



The Bara of Madagascar

Spread across a vast area of the central-South of Madagascar, with tentacles into the West and East, is Ibara, home to the approximately 520,000 Bara, a pastoral people who have remained faithful to the ways of their ancestors. Known for their traditional sport of cattle rustling, the prerequisite for entering into manhood, they now fall victim to an unfortunate prejudice, being associated with cattle thieves in the context of the present social and economic problem of armed gangsters and large-scale bovine theft. The Bara have long been a feared and misunderstood race. They are brave and hardworking from an early age, regard virility and intelligence highly, and are usually of a tall and slender build.

Bara society, hitherto impermeable to new ideas, is being increasingly forced to consider foreign concepts like schools and alternatives to cattle herding because of insecurity; there is the constant threat of losing their herds to organized theft which in some cases forces them to abandon their villages and find a different way of life.

The cohesiveness of Bara society persists in the face of their differences: they do not all speak the same way; they have varying taboos and customs; there has never been one united Bara kingdom and yet spread over the large area where they are found, they all have a strong common identity of being "Bara".

Primary Religion:

Indigenous

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

5%

Churches:

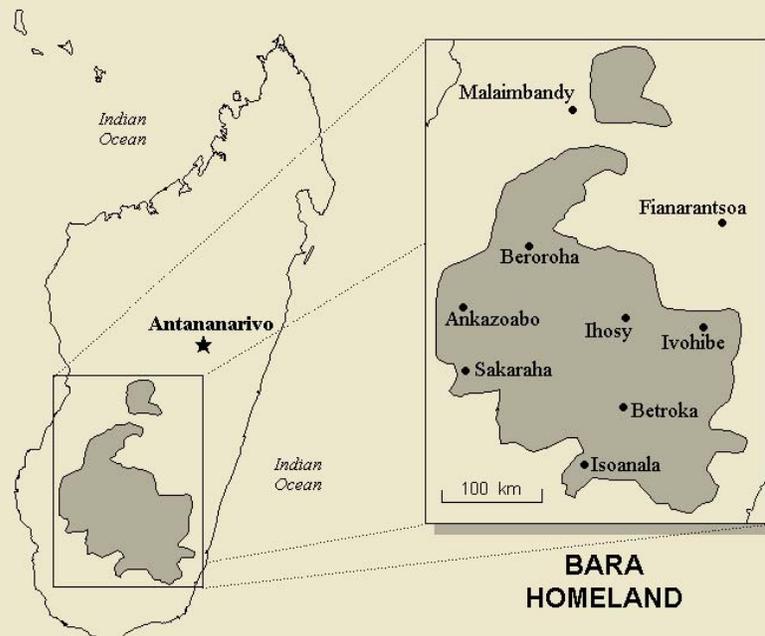
435

Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

No Bible

Population (date):

520,000



**BARA
HOMELAND**

The Bara of Madagascar

Item Name

Item Note

Have They Heard The Gospel?

Profile Summary

Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	5%
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion (%)	95%
Number Of Pastors	208
Comment (Pastors)	based on pastor ratio of 1:2,500 and population of 520,000
Number Of Missionaries Working	26
Comment (Number Of Missionaries)	26, based on missionary ratio of 1:20,000 and population of 520,000
Response To The Gospel	Antagonism
Number Of Churches	435
Is The Word Of God Translated?	Some draft Gospels in eastern and southwestern Bara dialects, but they are hardly known about, and there is no organized distribution.
Translation Medium	Printed
Any Hinderance To Scripture Distribution?	Illiteracy; Available Bible in official Malagasy only, apart from the draft portions.
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available (Summary)	Recordings: No Literature: Yes Video Films: Yes Radio: Yes. They have two dictionaries and two catechisms.

Population All Countries

Group Description

World Population For This People	520,000
World Population (Date)	2000
World Population (Urban Percent)	23.8
Comment (World Population)	The population figure has been calculated on the Bara being 3.5% of the total Malagasy population (census 1969). However this percentage was consistently 4.7% in the censuses of 1921, 1934, and 1958 (Elli 1993) and Poirier and Dez's study of 1963 puts it at 3.9%. Urban population is estimated from the 1993 census data; figures include "secondary urban centers" i.e. large villages and vicinity.

Countries Where People Group Lives

Group Description

Country Name	Madagascar
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Geography & Environment

Group Description

Location	<p>Ibara lies in south-central Madagascar. The western and north-western borders are shared with the Vezo, Masikoro and Sakalava people, containing a "no man's land" beyond the Isalo mountains. The Zomandao river separates them from the Betsileo to the north and in the south-west the Bara have a colony of Tanosy neighbors on the left bank of the Onilahy river. The southern border of Ibara runs just south of the Tropic of Capricorn below the town of Isoanala, on the other side of which is Androy. To the east the forest separates the Bara from the Tesaka. (A growing pocket of Tesaka is found inside Ibara in the valleys of the Itomampy and Volambita as well as on the Ranotsara plain). Ibara consists of three geographic regions: the Ranotsara Plain to the east which includes the fertile valley of the Ionaivo, Menarahaka and Itomampy rivers, excellent for the mixed economy of rice culture and cattle herding; then the center which consists of the larger and sparsely populated Horombe plateau, between the Ihosy valley and Isalo mountains, good for the same mixed economy, and then the area to the west of the Isalo mountains inside the Mangoky drainage basin, with the same economy.</p> <p>Bara territory corresponds roughly to the Fivondronana (districts) of Ivohibe, Iakora, Ihosy, Betroka, Sakaraha, Ankazoabo and Beroroha, the North of the Amboasary-sud district, Midongy and Befotaka (in the provinces of Toliara and Fianarantsoa).</p>
Country	Madagascar
Ecosystem Type	Savannas
Geological Type	Other
Elevation	600-2100 meters
Longitude	44E-47E

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Item Name	Item Note
Latitude	20S-24S
Climate	Hot and dry throughout the year. Most of the rain that does fall occurs during a period of six weeks in December and January.

Language & Linguistics

Group Description

Primary Language	Malagasy, Southern
Comment (Language)	<p>Bara people do not all speak the same way: there is clearly an Eastern way, a Western way and varieties in the Center, North and South.</p> <p>The people of Ibara can usually situate someone within a limited radius based on the way they speak - they usually can't tell further than where their market days take them. There is a particular distinction between those who speak Bara "mikaty" in the west and south, who say "atimo" (= "south") and "atoly" (= "egg"), as opposed to those who speak Bara tevondro in the east, who say "atsimo" and "atody". This is a regional indicator, not an ethnic marker.</p> <p>Comments: Knowledge about the languages in the south of Madagascar is yet to be refined - borders determined, comparisons made, in terms of mutual intelligibility and attitudes to the official language. The University of Toliara (M Solo Raharinjanahary et al) has initiated a language atlas project for Madagascar, beginning in the province of Toliara. A Sociolinguistic survey is in progress (in collaboration with SIL) and a doctoral thesis is being written on the language ecology of Southern Madagascar, with the Bara language as case study.</p>
Dialects	Bara
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Very receptive

Literacy

Group Description

Adult Literacy Percentage	27.1%
Adult Literacy Percentage	27.1%
Literacy Attitude	Somewhat resistant
Active Literacy Program	Yes
Publications In Vernacular	Lutheran and Catholic catechisms; some draft Gospels in eastern and south-western Bara; dictionaries.
Comment (Literacy)	27.1% for the region, according to the official figures; this figure seems too high and for the Bara. it is less than 15%.

Economics

Group Description

Subsistence Type	Agriculturalists
Income Sources	When necessary, they trade cattle for other items. They may also sell livestock and products they cultivate at the market.
Products / Crafts	sculptures, mats
Trade Partners	neighboring villagers; important cattle traders in larger centers, like Ihosy
Modernization / Utilities	None

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Item Name

Comment (Economy)

Item Note

Culturally they are pastoralists, but they practice some agriculture to assure their subsistence. They don't want to be known as agriculturalists!

The Bara have been impermeable to change and are perhaps only now being forced out of their cultural self-sufficiency and auto-dependency by problems of security and economic difficulty. This is brought about by the activities of the malaso, armed gangs of organized criminals, who make off with large numbers of cattle, their main livelihood. Whole villages are being abandoned, e.g. between Betroka and Ihosy. These Bara then become "urbanized", and their lifestyle changes.

When a Bara loses his herd to these thieves, he is ruined. This problem has evolved from the sport-like tradition of cattle rustling that the Bara are known for (although the phenomenon is not unique to the Bara) and presents a very real threat to Bara society. Traditionally, the wealth in heads of cattle reinforces the authority of the elders, so that when they lose their herd, they also lose their power. Young men, who according to Hoerner (1986) are often partially educated and no longer fit into traditional society, fall prey to recruitment by gangs of malaso and become involved in cattle-rustling.

Cattle-rustling in the traditional sense is a condition for manhood among the Bara. To comprehend the phenomenon, one needs to understand the importance of physical strength and virility (which borders on violence) as an ethic in Bara society. Louis Paul Randriamarolaza's paper (1986) clarifies this controversial activity and shares some excellent insight about it. One group of Bara refer to themselves as Baralahy, literally "Bara males", meaning "strong people". Faublée (1954) mentions that before circumcision a Bara boy is referred to as a female. This ethic of strength has a reverse side of cunning and craftiness, in the sense of tactics and intelligence. A head with no cunning is to them a taboara, a pumpkin. They do not easily trust strangers, as the proverb indicates: Fanalo tsy maody tsy ela velo ("a warrior who is not careful will not live long"). The force or strength value also has a moral side to it and is seen in a love for justice and frankness, which sometimes leads to verbal violence. Randriamarolaza goes on to show how in such a society the word halatsy cannot have a pejorative meaning (halatsy aomby: "theft of cattle"), because the custom is an extension of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of their ancestors, with reference to a proverb inherited from them: Ny halatsy tsindrokiny ny mahery ("stealing cattle is the only form of gathering worthy of the strong").

The other argument for understanding the cattle-rustling among the Bara, is that it was a means of economic exchange (A steals from B who steals from C who steals from D who steals from A) and growing one's herd. In the Barabe region where Randriamarolaza worked, the cattle exchanging hands in this way were the fairly domesticated beasts kept at the village at the toets'aomby (village pastures) or vala (cattle-pen), not the main herds out on the tanin'aomby or tany fiarakandrova (vast territories reserved for cattle). (Randriamarolaza has the definitions for the terms toets'aomby and tany fiarakandrova the other way round, but according to Père Luigi, this is incorrect.) The toets'aomby or vala represents a secular and public space, whereas the tanin'aomby is the symbol of the ownership and collective identity of the foko (clan), a sacred space that no Baralahy would desecrate. However the malaso, the common robbers, hold no place sacred, and steal cattle from anywhere.

Community Development

Group Description

Health Care (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Health Care)

malnutrition and bad sanitary conditions are known to be limiting factors in the fertility rate .. Ibara .. has some of the lowest fertility rates in the province" (Hoerner, 1986)

"In Madagascar the ratio doctor: inhabitant is 1:9780, far below the norm of 1:5000, and this reflects a difficulty of accessibility to health care" (ONE, 1994) - this ratio would be much worse for rural areas like Ibara.

Diet (Quality)

Fair

Comment (Diet)

Don't like to slaughter own cattle, except for funerals and sacrificial rites; typically rice & milk/vegetables, cassava, maize.

Water (Quality)

Fair

Comment (Water)

Overall [in Madagascar] 11.6% of the rural population (932,881 persons) have access to drinkable water, and about 6,800,000 do not yet have access to it" (ONE, 1994)

Access is mainly from rivers, streams and wells (ONE, 1994)

Shelter Description

Mainly houses made of stick frames, plastered over with mud.

Energy/Fuel (Quality)

Poor

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Item Note

Comment (Energy)	Accessibility to electricity is poor, especially in rural areas; according to Jirama approx 200,000 people in the whole of Madagascar have access to electricity (ONE, 1994).
Clothing	According to the 1993 census, 0.9% of households in Ibara have electricity. They use mainly firewood for cooking and heating. (estimated 94% from 1993 census) Women wrap a lamba-hoany (large rectangular printed cloth) around themselves; men wear a sikibe (also a type of large cloth) draped over the shoulder or tied around the waist. They often wear westernized accessories. Men are often seen carrying a spear, boys with slings. They often sport a shotgun when out with the cattle.
Transportation	Foot, ox-carts, taxi-brousse

Society & Culture

Group Description

Family Structures	Patriarchal
Neighbor Relations	Reserved, self-contained; bitter towards many neighboring ethnic groups for settling in their best land.
Authority / Rule	Clan chiefs; elders have much authority; the hazomanga (refers to both the sacrificial altar place and the patriarch) plays a very important role; authority is largely tied to the number of cattle owned.
Social Habits/Groupings	Live in small close-knit villages; interdependent. Death and burial very important.
Cultural Change Pace	Slow
Identification With National Culture	Distinct
Self Image	Prestigious
Judicial / Punishment System	The Bara have specific social laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, and theft, but tend more and more towards government intervention for justice.
Celebrations	"Bilo" for healing; marriage, various sacrifices for both the dead and the living, for fertility, and circumcision.
Recreations	Wrestling, dancing
Art Forms	sculpture, clay, mats
Media	none to our knowledge
Attitude To Outsiders	somewhat resistant
Attitude To Change	somewhat resistant
History Of People Group	The Bara are a pastoral people with a fair amount of social cohesion, perhaps due to some political centralization in the nineteenth century. When the French arrived in 1896, the Bara to the north of the Ilañana river were found to be divided into four large kingdoms, ruled by four Zafimañely chiefs: in the east (around Ivohibe) the Bara Iatsatsa under Isambo; around Ranohira and Ihosy the Bara Be under Ramieba; around Ankazoabo the Bara Imamono under Impoinimery and in the south-east around Benenitra the Bara Vinda under Mahavory. Each kingdom consisted of numerous clans, each with their own chief being a vassal to the Zafimañely king. To the south of the Ilañana a number of large families imposed their authority over the remaining Bara clans, e.g. the Zafimarozaha, Manambia and Marovola families. Apart from members of Bara clans, many immigrants on Bara territory have adopted Bara customs and language and call themselves Bara, e.g. the Bara Bory of Betsileo origin, Bara Haronga of Tesaka origin, and Bara Tanosy of Tanosy origin. Raymond Kent (1968) says that the term Bara was not used until the nineteenth century. The first European visitors to Ibara were two French travelers from Fort Dauphin, mid- seventeenth century, but they left no account. The first people to ever write about the Bara were missionaries of the London Missionary Society, GA Shaw (1885) and others after their visits between 1876 and 1887.

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Comment (Culture)

Item Note

According to Jacques Faublée (1954:5), Bara society consists of large families (raza), each a group of descendants of a common ancestor. Members of a raza distinguish themselves in the following ways:

1. The earbrand of their cattle, which is named after the particular cut or design of the mark and the origin of the animal, expresses a vow, refers to the difficult beginnings of the herd and testifies of harmony and cohesion in the family.
2. A name, which recalls the ancestor, the place of origin, the family history, a quality or a fault. This is often the same name as that of the cattle's earmark.
3. Some taboos (faly), which usually prohibit certain food or the killing of certain animals or birds or proscribe certain behavior or the protection of certain animals or birds, etc. The origin of a taboo can be an experience, a curse by an ancestor, a revelation an ancestor had, etc. All Bara are aware that violating a faly amounts to destroying the life of the family.
4. A tradition (tatara-raza) which is family history of which the shortest form consists of a genealogy, stating from the men's perspective: which family they married into, which children they had, which family their oldest son married into, etc. In the tantara raza family names, cattle earbrands, origins, faly are recorded and sometimes explained.

The above four aspects are basic to the Bara social identity, since every Bara is known by his raza. Bara society is patrilineal, each raza having one patriarch, the lonaky or pazaka who alone has the right to perform the priestly role during ceremonies involving sacrifices and the hazomanga. Each Bara has one hazomanga, the same as his father and his father's father.

The raza (clans) consist of different tariky (or tario or tariza) which are the lineage. The concepts of foko and traño (household) are not that clearly defined, as they can refer to different denominations of kinship and are often applied to contradictory concepts by foreign authors. Huntington writes that "the basic unit of organization for Bara society (...) is the local, corporate kin group, the tariky (1974:137)". The tariky indicates the smaller local corporate group who shares the control of rice fields, cattle, women, village and tomb.

From the Bara standpoint there are two other significant categories of people, indicated by the terms longo ("family" or "relative"), and okafa or arahamba (previously "enemy" but now meaning "stranger" or "not longo").

Two names are given to a child - the first being determined by the astrological destiny of the birth, so that all children born under the same sign would have the same name for life, the names being different for boys and girls. This name prescribes particular taboos, prohibits certain marriages, indicates days that the person should not do any work, etc. (It is possible for a person to be born into a lower class, according to his raza, but have high professional prestige because of his destiny, e.g. to become an influential ombiasa). Later-on the parents choose a second name for the child, often that of the grandfather, expressing a wish, a vow or a description. This name often changes later in life and is replaced by a posthumous name at the time of death. Names do not individualize people. The individual is indistinct as such, but important in relation to his group, the living and the dead - his raza. Faublée (1954:83) writes that a Bara is not Mr. or Mrs. So-and-so, but fulfills a particular function in a particular situation, prescribed by his or her role in society. He is the father, the uncle, the eldest, the youngest, the nephew, etc.

Youth

Group Description

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)

Cattle herding, some cultivation, fetching wood, water, tending younger siblings.

Youth Problems (Teens)

Not enough schooling; life expectancy higher, but inheritance smaller.

Youth Greatest Needs (teens)

Education

Comment (Youth)

Some youth fall prey to organized cattle raiding. They accept gangsterism as an alternative way of making a living causing them to rebel against the traditional system of authority.

Education

Group Description

Percent Of Eligible Students Enrolled

23% (this applies to the region of Ibara, migrants included).

Language Of Instruction Early Years

Malagasy, Bara

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Item Name

Language Of Textbooks Early Years

Language Of Instruction Later Years

Language Of Textbooks Later Years

Item Note

Malagasy, Bara

French

French

Church Growth

Status of Christianity

Comment (Church Growth)

It is the experience of evangelists among the Bara, that when they are approached with respect, love and patience, they show themselves to be very receptive. Catholic and Lutheran evangelists are the most active among the Bara. Exact numbers are not known, but there are very few committed Christians among this group, estimated at under 5%. However, over the last few years, a marked growth has been reported. Attitudes towards Christianity vary, depending on the experience people have had in this regard. For example, a Bara village chief said researchers would be welcome to come and do tests in his village, provided that they did not pray there, as that would make their aody (charm or fetish) ineffective.

Religion & Response

Status of Christianity

Religious Practices & Ceremonies

The Bara pray to "Zanahary who made hands and feet", and numerous sacrifices are made for the living and the dead. The hazomanga velo or mpisoro officiates during rituals at the hazomanga (sacrificial altar place; also refers to the person who officiates, the patriarch). The ombiasa (divine, witch-doctor, traditional healer, astrologer) also leads some ceremonies.

Only members of the same hazomanga can sit down before the sacrificial post and participate in ceremonies. The hazomanga is found a few meters to the north-east of the patriarch's house (trañon-donaky). The house is easily distinguishable from others, as it is often the highest of the village and is built in the north-east, while the other houses in the village are built to the south and the west. The importance of this house is shown by the slaughtering of a cow during its inauguration. The sacred objects inherited from the ancestors are kept in the north-eastern corner of the trañon-donaky and consists of the long knife (vy arara, verara, vy lava, vy mengoky) for cutting the victim's throat, the tin beaker (fanovy) for sprinkling water or a water-blood mixture and the marine conch shell (atsiva) for the convocation of the blood relatives. These objects are hidden and only brought out (in some areas by a special little door) when a sacrifice is to be made.

There are varieties of interpretation of the hazomanga. Among the Zafindrendriko, the Bara Iatsatsa and the Bara Imamono, the word hazomanga has a wider meaning. They do not erect a sacrificial post, but keep a special space swept and clean for the purposes of sacrificial ceremonies. To them hazomanga refers to the person of the patriarch, to his house (also called fatora) and to the three sacred objects. Faublée (1954:68) mentions that the Bara Vinda have a hazom-bòto, which commemorates circumcision and serves as a sacrificial post.

Rites practiced by the Bara include the bilo (a type of healing through exorcism of the helo), savatse (circumcision), different sacrifices (soro and saotse), funeral rites and divination (sikily). The soro is sacrificial prayer offered to Zanahary and the patrilinear ancestors, and can only be officiated by the patriarch. This is done on behalf of the whole lineage or family at the hazomanga. In the case of the bilo, sacrifices for marriage or when there has been a serious fault committed (such as incest or breaking some taboo), the required sacrifices to prevent any disastrous consequences from such transgressions are not made at the hazomanga, but somewhere else in or near the village.

Anybody can call on superhuman powers, especially on the helo, which are spirits of living nature, spirits of life, to make a vow (sareky) and ask a favor, in exchange for the sacrifice of a chicken or a sheep, for which the patriarch's intervention is not required. In some cases a person becomes a medium for the helo and is then consulted by those in need. The helo are small dark spirits who live in particular trees or in particular water spots, or in particular creatures such as eels, that get fed with locusts, frogs or meat from a sacrificed cow. They sometimes haunt a person and sometimes show their favor of a child, who is then consecrated by abstention from certain foods and other soiling elements. Usually veneration of the helo concerns sterility or wealth or a guilt offering for having offended them by desecrating their dwelling place. This type of prayer is called saotsy.

Three elements are present in all sacrificial rites (Elli:93), namely tata (prayer, calling on Zanahary and the ancestors, explaining the reasons for the occasion and the request made); soro (the sacrifice of the victim, usually a cow; or some rice and honey in the case of a pregnancy); and tsipirano (blessing - sprinkling with water during the tata, or with a mixture of water and blood after the soro). The three terms are used interchangeably to indicate the total rite.

Attitude To Christianity

Somewhat resistant

Attitude To Religious Change

Very resistant

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Item Name

Resistance / Receptivity

Religious Analogies & Bridges

Spiritual Climate And Openness

Comment (Religion)

Items For Prayer

Item Note

In embracing Christianity, the Bara undo their own culture; the cattle become lay animals and many societal structures disintegrate.

Zanahary, creator God who made hands and feet.

The hazomanga, which designates both the person honored as such (hazomanga velo, i.e. the living hazomanga) and the place where sacrifices take place in the village, is crucial in village life. It is very important that blood flows for a wrong done or a favor asked.

Atonement is always made with blood. There is an idea of communion, where a member of the family doing the sacrifice is perhaps absent, living elsewhere or away with the herd and they send this relative a piece of charcoal that has been dipped in the sacrificial blood, so that they can have a part in the blessing.

Some Bara believe in Ndriañakatsakatsy, the son of Zanahary the creator God, to whom they address themselves when needing forgiveness of sin and upon whom they call for religious rites. This merits some investigation as to whether an analogy can be drawn.

"On all that you tell us about Zanahary we totally agree; our problem is Jesus Christ" (quoted by RC Bishop Rakotondravahatra in Elli, 1993)

Since 1998 many Bara in the East have become Christians during a spiritual revival resulting from the supernatural experience and encounter with Jesus a Bara woman had in Maropaika, district of Ivohibe

There are many parallels in the Bara tradition which can function as keys to understanding the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They are amazed to learn that the sacrifice of Jesus was done once for all sin and for the whole world.

1. Creative and culturally sensitive representation of Christ
2. Christian workers currently targeting the Bara
3. The Bara Project of the Norwegian Mission Society
4. A vision among Malagasy Christians to reach out to their Bara compatriots

History Of Christianity In Group

Year Began

1876

By Whom

London Missionary Society

Significant Events

End of 1800's, Norwegian Protestant missionaries in Ranohira, Ihoisy and Ivohibe (important Bara centers).

Status of Christianity

Scripture

Translation Status

Possible

Available Scripture

Portions

Scripture Use

Hardly at all

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Literature

yes

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Recordings

no

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Film/Videos

yes

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Radio

yes

Status of Christianity

Missions and Churches

Organization Name

Lutheran

Organization Name

Roman Catholic Church

Status of Christianity