

Various notes from visit to Ethiopia 10-21 June 2002

Discussion with Archbishop Berhanejesus, Archdiocese of Addis Ababa, 11 June 2002

Those present

Fr Aidan, Jonathan, Abuna Berhanejesus, Abba Kidane Mariam, Abba ?? (Cathedral Parish Priest)

Church was originally working in the W and SW border areas. It has now been invited to the highland areas, given land by regional government and asked to build schools.

Aid to the Church in Need. Without this there is no support for youth who then turn to Protestantism and may then become disillusioned and turn to Islam.

On a practical level, the Archbishop had three suggested projects, both relating to the Catholic school in Bahar Dar, Gojam.

The school currently has an elementary section run by Sr Abeba of the Daughters of Charity. The Church is trying to complete a secondary section.

1. Furnishing of the priests' house (the Director of the school will be a priest)
2. Equipping the science laboratory
3. Building (??) a wing of classrooms

Meeting with the Papal Nuncio, 11 June 2002

This was a somewhat ad hoc meeting arranged by the ever active Abba Kidane Mariam.

The Nuncio had several ideas:

1. The Catholic school at Bahar Dar, as proposed by Abuna Berhanejesus, but the Nuncio did not see this as an immediate priority.
2. Something to help support the development of the clergy, e.g. along the lines of the original 'Blackfriars Ethiopians'.
3. Volunteers with specialist experience in school teaching and/or management.
4. Theological training in theological institute run by the Capuchins in Addis Ababa. Eg a 2-month stint, supported by the fund.
5. Need a diversity of disciplines and quality of training for Ethiopians which *they* can then transfer (with quality)
6. Books in residences where students live. Contemporary, good, theological magazines - but not too radical. Biblical, patristical but avoiding theology which might emphasise separation or distance from Orthodox theology. Aidan commented that 'neopatristic theology' might be the thing and that the best country for this was Italy. However, the language needed is English - even Eritrea is moving towards English. The Nuncio said that there is no collection of the Fathers of the Church available in Ethiopia and that some old English translations of the Fathers would be valuable. Aidan suggested Fr Edmund's work 'Augustine for the 21st Century' (and I seem to recall AN suggesting he might be able to find a cheap copy??). There is no one volume of the Fathers, but have to start somewhere.

The Bishops are putting more effort into the formation of the clergy, both spiritual and intellectual.

There are 30 million Ethiopian (50% of the population) below 19 years of age. Grandmother is not there to teach them traditional prayers. They are all in 'new' families and the Nuncio questioned whether they would have roots within a Christian tradition.

Meeting with Abuna Tesfasellassie, Bishop of Adigrat, 13 June 2002

There is a lot of work taking place in the normal running of the Church. There is also pressure for the Church to go into new areas at the invitation of the Orthodox church.

Abuna Tesfasellassie had two suggestions, both in Maichew, south of Mekele. Currently the Church does not have a presence in Maichew but was there during the famine, running a food distribution base. The Church's reputation was enhanced greatly by its successes in food distribution and the government gave the land that the distribution centre was on to the Church with the expectation/hope that the Church would develop some permanent presence there.

1. An accommodation block for use by sisters or priests. Originally the Comboni Sisters were going to start in Maichew but with a change in Provincial came a change in plan. At the moment there are no congregations planning to move to Maichew. However, doing something here is one of the Bishop's priorities and it seems as if the hope is that a small accommodation block would make it easier to attract a congregation. The sisters (or priest) could use the accommodation as a temporary base whilst they did a needs assessment of the area and, if they planned to stay, whilst they set up their own house. The envisaged accommodation would have 2-3 bedrooms plus a room for saying mass.

2. The next stage of development is envisaged as being a kindergarten or some sort of medical support, run by whichever order/congregation moves in to Maichew.

The estimated cost of the accommodation is £32,000 (for two blocks), which the Bishop admitted seemed a 'bit big'. He was keen to point out that he did not have an expectation of 100% funding, as it is a large amount. The estimated cost of a kindergarten (stage 2) would be £63,000.

People are very happy to have support from the Catholic Church - schools are not normally affordable by the people.

Regional and local government regularly lobbies the Eparchy for the Catholic Church to be involved in their areas. E.g. W Tigray where the Church has not been there has been an unexpected openness by the people and the government. An important moment. But the Bishop's priority is in Maichew.

The Bishop was concerned about funding 'dependency' but more because of the continued pressure it would put on our fund. AN explained that our vision was to create a fund that would operate over an extended period of time, rather than providing a one-off donation. The Bishop was interested in the scope for 'human contact' eg through donors including Ethiopia/Adigrat eparchy in their holiday plans. He sees the human link is quite important - some donors and organisations are quite 'hard' on their relationships. We need a different mentality.

Adigrat is meeting the needs of the diocese *and* others.

The project can start as soon as possible - there are no problems relating to land, labour or materials.

Maintenance would be the responsibility of the church or the order using the buildings.

Miscellaneous notes

Dominicani

There was once a Dominican community, over 100 years ago, between Adigrat and Guzemakeda at the eastern zone of Tigray.

Zalambesa

Occupied for 2 years by Eritrea during recent war. Some 20,000 people displaced, some to Ethiopia, some to Eritrea.

Systematically destroyed. *All* buildings damaged. Not much, if any, sign of shell or shrapnel damage.

The Church had 8 buildings in Zalambesa including a Church, convent, parish house. All pretty much destroyed.

Sebeya, eastern zone of Tigray

Visit with Abba Mesgkenna Woldu

Holy Trinity Church was highlighted as a example parish of the diocese. However, it is probably the best appointed with a refurbished church and good priests house as well as good road access to Adigrat.

- The total population of 5000 was evacuated during the war.
- The church was damaged by gunfire and the roof partially collapsed.
- The parish house was shell damaged.

- The church has been repaired and is now the best-condition church in the diocese after Adigrat.
- There is a church, parish house and school.
- A rare thing for a parish - it has a tap water supply from a water tank fed by rain-water.
- Most parishes are not accessible by road and thus the parish priest has to walk or go by mule. It is up to a two hour walk to parish boundaries and mobility is not helped by hilly country.
- Most other churches are in a poor state of repair, with leaking roofs and a lack of furniture.
- Most people in the area can read and write, thanks to a Church education. Very few will have a full primary education.
- Very few aged 45+ will be literate.
- Without the Church, education standards would be lower.
- Priests are the best educated in the parishes except for orthodox priests who have converted (18% was a figure given, but not sure what for. Percentage of priests converted from Orthodox?)
- Some professionals (e.g. teachers and administrators) educated to grade 12. Rarely educated to degree level within bounds of a parish.
- No one hostile to the church within government.
- The Church has great credibility in the eyes of the people since the drought/war of 1984 (and 1994?).
- Government is more open nowadays.
- Holy Trinity parish could be an example of ecumenism - relations with the Orthodox church are good.
- Approx 500-1000 Catholics in the parish.

People

Abba Wolde Gabriel Kahsay - runs ACDS in Mekelle.

Abba Mesgenna Woldu - link between diocese and school in Wukro

Abba Muccie Dorrie - lecturer at Major Seminary, Adigrat

Abba Thomas - lecturer at Major Seminary, Adigrat

Abba Wolde Gabriel - lecturer at Major Seminary, Adigrat (once taught by Aidan)

Abba Thum - Laity counsellor (accompanied us to Axum)

Alem Berhe - Abba Wolde Gabriel Kahsay's neice

Redae Kidanu - Abba Wolde Gabriel Kahsay's driver.

Catholic School, Bahar Dar

- The Headmistress is Sr Abeba of the Daughters of Charity. The convent is in the school grounds and there are 3 sisters in the community, all Ethiopians.
- 615 children (526 kindergarten to 6th grade), the vast majority non-Catholic (only 2 Catholic students).
- Fees are Birr 35 per month, plus school uniform. There are approx 100 non fee paying 'poor' children.
- School hours 0815 - 1500
- The school goes up to grade 9 but parents and children are asking for an extension to grade 10. National exam are taken at G8 and G10. Good marks at G10 makes students eligible for G'10+2' pre university education at 16-18 years of age (younger end in the cities). An entrance exam for university takes place at G10+2.
- There are 28 teachers at the school. Not all are Christian - there is one Muslim.

- There are only 3 'known' Catholic families in Bahar Dar. Due to there being no Catholic cemetery, families are reluctant to be openly Catholic as it would mean that bodies would have to be taken to Addis Ababa for burial - a long and expensive journey.
- The longer term plan is to separate the school into an upper and lower school, each managed by its own head (eg Sr Abeba for the lower school). There would be a Director (a priest, perhaps a Lazarist?) overseeing *both* schools. Currently Sr Abeba is not qualified to manage above grade 8 and someone more highly qualified is needed to be the Director and to report to the Bishop and the Government.
- There are three cycles. 1st cycle grades 1-4, 2nd cycle grades 5-8 and 3rd cycle grades 9-10.
- There is a library but it does not have enough books. A wider variety of books is needed. A lot of books have been donated by the British Council.

Laboratory

- The Provincial (Sr Aster) has a list of equipment required.
- The laboratory and other new buildings were built by an Italian contractor. They are good quality and should last.
- A laboratory is compulsory for G5 and upwards. The school has had a dispensation for now, but the government wants education to be practical as well as theoretical.
- The school will need to employ a specialist laboratory teacher.

Priests' House

- A priest is needed because the school needs to be run iaw the Church's ethos. The priest can also teach - it is common for priests to teach in schools. Schools also now ask for diplomas and certificates.
- Priests would teach upper grades 5/6 upwards.
- Sisters and priests are more focussed on the children and the school etc. Other teachers can be more distracted and perhaps less dedicated due to family responsibilities.
- 3 bedrooms
- Ideal is to have more than 2 priests. One as Director, one as 'upper' head, plus any others.
- The Lazarists have a house in Bahar Dar (Eritrean province). The Eritreans are going back to Eritrea - perhaps the Lazarists could sell or rent their property.
- If the Lazarists came to the school, the parish priest could move into the new house.
- G1-4 Elementary 1st cycle
G5-8 Elementary 2nd cycle
G9-10 High School 1st cycle
G10+2 High School 2nd cycle
- The government wants to limit the number of students going on to G10+2 and university, focussing funds on those who stand a good chance of succeeding, but everyone gets enough education to be literate.
- 3 years of funding (100,000 Birr p/a) have come from the mother house in Paris - this year is the last year of funding. From the on the province/diocese will be responsible for funding this 'hole'.
- Cost estimates:

500 pupils, 12 months, 35 Birr	= 210,000 Birr
Fund from Mother house	= 100,000 Birr
Estimated running costs	= 310,000 Birr