. They live in 5 Provinces of Flanders (Northern lowlands) and comprise 54.7% of the people of Belgium.. 89% of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church. 6% of them are nonreligious and 2% consider themselves as atheists. Roughly 1% of them are Protestant.

Walloon

Over 3,300,000, (32.3% of the population) are Walloon and speak French and Walloon. They live in 5 provinces of *Wallonie*. 84 % of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church while 6% and 2% claim to be nonreligious and atheists, respectively. Roughly 1% of them are Protestant.

German

Some 150,000 German speaking people (*hoch-deutsch*) live in eastern Cantons and Liege Province along the border with Germany. Most of them are strong Lutherans.

Expatriate Peoples

Albanian (3,300)

This group, who speaks *Albanian* and *Tosk*, are refugees and also migrant workers from Albania since 1946. 40% of them are nonreligious and another 40% are Muslims. Around 671 of the Albanians in Belgium (20%) are Christians belonging to the Assembly of God (AOG), Roman Catholic Church, and Seventh Day Adventists (SDA).

Algerian Arab (15,000)

This group speaks Arabic and Algerian. They are migrant workers from Algeria. Most of them came via France and mainly live in Brussels. About 98% of them are Muslims (Maliki Sunnis). Around 2% of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Arabized Berber (130,000)

This group speaks Arabic and Moroccan. They are Moroccans, Egyptians, Algerians, and Libyan Berbers. They mostly live in Brussels and 99% of them are Muslim (Sunnis).

Belgians,Luxemburgian (14,900)

This group speaks Luxembourgish. 88% of them are Roman Catholics.

Portuguese Speaking Belgian (80,000)

This group speaks Portuguese. 93% of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

British (30,000)

The British in Belgium speak English. They are expatriates from the United Kingdom. Most of them are in education, commerce, and industry. 79% of them belong to the Church of England.

Cambodian

Most of the 3,400 Cambodians in Belgium speak *Khmer*. They are refugees from civil war in Cambodia. Most of them, 93%, are *Theravada Buddhists* while 3% consider

themselves as nonreligious. The 5% who are Christians belong to the Roman Catholic Church and churches related to the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA).

Dutch (58,992)

This group speaks Dutch. These expatriates from Holland mostly work in commerce and different professions. These people are a different group from the indigenous Flemish already described. 76% of them are Christians and most of them belong to *Dutch Reformed Church*.

Egyptian Arab (9,800)

This group speaks Arabic and Egyptian. They are labor migrants from Egypt and live mostly in Brussels. 95% of them are Muslims (*Maliki Sunnis*). Roughly 5% are affiliated Christians belonging to the Roman Catholic Church and Coptic Orthodox Church (COC).

French (196,641)

This group speaks French. They are French nationals are in whole range of professions. These French speaking people are a different group from the *Walloons* described above. They are strong Roman Catholics.

Greek (39,328)

This group speaks Greek. Most of them are émigrés from Cyprus. 95% of them belong to the Greek Orthodox Church.

Han Chinese, Mandarin (600)

This group speaks Mandarin Chinese, the language spoken in Beijing. They are residents from the Chinese diaspora. 70% are Confucianists and Buddhists. Some 4,000 live in Antwerp while 3,000 live in Brussels. 25% belong to different Christian denominations.

Han Chinese, Cantonese (500)

This group speaks Cantonese Chinese, which is spoken in Hong Kong. 85% are *Confucianists* and *Buddhists*. They live mainly in Antwerp and Brussels. 12% belong to different Christian denominations.

Irani (3,500)

This group speaks *Farsi*. Most of them are Muslims.

Italian (280,000)

These expatriates from Italy speak Italian and engage in business, commerce, and industry. 99% are *Roman Catholics*.

Jewish 39,000

Jewish people in Belgium primarily speak French. They mainly live in the urban areas of Brussels and Antwerp. About 45 % of them practice Judaism. Less than 0.1% are members of any Christian denomination.

Kabyle

This group, who number around 49,000 in Belgium, speaks *Kabyle*, a sub language of Berber. Over 4.4 million Kabyle continue to live in Algeria. The Belgium group are migrant workers from Algeria. 95% of them are Muslims (*Maliki Sunnis*).

Roughly 5% of them are members of the Roman Catholic Church, North African Mission (NAM), or Living Bible International (LBI).

<http://www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/mgcbere.html>

Kurmanji, Northern Kurd (13,000)

This group speaks *Kurmanji*. They are labor migrants and refugees from Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Almost 100% of them are *Sunni Muslims*.

Libyan Arab (4,916)

This group speaks Arabic and Libyan. They are refugees and migrant workers from Libya. Most of them live in Brussels and 99% of them are Muslims (*Maliki Sunnis*).

Lingala (Zairian) (7,800)

This group speaks *Lingala*. They are migrant laborers from Zaire and central Africa. 15% of them follow Traditional Religion while 10% consider themselves as nonreligious. Roughly 75% of them are Christians and belong to the Roman Catholic Church, Episcopal Church, or *Eglise du Christ au Zaire*.

Moroccan Arab (132,000)

This group speaks Arabic and Moroccan. They are labor migrants from Morocco via France. They live primarily in Brussels. 99% of them are Muslims (*Maliki Sunnis*). About 1% is Christian and most of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Polish (39,328)

This group speaks Polish. They are migrant workers and immigrants from Poland. They are strong Roman Catholics.

Portuguese (79,343)

This group speaks Portuguese. They are expatriates from Portugal and they are in commerce and business. They are predominantly Roman Catholics.

Roma Gypsy (14,000)

This group speaks *Romani*. There are settled Roma but some are also nomadic. 80% of them are affiliated Christians who belong to *Gypsy Evangelical Movement* (GEM) and *Gospel Gypsy Missionary Society* (GGMS).

Russian (19,664)

This group speaks Russian. They are refugees from USSR in 1917 and 1945. 70% of them are affiliated Christians who belong to either the *Russian Orthodox Church* (ROC) or *Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia* (ROCOR).

Shawiya

The Shawiya, numbering 37,000 in Belgium, are a Berber group from the *Aures Mountains* of northeastern Algeria *Batnah province*. The Shawiya group speaks *Chaouia*. Around 1.7 million Shawiya live in Algeria.

<http://www.angelfire.com/az/rescon/mgcberrer.html>.

Spaniard (70,000)

This group speaks Spanish. They are expatriates from Spain and they are in industry, commerce, and in different professions. They are predominantly Roman Catholics.

Tunisian Arab (8,900)

This group speaks Arabic and Tunisian. They are immigrants from Tunisia and live mainly in Brussels. 99% of them are Muslims (*Maliki Sunnis*).

Turk (51,000)

This group speaks Turkish. They are migrant workers who live mainly in Brussels. They work in factories and in construction. Almost all of them are Muslim (*Hanafi Sunnis*). Less than 0.1% are Christians who belong to *Gospel Mission Union* (GMU) and *Operation Mobilization* (OM).

USA White (28,000)

This group speaks English. They are people from U.S. living in Belgium for business and education. Roughly 80% of them are affiliated Christians in many denominations.

Vietnamese (3,100)

This group speaks Vietnamese. They are refugees from wars in Indochina since 1930s. About 80% of them are Buddhists/New Religionists while 17% belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

<http://www.joshuaproject.net>

World Christian Encyclopedia, vol.2 David B.Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson ed. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Religion

Religious liberty is fully guaranteed under the constitution, and the stipend for ministers is partially paid by the government. However, official recognition is given to selected, main religions. Many smaller religious groupings, including evangelical denominations, were listed as “sects” in a 1997 government investigation and thus put under a shadow of suspicion. Efforts to rectify this are likely to be successful. Officially, about three-quarters or 75% of Belgian population claim to be Roman Catholic, but a more realistic figure is 60%.

Belgium is among one of the least evangelized and most spiritually needy countries in the world. For 400 years spiritual darkness has gripped this land. In the 16th century, the Spanish Inquisition destroyed the 600 churches that embraced Reformed teachings. Today, evangelical Christians are looked on with suspicion. Most Belgians are "non-practicing Catholics." The vast influx of the New Age movement has resulted in the majority of Belgians without strong religious affiliations turning to this mixture of pagan religion and Eastern philosophy.

Of the 308 administrative districts in Flanders, 116 have no evangelical witness. Of Wallonia's 281 districts 168 have no Christian witness. The areas of *Flemish Brabant* and *East Flanders*, *Francophone Liège*, Namur, and Luxembourg demonstrate great need for the gospel. The city of Brussels has a foreign population of over 29%. Muslims compose 8% of the population of Brussels while evangelical Christians are 5.9% of the people. Many larger churches in Brussels serve among the ethnic minorities.

Religion/Christian

General Church History

Christianity came to Belgium at the time of the Roman occupation. The Frankish invasion destroyed early bishoprics which had been established in the 4th century. Still, Christianity in Belgium gradually experienced a period of consolidation and expansion. In fact 30 monasteries were built between 530 and 640. The mysticism of *John Ruysbroeck*, *Thomas A. Kempis* and *Denis Chartereus* influenced Pre-Reformation era Belgium, resulting in the foundation of the *University of Louvain* in 1425.

The *Peace of Westphalia of 1648* divided the Low Countries into religious spheres of influence, *Calvinism* in northern Holland and *Catholicism* in Belgium. The Catholic Hapsburgs ruled during 1715-1794 followed by France between 1794 and 1814. The *Treaty of Vienna* united the Netherlands and Belgium under one crown, and in 1830 Belgium was granted independence. Freedom of religion was proclaimed, and three

religious communities (Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish) were officially recognized at independence.

Non Christian Groups

Non-Religious

The largest non-Christian block in Belgium, the non-religious, number over 2,867,000 persons (28.22%) and are showing an annual growth rate of + 2.2 % as compared to an annual growth rate of – 0.7% for all Christians, a figure that includes Catholic, Orthodox, and various non-Christian groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons.

Islam

Islam claims some 3.60% of the population and is strongest among the expatriates from the Middle East. The Muslim groups count some 365,800 persons and point to an annual growth rate of +1.3%. The Islamic groups from the Turks and the Kurds have proved resistant to the gospel.

Buddhist

Over 29,460 Buddhists live in Belgium. The Buddhists are primarily among the Cambodian and Vietnamese groups. While only 0.29 % of the people in Belgium, the Buddhists report an annual growth rate of + 7.9%.

Jewish

The Jewish religion claims over 21,338 people in Belgium or 0.21% of the total population. The Jewish religion admits to a decline in adherents (-3.3%).

Baha'i

The Baha'i Religion claims only 2050 persons in Belgium but also claims an annual growth rate of over 15%.

Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic faith is closely linked to Belgian history in the sense that it was the common hostility of anticlerical liberals and Catholics to the Calvinist William I of Holland, which led to the creation of the state in 1830. The remarkable growth and presence of Catholic faith in Belgium, although it is rapidly changing these days, is due to the Church's effective use of press, association and educational institutions and the attachment of the majority of the citizens to Catholicism.

Since 1831, there has been a significant restoration of religious orders and a development of parish missions, although, primary attention has been given to schools. This blending of initiatives, crowned by the formation of a political party conceived as the defender of church interest, helped to create the strongly institutionalized Catholicism, which still characterized Belgium.

Although it is true that the Catholic Church in Belgium is still conceived as playing a more important role than in neighboring countries, nevertheless, during the past decades, an increasing number of Belgian Catholics have begun to question the pastoral conceptions which have prevailed until now. These doubts are shared by a relatively important part of the clergy who through diverse informal groups support the tendency towards the increasing collaboration of Catholics and non-Catholics within pluralistic institutions. The powerful influence of the church and the Catholic world is not spread evenly across the country.

Like the state, the church is split by cultural cleavage. A clear difference exists between the Catholicism of Flemish areas of the north and that of the French speaking area (*Walloon*) of the south. Flemish Catholics show themselves to be significantly more

active than French speaking in terms of Sunday attendance and participation of different Catholic organizations and movements. The presence in Brussels of a large number of foreign officials and their families has led to the creation of a European Catholic center dedicated to the need for pastoral service of members of the European Economic Community and other international institutions.

Three groups of Catholics work in Belgium and together claim 3,962 congregations, over 6,000,000 members and 8,000,000 adherents

Catholic (Non-Roman) Churches

There are around 10 small Catholic churches: *The Belgian Old Catholic Church*, which traces its origin to the *Jansenist* controversy of the early 18th century and is related to the *Utrecht-based Old Catholic Church* in the Netherlands; the *Catholic Apostolic (Irvingite) Church* and its secession the *New Apostolic Church*; *Antoinistes* and several smaller bodies under bishops-at-large.

Orthodox Church

The Orthodox community in Belgium is composed primarily of Russians and Greeks, with a relatively small number of Belgians, 11,000 and 33,000 respectively, altogether totaling about 44,000. The *Greek Orthodox Church (Eglise Orthoxoxe Greague)* claims 12 congregations with 26,408 members and 53,000 adherents. The Russian Orthodox Church (*Eglise Otthodoxe Russe*) has some 4 congregations with 2000 members.

Jehovah's Witnesses (Témoins de Jéhovah)

Jehovah's Witnesses entered Belgium prior to World War I and have become the second-largest religious group in the country--surpassed only by the Roman Catholics.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim 377 congregations, 26,408 members, and 53,000 adherents. They number 25% more than the largest Protestant denomination.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) (Eglise de J-C des Saints des DJ)

The Mormon Church in Belgium claims over 2500 members and 3400 adherents.

Christian Scientists (Eglise du Christ, Scientiste)

The Christian Scientist group has 2 congregations and around 70 members.

Apostolic Rosicrucians (Eglise Rosicrucienne Apostolique)

This Church that is headquartered in Brussels is a Gnostic body with 1 congregation and around 50 members.

Protestant Churches

Though clearly a minority, Protestantism has a long history in Belgium. The country was reached early on by the Reformation and had its own reformer, *Guy De Bres*, who published in 1561 the *Confessio Belgica*. However, the political context did not enable Protestantism to survive, other than in a few centers.

At the time of independence in 1830, there were only a few thousand Protestants among Belgium's three million inhabitants. At that time, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were all officially recognized and accorded the same juridical and material privileges.

The Protestant community in 1995 of about 120,000 is distributed unevenly throughout the country, forming 1.2 percent of the total population. More protestants live in the French than in the Flemish area. The provinces of *Limbourg* and *Luxembourg* are virtually devoid of Protestants. *Protestantism has hardly grown over the past 30 years.*

The increases in Pentecostal and other more conservative groups has to a small degree offset the losses of the older, more liberal denominations. In fact, almost one-half of the Protestants in Belgium are expatriates.

The Protestant Church of Belgium (*Eglise Protestante de Belgique*)

The largest and oldest denomination is the *Protestant Church of Belgium*, which is popularly considered by other Protestants to be a national church because of its official tie and financial support accorded by the state. The Church came into being around 1830 when scattered protestants joined together to form it. In 1969 the Church merged with the Methodist Church. Many leaders consider the EPUB to be sliding toward a liberal theological stance. The Church's influence is felt in that all protestant teachers in the state schools must be sponsored by the Protestant Church of Belgium. The EPUB has alienated some other Christian groups by assuming the right to speak for all Protestants at government levels. The Church now reports around 105 congregations with 4700 members and 27,000 adherents.

The Liberal Protestant Church in Belgium (*Eglise Protestante Libérale de Belgique*)

This Church that began in 1888 now reports some 4 congregations with around 5000 members.

Reformed Church of Belgium (*Eglise Réformée de Belgique*)

Belgium's second Protestant church both in size and age is the Reformed Church of Belgium, formed in 1837 among coal miners through the joint work of the Evangelical Free Church of Switzerland and the British and Foreign Bible Society. It reports around 50 congregations with under 10,000 members.

Salvation Army (*Armée du Salut*)

The Salvation Army that began as early as 1889 in Belgium now has 12 congregations with over 500 members.

Pentecostal Churches

Pentecostalism came to Belgium in 1931 with the arrival of the first missionaries of the Assemblies of God, and this remains the principal Pentecostal community. Nine smaller Pentecostal denominations are also present, as well as a number of fast-growing independent charismatic churches.

Assemblées de Dieu de Belgique began in Belgium in 1931 and now report over 70 congregations with 3500 members and over 5500 adherents.

Eglise Pentecôtistes has over 90 congregations with 3000 members.

The Church of Christ (*Eglises du Christ*)

The Church of Christ in Belgium began in 1956 and now reports 11 congregations with 225 members

The Church of God

Connected to the work of the Church of God, Cleveland, this Church has some 15 congregations with over 2000 members and almost 4000 adherents.

The Union of Free Evangelical Churches (*Union des Eglises Ev Libres de Belgique*)

The Union of Free Evangelical Churches in Belgium is composed of at least three groups of Free Churches with a membership of over 4000 in around 110 congregations. The group traces its beginnings in Belgium to around 1918.

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in Belgium (*Gereformeerde Kerken In België*)

The Peniel Church (Eglise Evangélique Peniel)

The Evangelical Peniel Church dates from 1935 and now has some 12 congregations with over 350 members.

Adventists (Eglise Adventiste du Septième Jour)

The Adventist Church began in Belgium in 1897. It now reports over 27 congregations with more than 1300 members.

The Union of Evangelical Baptists in Belgium (*Union des Eglises Ev. Baptistes de Belgique*)

The Union of Evangelical Baptists report some 33 congregations with over 1000 members and around 2500 adherents. Earlier connected to the Southern Baptist Convention of the USA, the Belgium Baptists work 60% among Walloons.

The Brethren Church Open (*Assemblées des Frères*)

The Open Brethren Church works 90% in the Walloon area. The group reports 21 congregations with 850 members.

The Brethren Church Exclusive (Assemblée Chrétienne Evangélique)

The Exclusive Brethren Church that is composed of three different branches has some 20 congregations with almost 800 members.

The Lutheran or Lutheran Reformed (*Eglise Ev. Luthérienne Belge*)

The Lutheran Church in Belgium began in 1950 and now reports 1 congregation with some 1000 members. Another Lutheran group, (*Eglise Ev. Protestante Luthérienne de Belgique*) that began as early as 1927 also has 1 congregation but only 70 members.

The Anglican Church (*Eglise Anglicaine*)

The Anglican Church exists mainly for the sizeable English-speaking expatriate community. Nevertheless, there are also a few native Belgian members, and the Anglican Church is one of Belgium's officially-recognized religious communities. This Church began in Belgium as early as 1650 and now reports some 11 congregations with over 3000 members.

The Mennonite Church (Conseil Mennonite Belge, Eglise Mennonite Belge))

The Mennonite Church in Belgium began in 1950 and has some 5 congregations with around 40 members.

Johnstone, Barrett, www.mcdonald.southern.edu/churches/infopage.html.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians should recognize the spiritual needs of Belgium, a nation which is spiritually one of the neediest countries in Europe, although it is a rich country, materially speaking.
2. Evangelicals should pray for revival within Protestant churches. Protestantism has hardly grown over the past 30 years. The growth of evangelical, and especially Pentecostal groups and the evangelical wing of the largely United Protestant Church (EPUB) has offset the dramatic decline of the latter's numbers.
3. Evangelicals should support, encourage, and offer assistance to the on-going efforts toward church starting in Belgium. Project Gabriel seeks to increase Francophone churches from 415 to 1417 by 2015. Other groups envision over 350 new churches in Flemish areas. Flemish Pentecostal churches have a vision of 120 new churches in

Flemish regions by 2015. Every avenue of participating in these church-starting efforts and leading others to join them should be exercised.

4. Evangelicals should seek to help discover and train leaders for the churches and the churches that will be started. Only 40% of the Flemish-speaking churches have an indigenous pastor. While several training programs are trying to prepare workers, the need outstrips the possibilities of these institutions. The Assemblies of God have developed an effective extension (TEE) program that serves not only Belgium but other regions of Europe as well. All Evangelicals should seek to have a part in these training efforts.
5. Evangelicals should recognize the strategic significance of Belgium, especially that of Brussels. Brussels, as a political center of Europe, is a 29% foreign and over 8% Muslim. Brussels is 5.9% evangelicals and a further 3% historic Protestant. The spiritual needs of the diplomatic, business and Eurocrat communities are many. There are now growing prayer networks among and for them. The Full Gospel Businessmen's Association has had a significant impact.
6. Evangelicals should assist those attempting to provide Christian media materials in Belgium. While praying for the efforts already being offered, Evangelicals should strive to assist in enlarging these ministries.
7. Evangelicals should pay a special attention to North Africans living in Belgium. There is no single Christian Church for the 20,000 Morrocans in the city of Antwerp. North Africans, predominantly Moroccans, have increased through legal and illegal immigration. The majority of them live in poorer urban areas. Although there are few Christian congregations within North African communities, they are almost entirely Muslims. Arab World Missions (**AWM**) and Belgian Evangelical Mission (**BEM**) have two couples ministering to them, but many more workers are needed.
8. Evangelicals should engage their ministries among university students. The student population of 135,000 in 17 universities and colleges is a major challenge. IFES has a ministry in 8 Flemish universities (Ichthus with 120 students involved) and in 5 French universities (GBU), but the total membership in each of the two branches is 50.