

Heritage of christianity in ethiopia theology religion



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Christianity and Islam have coexisted in Ethiopia since the celebrated first migration in the formative period of Islam fourteen-hundred old ages ago. Ethiopia has overcome many efforts in the yesteryear to subvert this coexistence, but modern Ethiopia remains a state which prides itself on a tradition of spiritual tolerance between its populations of Christian, Muslim and Judaic citizens. This delicate balance nevertheless, is confronting a menace by intervention from outside involvements trying to set up control in the Horn of Africa. These foreigners are utilizing spiritual non-governmental organisations such as evangelical Christian missionaries and Wahabist Muslim da'wah to act upon the population against the traditional opinion Coptic Church.

Heritage of Christianity in Ethiopia

The Judeo-Christian history of Ethiopia goes back to the clip of Israel ' s King Solomon in the 10th century BCE. The Holy Bible (First Kings) records that the Queen of Sheba (modern Ethiopia) , visited King Solomon. The Ethiopian heroic poem Kebra Nagast records that she bore a boy by Solomon, Menelik, who is said to hold brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia. This was the beginning of the Solomonid Dynasty of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Coptic Orthodox Tewahedo Church (afterlife referred to as the Coptic Church) claims the Ark still resides in the Chapel of the Tablet in the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in the town of Axum, Ethiopia (Raffaele, 2007) .

Axum is besides the name of the first Christian land of Ethiopia, which was the first of any universe state to follow Christianity as the official province faith. The Coptics relate that Christianity was foremost brought to Ethiopia by an Ethiopian royal functionary who was converted by Phillip the Evangelist, one of the first seven deacons of Christianity. In the 4th century, the Pope of the Coptic Church in Alexandria appointed Frumentius as the first Archbishop of Axum and Axum became officially a Christian state. It should be noted that before this clip the Coptic Church based in Alexandria (besides known as the Oriental Orthodox) had already split off from what would go the Catholic churches and the Eastern Orthodox churches. This split was due to difference in sentiment on the nature of the Christ (Gascoigne, From 2001, ongoing) . This difference of sentiment continues to estrange the Coptics from the remainder of Christianity to this twenty-four hours, as will be seen.

Muslim Heritage in Ethiopia

In the twelvemonth 613, the Companions and Family of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) were being persecuted by the Qurayshi kin in Mecca. One of the taking Companions was an Ethiopian slave. The Ethiopian male monarch at this clip was known to be a merely leader and the Prophet was convinced that his followings would be safest in a Christian state where the people followed the Bibles of the Book instead than among the heathen folks of Arabia. The Prophet ordered his Companions to migrate (hijra) to Ethiopia for their safety. During the six old ages the Companions stayed in Ethiopia, many Ethiopians converted to the new faith of Islam. In the 6th twelvemonth of the first hijirat, a nephew of the Prophet, Amir ibn Umayya visited Ethiopia with an invitation to Negus, the male monarch of Ethiopia to accept Islam. Amir was heartily received by Negus, who against the will of the remainder of the royal household and the Coptic Church, converted to Islam. The royal household revolted against Negus and when Negus died, the Prophet offered the first of all time in-absentia funeral supplication (Salatul Ghaib) in his award (Mohammed, 2012) .

Islam had established itself in Ethiopia, but Ethiopia would stay officially a Christian state. The Solomonid Dynasty would go on to reign until the Marxist revolution of 1974 and the royal place was that there were no Muslim Ethiopians. The place of the royal household was that Muslim Ethiopians were aliens populating in the state (The First Hijrah Foundation (FHF) , 2012) . This “ alien ” label on Muslim Ethiopians is in portion strengthened by cultural and racial divisions within Ethiopia.

Racial and Cultural Federalism

Ethiopia is presently divided into ethnically-based independent federal parts. For illustration, the Somali cultural part is the most thickly settled and takes up approximately the eastern tierce of the state with its population 97 % ethnically Somali. The Somali people are a Cushitic (black African) cultural group and predominately Muslim (98 %) . The following most thickly settled part is Oromo. The Oromo are besides a Cushitic cultural group whose population is sacredly divided between predominately Muslim in the eastern part of the part and evangelical Protestant (referred to as Penty) Christian in the West. The Amhara cultural group is Semitic (like the Hebrew and Arabs) and lives in the upland part of Amhara (Population Census Commission, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2008) . The royal household of Ethiopia was of Amharic ethnicity and this cultural group still maintains laterality in the Ethiopian federal authorities. The Amharic people are predominately Coptic and the Coptic Church in Ethiopia is chiefly led by Amharics. This historical laterality of the Amharic people over the other ethnicities of the part has been the cause for some of the struggle in the part that to foreigners may look to be merely sacredly based.

Past Religious Conflicts

With the outgrowth and rapid growing of Islam in the 6th century, Ethiopia rapidly became an stray “ Island of Christendom in a Sea of Islam ” (Gascoigne, From 2001, ongoing) . Although geographically isolated, Ethiopia maintained strong ties to the remainder of Christendom. The Ethiopian Patriarch has ever been appointed by the Oriental Orthodox Pope in Alexandria and monastics from the Ethiopian Coptic Church maintain the

alone right of being co-custodians of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. By the terminal of the 13th century, Ethiopia was the lone non-Muslim province in northern Africa.

During the 15th century, Ethiopian monastics from Jerusalem attempted to go to the Council of Florence to discourse the re-unification of the Christian Churches. They were denied entry to the council by both the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches because of the theological differences which had caused them to divide off originally. The presence of the Ethiopian monastics at Florence did, nevertheless, serve to pull the attending of Rome ensuing in a Jesuit mission being sent to Ethiopia. This Jesuit presence would last about two hundred old ages and finally consequence in the Ethiopian male monarch, Susenyos, abdicating the Coptic religion as unorthodoxy and following the Roman Catholic religion. After the going of the Jesuits, Susenyos succumbed to coerce and reverted back to the Coptic religion.

During the 16th century when the Jesuit presence was at its strongest, Ethiopia was besides confronting jihads from the Muslims. The first jihad was from the Sultan Gran (aka Ahmad ibn Ibrahim) who had based his sultanate in Harar. His determination to declare holy war on Ethiopia was due in portion to marginalisation and favoritism against the Muslims influenced in portion by the Jesuit missionaries. Gran moved an ground forces of Somalis west and destroyed a great many of the Christian shrines and holy topographic points (Gascoigne, From 2001, ongoing) .

In the 19th and 20th centuries Ethiopia fought to keep its independency from the colonial powers of Portugal and Italy. The Ethiopian emperor, Haile

Selassie, led in the formation of the League of Nations and the Organization of African Unity. After the 2nd universe war, Ethiopia - backed by the United States, who was looking for a possible Red Sea port - annexed Eritrea. Eritrean sentiment was divided on this between Christians who were pro-unification and Moslems who were for Eritrean independency. This led to about 40 old ages of struggle. As portion of the larger planetary cold war, a Marxist component emerged in Eritrea. This Marxist component finally performed a military putsch against the royal household, force outing Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. A period of instability prevailed until 1991 when the current fundamental law was affirmed and Eritrea was granted independency in 1993.

From 1991 until 2012, Ethiopia was

under the control of the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Occasional wars continued to interrupt out along Ethiopia ' s boundary lines and the struggles would slop over into the adjacent states of Somalia and Sudan. Meles supported, and was supported by, the Coptics and the Amharic population. Although no longer in power by jurisprudence, the Coptics and the Amharic peoples still hold much influence. Meles support of the Coptics and marginalisation of the Muslims and Penties is portion of the cause of recent force in the state (Heinlein, 2012) .

Recent Events

On the second of March, 2011 in Asendabo, a Penty allegedly desecrated the Koran. It was believed by the Ethiopian Government that the Kwarja Muslim religious order used this alleged act to motivate a public violence that

resulted in up to 10, 000 Christians fleeing the country. Approximately 50 churches and many Christian places were burned to the ground. This was the largest in a series of Muslim onslaughts against Christians, particularly Pentecostals in Muslim dominated parts. In November of 2010, Christian occupants of Besheno found warnings nailed to their doors to change over, go forth to the metropolis, or be killed. On the twenty-sixth of February, 2011, a Muslim rabble attacked seventeen Pentecost college pupils with rods and sticks for trying to administer Bibles in a Muslim small town (Macedo, 2011) . Although freedom of faith is guaranteed in the Ethiopian fundamental law, each independent part may construe that freedom in its own manner.

In November of 2011, the Ethiopian Government identified the Kwararja religious order with Al-Qaeda and expressed concern over a turning force of Wahhabi Muslims advancing force against moderate Muslims and Christians with the purpose of doing Ethiopia an Islamic state governed by Sharia jurisprudence. Wahabist instructions would upset the balance between Christians and Muslims and challenge United States involvements in the part every bit good. The Ethiopian Government responded by endorsing a young Muslim religious order, Al-Ahbash. Al-Ahbash was founded by an Ethiopian and is really anti-Wahabi/Salafi in its beliefs, traveling so far as to declare takfir against them (declaring the Wahabi/Salafi as misbelievers) . The Ethiopian Government appointed an Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (IASC) that was Ahbash heavy with no representatives from the Wahabi or Salafi religious orders. This council seeks to make Ahbash based Islamic schools in Ethiopia so that Ethiopians will not have to travel to Arabic states to learn to go Imams (Fentaw, 2012) .

With the decease of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in August of 2012, some Ethiopian Christians and Muslims are trusting for integrity in the hereafter. Ethiopian college pupils of both Christian and Muslim religions joined together to establish the group “ Concerned Ethiopian Students ” to work toward peace. When Egypt and Libya saw public violences in September of 2012 because of the movie “ Innocence of Muslims ” produced by Coptic Christians life in the United States, Coptic leaders were speedy to denounce the movie. On the fifth of November, 2012, the new Pope of the Oriental Orthodox Communion was elected and took his topographic point governing the Coptic Church in Alexandria. The following twenty-four hours he issued a statement saying that the Coptic Church has no political function, but that he fears Sharia jurisprudence will endanger the spiritual freedom and safety of the Christian community (Schiava, 2012) . On the seventh of November, 2012, the Ethiopian Government announced the freshly elected members of the IASC. The authorities hopes the IASC can convey peace within the Muslim community (VanDerWolf, 2012) . Muslims, particularly Wahabis, had been protesting the elections for months. The Wahabis had requested the elections be held in mosques alternatively of public meeting halls. The Wahabi fright is that the elections were influenced by the authorities which they say is seeking to censor the Wahabi religious order and advance Ahbash (Heinlein, 2012) . More than one 100 Muslims are being held on terrorist act charges for the protests (VanDerWolf, 2012) .

The Way Ahead for United States Interests

The United States ‘ engagement in the Horn of Africa, peculiarly Ethiopia sits in the same delicate state of affairs as the Coptic Church. With the United

States confederation with the Amharic opinion parties of Ethiopia, any move by the authorities against Islam or any religious order of Islam, such as Wahabi, is seen by the extremist Muslims as an act backed by or even directed by the United States and Israel (The First Hijrah Foundation (FHF) , 2012) . The evangelism of the Pentecostal churches into Muslim and Coptic countries is seen by some as intervention from the United States, though through such entities as the Ku Klux Klan (remark to (CBS News, 2012) . While this may look pathetic, it conveys the fright that is bred in the heads of some Ethiopian Muslims.

The Ethiopian Copts may be confronting the greatest battle in their about two-thousand twelvemonth history. If an Islamist cabal additions control of the state, many will fly the state much as most Christians have fled from Iraq and most late Egypt. Any move by the United States authorities or American based organisations to help the Christians in Ethiopia will merely beef up the resoluteness of the Islamist religious orders to extinguish the Christian powerbase. Possibly they may happen peace in true democracy in the post-Zenawi epoch.