

WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates informed continuous co-ordinated evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

Editor: THOMAS COCHRANE.

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Important Factors in Abyssinia

JOSEPH J. COOKSEY

THE future of Christianity in Ethiopia cannot but be a concern of the Church at the present juncture when the independence of the country is threatened by war with Italy. Sixteen centuries have passed since Frumentius first preached Christ to the people, and under the guidance of Athanasius of Alexandria, Ethiopia came within the orbit of the Eastern Church. Reverence for Bible teaching marked the Church from its commencement, so that the Ethiopic translation of the Septuagint, made in the fourth and fifth centuries, is one of the oldest versions extant, and on it was nurtured a vigorous Christian faith.

By the middle of the sixth century the evangelizing vitality of this Church was felt in Arabia from the Yemen to the Hedjaz, and to it Mohammed committed the protection of the first band of Moslem converts from paganism at Mecca. It is, therefore, not without historic significance that the present Emperor, Haile Selassie, is not only a zealous patron of the work of the Bible Society in his capital of Addis Ababa, but has himself issued the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles and part of the Old Testament from the Government Press. When African Christianity was blotted out by the Moslem armies in the early seventh century, the Abyssinian Church survived, protected not alone by her mountains, but by the valour inspired by her Christian faith. In this we find the main reason for its survival when for centuries the kingdom rose like an island amid lands submerged by the flood of Islam.

Perhaps the greatest spiritual calamity that has ever overtaken Ethiopia happened as a result of her ecclesiastical bond with the Alexandrian Church. The Monophysite controversy, as to whether Christ had a single or dual nature, which engaged the Coptic Church of Egypt embroiled the daughter Church of Abyssinia. The Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) pronounced as heretical those who held Monophysite views, but both Churches rejected the Decrees and defied the Council. Their consequent isolation

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from the main Christian body had a disastrous sequel. It made easy the Moslem conquest of Egypt in the early seventh century, and it ushered the Abyssinian Church into an era of spiritual decline and cultural poverty following upon long years of barren controversy.

As spiritual life decreased formalism increased, the clergy came to depend upon priestly authority and the granting of easy absolution following facile confession. The laity drifted into an apathetic indifference to the Church and the decay which then set in persists to this day. So complete was the isolation of the Ethiopian Church that even the two letters a year sent by the Patriarch of Alexandria to keep in touch with her—recorded by Abu Salih in the twelfth century—were suppressed by the Moslem Caliph, El Hakim.

For eight centuries she was forgotten by Christendom, until John II of Portugal sent Dom Pedro Cavilham on a mission of enquiry in 1490, and a second embassy led by Dom Rodrigo de Lima followed thirty years later. A commercial Treaty and Pact of Friendship were then concluded, and these covenants prepared the way for the despatch of Jesuit missionaries, who succeeded in 1604 in inducing the reigning Emperor not only to profess the Roman faith, but to make formal submission to Rome. This step involved a revocation of the decision taken on the Monophysite controversy, and the nation rose in rebellion. The Emperor was slain; allegiance to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria was reaffirmed, and thirty years later the Jesuit Mission was expelled, after a century-and-a-half of intensive activity, during which Abyssinia seemed surely destined to pass under the sway of the Church of Rome. It would have been well had Ethiopia been permitted to continue in the isolation in which the Portuguese found her, for the Jesuits left her a legacy of Mariolatry of which she had previously known practically nothing, and which served further to destroy the faith of her early Bible-loving people.

Modern Ethiopia has so far moved with the times that three Roman Catholic missions are now at work in the

IMPORTANT FACTORS IN ABYSSINIA

country—the Capuchins in the Galla country, the Institute de la Consolata of Turin in the Kaffa area in the south-west, also the Lazarists at Alitiéna, near Adi Caich, and together they maintain an important Church, school and orphanage work. But the temper of the people has not changed since it destroyed the Catholic power which threatened its independence and religion in 1604, and later, after a conflict lasting from 1914–1916, formerly deposed its renegade Emperor Lij Eyassu, who had plotted to subvert the Church and to make Islam the dominant faith. Therefore, in any true estimate of the present situation in Ethiopia and what may be expected to happen should hostilities unfortunately break out, we must give full weight to the factor of religion.

It is as well known in East Africa as in Europe, that the Roman Church seeks expansion in Africa to compensate for the loss of supremacy and privilege she has suffered in Europe. From Senegal in the west to Eritrea in the east Catholicism is already dominant, as it is also in the Moslem north; the south alone is so largely Protestant as not to be seriously disturbed. Using the pretext of the foreign influence of Protestant missions, a narrow nationalism has been created in the Belgian Congo, the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique, in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, so that in recent years large numbers of people in these countries have passed under the tutelage of the Church of Rome.

The Italianization of East Africa has synchronized with the aggressive action of the Roman Church, whereby the Swedish Mission in Eritrea has been totally suppressed, and its work in Italian Somaliland greatly crippled in spite of its treaty rights, while the work of Catholic missions has been correspondingly developed. The present threat against Ethiopia is directed not only against her national independence, but against her religion also, and if the past history of the country serves in any way as a guide, then we may expect a resistance of peculiar intensity. Our correspondent in Ethiopia calls our attention to a growing understanding based upon religious grounds in the

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present crisis between the 3,000,000 Ethiopian Moslems and the Ethiopian Christians. The intellectual and spiritual revolt of Mohammed against the decadent Christianity prevalent in his day is set out in the Koran, and some of his denunciation, though uttered in the seventh century, is applicable to the Roman Church of to-day. Islam can furnish arguments to sharpen a militant antagonism to Roman Catholic absorption which would appeal to Moslems not only in Ethiopia, but also in the neighbouring territories of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Uganda and Kenya, and this consideration adds gravity to the already dangerous possibilities of conflict in Ethiopia.

The Moslem people are scattered throughout the country, but are especially numerous among the Gallas in the south and south-west, and among the Danakil and Somali peoples on the east. About a half of the 2,000,000 pagans in the country are also among the Gallas. The Christian population, totalling 5,000,000, is dominant in the north and north-west, where they are represented by the Amharas, Tigrinyans, Shoans and kindred people. The Shoans are the ruling class, numbering about 1,250,000; they constitute a soldier caste which is the nucleus of the ruler's power. The Tigrinyans are probably of Semitic descent. They have been the chief civilizing element in the country. In former days they furnished its rulers and are now the dominant people in the northern kingdom of Axum.

The ancient civilization of Axum was derived from Egypt, and under the Ptolemies was developed to a high degree of splendour. In the hands of Greek merchants its port of Alulis was a rich emporium of trade with the interior of Africa, and became famous all over Eastern Europe by the quantities of gold, ivory, ostrich feathers, aromatics and rare animals which it exported.

It is a matter for regret, now that the present crisis has arisen in Ethiopia, that this land of ancient civilizations and of a Christian Church with a history of sixteen centuries behind it has been so long neglected. All through its history it has sorely lacked the helpful Christian fellowship of the Western Church.

IMPORTANT FACTORS IN ABYSSINIA

Something was attempted a century ago when Samuel Gobat, Christian Kugler and Ludwig Krapf first broke in upon its isolation, but until recently their work was not followed up. Yet reasons for encouragement have not been wanting. Dr. T. A. Lambie in a recent communication writes: 'I have been touched on more than one occasion when my own soul was drawn out to speak in a tender way of our Lord Jesus Christ, to have some priest or other cleric come to me and say: "Thank you, what you say has really touched my heart, it is so true, and we believe it."'

Another source of encouragement is that His Majesty Haile Selassie and his foreign minister Belatin Geyta Herouy are firm friends of the missionaries. Short of being active partisans in the cause of missions, which would create difficulties, their friendship and Christian fellowship can be counted upon. So practical is their interest that the Sudan Interior Mission, of which Dr. Lambie is Field Director, has been able during the past eight years to open fourteen mission stations, and to bring to the country about 100 missionaries; likewise the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society has recently opened three stations. So tolerant are the authorities that even the Catholics have made great advances. But he adds this significant warning. 'If Ethiopia is overthrown in this threatened conflict it will almost surely be the end of Protestant missionary work just when such a splendid start has been made, and the end also of the Coptic Church, for Rome will brook no rivals.'

Monks and Missionaries in Abyssinia

The Times, commenting on missionary work in Abyssinia says that, in the event of serious internal trouble, the Church Mission to Jews, working among the Falasha Jews in North Tsana, will trek towards the Sudan. All missionaries will be provided with a mule caravan and armed escort by the Ethiopian authorities.

IN connexion with work among the Falasha Jews in Abyssinia, the monks inhabiting monasteries on the peninsula of Gorgora in Lake Tsana were visited. They live in separate huts, hidden among trees and bushes. The abbot received the missionaries kindly, and