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Abstract

In this article, I explore the growth of Anglicanism in the Horn of Africa and Ethiopia with a particular focus on planting new dioceses amid the phenomenon of church-planting movements.

Introduction

In recent years, the growth of the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa led the diocese to begin a process of becoming a separate ecclesiastical province of the Anglican Communion. In 2019, the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, at its Provincial Synod, granted the Diocese of Egypt the authority to separate. In January 2020, this move was approved by the Primate's Meeting. "The new Province of Alexandria was formed on 29 June 2020, with the former 'Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa' split into four new dioceses ("Episcopal/Anglican" 2025). Two of these four dioceses of the new Province of Alexandria are based in Ethiopia: The Horn of Africa, which includes Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea (although Anglican Christians are few and far between in those nations), and Gambella, an area in western Ethiopia which is nestled up against the border with South Sudan. Prior to the creation of the new province, these dioceses were one "Episcopal Area" known as The Horn of Africa.

Before examining the growth of Anglicanism in Ethiopia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it is helpful to have a very brief overview of the whole scope of Anglican work in the region (for a more thorough review of the history, see LeMarquand 2018).

Except for chaplaincy churches, there was little attempt to plant Anglican churches in Ethiopia or the wider Horn in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The first

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Anglicans to come to the region found an ancient and thriving Orthodox form of Christianity, little known in the western world (Munro-Hay, 2003, 1:717-723; Zanetti 2003, 1:723-728). The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo (or Täwahïdo) Church dates back to the kingdom of Axum in the early fourth century (Rufinus 1997; Fiaccadori 2003, 484-88; Isaac 2013). As I have written elsewhere: "The story of the ancient Ethiopian Orthodox Church provides an important backdrop to the story of Anglicans in the Horn since, for most of the two hundred years that Anglicans have worked in this region, they have had to do so with the permission of and in cooperation with the Orthodox, and Anglicans have worked for the renewal of that Church—or at least for the renewal of the Church as various Anglican mission societies have understood renewal" (LeMarquand 2018, 197).

Early Anglican Mission

The first Protestant missionaries were sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), arriving in "Abyssinia" in 1830. Like many of the first CMS missionaries in various parts of the world, they were Lutherans working as Anglicans (Jenkins 2000, 43-65). The best received of those working in the Horn was Samuel Gobat, who, although he had clear Protestant convictions, was an irenic individual who was able to build bridges with the Orthodox (Gobat 1850). A combination of factors, including misunderstandings between the missionaries and the Orthodox, missionary colleagues who were not as open as Gobat, and political disturbances within a divided region, forced the missionaries out of the country on several occasions until they left for good in 1842 (Crummey 2003, 1:740). A foundation of cooperation had been laid, however, which was built upon by subsequent mission efforts.

Anglican Missionaries and Emperor Tewodros: The Artisans' Mission

A second phase of Anglican missionary work eventually resulted in disaster. In 1855, the newly crowned Emperor Tewodros was able to bring unity to the previously divided region (Pankhurst 1988, 144). Gobat, now the second Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, saw a new opportunity in this new unity. He proposed that artisans with practical skills would be able to have a positive impact on Ethiopia. Tewodros agreed with Gobat's suggestion, and Swiss missionary craftsmen were soon sent. Sadly, when they arrived, they discovered that what Tewodros really wanted was firearms, which he saw as necessary in his quest to consolidate power and protect Ethiopia from the Ottoman Empire, which had attempted to occupy the Red Sea. The Emperor also wrote to the heads of state of in Europe asking for their help in protecting his (Christian) realm from

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Muslim incursion. In particular, he wanted the British navy to prevent the Turks from entering the Red Sea. His letters were unanswered.

A series of diplomatic blunders between the Emperor and the British tried Tewodros' patience. In January 1864, he imprisoned the British envoy, the Swiss missionary artisans, and the newly arrived Henry Stern and Henry Rosenthal, who had come to do mission work among Ethiopian Jews (Stern 1862). When the government in London heard of the confinement of Cameron, Stern, Rosenthal, and the others, they sent an envoy who was also promptly imprisoned. The prisoners were taken to the Emperor's mountain fortress of Maqdala. The British themselves then lost patience and sent a force of about 30,000 who travelled through the country, reaching Maqdala in April 1868. On Good Friday, April 10, the Ethiopian troops attacked the British, but were easily defeated. The Emperor committed suicide. The British burned the Maqdala fortress, absconded with hundreds of ancient manuscripts (now to be found in the British Museum), and withdrew. The missionaries were freed, but clearly their well-intentioned desire to win Ethiopia for the gospel using practical skills had failed. "If the first Anglican missionaries failed due to their own lack of a cohesive vision, the second failed by being caught up in the day's political intrigue" (LeMarquand 2018, 199).

Mission to the Bete Israel

The mission among Ethiopian Jews was organized by the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews (nick-named the "London Jews Society," [LJS]). The Society's goals included declaring the Messiahship of Jesus to Jews, and working for the restoration of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. The so-called Falashas, known among themselves as *Bete Israel* (Solomon 1999; Kessler 1982; Wumbrand 1972, 6:1144-45), have been an important factor in Ethiopian history and politics for centuries, even though their origins are obscure.

The LJS sent Henry Aaron Stern to Ethiopia to work among the *Bete Israel* in 1860. Although the LJS was an Anglican organization, the converts reached by their work did not become Anglican, but rather were baptized into the Orthodox Church (Gidney 1908). When the Italians invaded in 1935, the LJS missionaries withdrew, leaving an Ethiopian convert in charge of their work.

The LJS returned in 1948 as "The Church's Mission to the Jews" (CMJ). This phase of the mission was led by F.G. (Eric) Payne. In 1942, Payne had served a curacy in Bath, where Emperor Haile Selassie had spent part of his exile after the Italian invasion of

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Ethiopia. The CMJ worked closely with the Orthodox until the 1974 communist coup severely restricted their work. In 1978, their property was given to the Orthodox Church. Although this phase of Anglican mission had some success, it never had the goal of planting Anglican churches.

The Bible Churchmen's' Missionary Society (BCMS, now Crosslinks)

Beginning in the 1930s, this conservative evangelical missionary society began work in Ethiopia with the goal (like other Anglicans before them) of bringing theological and spiritual renewal to the Orthodox Church (Stokes 1948). They worked with an assumption, however, that the Orthodox Church (like pre-Reformation Catholicism in England) simply needed access to the Bible and a miraculous change would take place spontaneously. The major period of BCMS work in Ethiopia saw many important accomplishments. "BCMS missionaries were involved (with others) in a new translation of the Bible into Amharic, a significant work if for no other reason than that it was authorized by the Emperor. Bible Schools for the Orthodox Church, open to both men and women, provided biblical instruction in a way that was sympathetic to the Orthodox" (LeMarquand 2018, 201-202). The production of Christian literature in Amharic, again with a sympathetic eye to the Orthodox reader, also made a significant contribution.

Anglican Chaplaincies and Chaplains

None of these efforts by the CMS, the LJS/CMJ, or the BCMS produced Anglican churches. In fact, few Anglicans working in Ethiopia believed that Anglican churches were a necessity for Ethiopian Christians. The Orthodox Church was a Christian church, they reasoned. It may be (from a Protestant perspective) defective in theology and spirituality, but it was an orthodox Trinitarian body simply in need of reformation.

A few churches were planted in Ethiopia (and the wider Horn), but these churches were chaplaincy churches meant to serve the British expatriate community (and later other Anglican ex-pats). St. Matthew's Church in Addis Ababa received a chaplain in 1926. Churches were later planted in Asmara, Eritrea, and in Hargeisa and Mogadishu, Somalia (Cousins 1986; Trimingham 1950). Of these, and for varying reasons, only St. Matthew's in Addis Ababa remains as an Anglican congregation with its own building.

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Gambella and Assosa: History

The mid-twentieth century saw a major turning point in the history of Anglicanism in the Horn. As with other points of church history (the persecution of the Jerusalem church after the stoning of Stephen, and the scattering of believers after the execution of the Ugandan martyrs in the nineteenth century), the planting and growth of Anglican congregations in western Ethiopia came as the result of persecution and displacement.

In 1983, Sudan's Islamist regime in Khartoum imposed Sharia law on the entire country, including the people of the South, the majority of whom were, at the time, followers of African traditional religion, while a minority were Christian. The twenty years of civil war that followed resulted in the deaths of millions of southern Sudanese. Many of those who escaped did so by fleeing on foot to neighboring countries, including Ethiopia. Many of the refugees in Ethiopia were Jieng (Dinka people), and some of these were Anglican Christians. Massive displacement camps near the western Ethiopian towns of Itang, Bonga, Pinyudu, Dima, and Assosa soon saw a thriving Christian movement. "The vast movement of refugees out of the South . . . to Ethiopia created new, needy and receptive communities where the Christian Gospel met with a deep and unprecedented response" (Werner, Anderson and Wheeler 2000, 527).

Only 10% of the Jieng people were baptized Christians (mostly Anglican and Roman Catholic) before the war. The Nuer people had been evangelized by American Presbyterian missionaries, but, like the Jieng, the vast majority were resistant to the gospel message. In the camps, however, the message of a God who would come and suffer with those who were oppressed and hungry met with a receptive audience (see Nikkel 2001; Zink 2018; LeMarquand 2006). The suffering God seen in Jesus began to replace the ancestral divinities, now perceived as fickle and powerless.

Anglicans were especially militant in their evangelistic and church planting endeavors. Huge Anglican congregations began to form in the camps. These churches were characterized by an aggressive form of spiritual warfare against their old traditional religion. It was not that they abandoned their entire traditional worldview in favor of some modernist vision—they continued to believe in the existence of the unseen spiritual world of their ancestors—but they now saw these ancestral spirits as evil spirits to be opposed in the name of Jesus. The camps had become recruiting and training sites for the Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA), and so there existed in those places a military culture as many young boys began to train to go back to southern

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Sudan to fight against the aggressors from the North. But this martial spirit also gave rise to a form of *spiritually* militant Christianity. The cross began to be seen as a weapon to fight against the *jak* (traditional powers now interpreted as evil spirits).

> A committed band of aggressive evangelists with a spirituality steeped in military metaphors, bound together by shared experience, by shared education, Bible study and spiritual songs. They saw themselves as a "chosen generation," committed to the liberation struggle, but fired by their Christian faith and set apart for the decisive spiritual struggle being fought out with the *jak* [spirits] and the forces of evil. Others found their place in the military struggle bringing a Christian presence for the first time to the ranks of the SPLA (Werner, Anderson and Wheeler 2000, 529-530).

The Anglican churches in the camps of the Gambella region began as Jieng congregations, but their fervency soon attracted others, especially the closely related Nuer people, a Nilotic group that are indigenous to both the Sudanese and the Ethiopian sides of the border. Nuer-speaking congregations emerged in the camps, but since there were many Nuer people in the villages close to the camps, refugees also began to spread an Anglican form of Christianity outside of the camps. Bishop Nathaniel Garang, who lived for years behind enemy lines, including in the camp near Itang, evangelized, trained, and exorcised. Garang ordained probably hundreds of clergy, including many Nuer. By the end of the civil war, it is estimated that 90% of the Jieng population were baptized. Numbers are probably similar for the Nuer.

The vast majority of the Jieng refugees, including Jieng Anglicans, were driven out of Ethiopia after the fall of the *Dergue* (communist) regime in 1991, leaving the Nuer as the majority of the Anglicans in Gambella, although there are still some Jieng Anglican congregations in more recently established refugee camps in the Assosa region north of Gambella. A similar pattern of Jieng Anglicans working cross-culturally occurred in the Dima region of southern Gambella, where Anglican churches attracted the local Anuak people.

In the late 1990s, a Nuer-speaking Sudanese priest, the Rev. John Jock Chuol, visited the camps in Gambella. While in Ethiopia, he managed to make his way to the capital, where he met with the Rev. Huw Thomas, a United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG) missionary who was the chaplain at St. Matthew's from 1995-1996. John Jock appealed to Thomas to help Anglicans build an Anglican

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church in Gambella town for the growing Nuer congregation there. Following the tradition of Anglicans resisting the idea of planting Anglican churches in majority Orthodox countries, Thomas at first refused. However,

> Together with another Sudanese minister, John Jok, and a future priest, Deng Mark Khor, they went to visit the [Orthodox] Patriarch, *Abuna* Paulos. To their delight the *Abuna* not only supported the idea of Anglican churches for refugees, but gave the group a letter to that effect. The result was the establishment of St. Luke's Church in Gambella town under the leadership of the Rev. John Malesh (LeMarquand 2018, 205).

Cooperation between St. Matthew's and Gambella continued under the next Addis chaplain, the Rev. Tony Andrews (CMS, New Zealand). At this point, I believe that a mistake was made, although with the best of intentions. St Luke's, a modest traditional church (that is, made from sticks, mud, and straw), had been built in Gambella town, with help from St. Matthew's. Andrews began the practice of making mid-week visits to help John Malesh train Lay Readers, brought from the refugee camp at Pinyudu. So far, so good. But then St Matthew's also began to pay John Malesh a modest salary. Eventually, other clergy, both inside and outside of the camps, began to receive salaries. More traditional church structures were built. The congregations themselves, however, contributed nothing. A cycle of dependency was initiated. The bishops of Egypt, first Ghais Abdel Malik and then Mouneer Anis Hanna, came to do confirmations, and the Gambella churches came under the authority of the Diocese of Egypt, the diocese itself eventually being renamed the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa. Under the first ("Area") Bishop of the Horn of Africa, Andrew Proud, more local churches were built, more training and ordinations took place, and liturgies were translated into local languages, including Nuer and Jieng, of course. By this time, other language groups were joining the episcopal area. Mabaan people from the Sherkole camp in Assosa, Anuak people in the Dima region and in Gambella town, and Opo people from the area west of Itang along the South Sudan border. In Addis Ababa, a ministry to Somali people also developed. All of these groups also translated liturgies into their own languages—and their pastors also began receiving salaries from "the office" in Addis, almost all of these funds having to be raised from outside of the country.

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Gambella and Assosa: Assessment

Can we assess the health of Ethiopian Anglicanism according to the three-self principles of Henry Venn (Venn 1971)? First, it is clear that these churches are *self-propagating*. Evangelism in Ethiopia since the 1980s has been done almost exclusively by indigenous people. Their methods have been diverse. Andrew Proud reported to me that during his episcopacy, the Anuak choir from their Gambella congregation, St. Barnabas, would travel to villages, sing, and gather a small audience from which a congregation would be formed. Often, clergy and lay leaders will notice that the village down the road had no Anglican Church, so they would simply go, preach the gospel, and begin worship services, thereby establishing a new church community. Also during that time, churches began performing dramatic retellings of biblical stories, which became an effective evangelistic tool (see Witts 2016). In the second decade of this century, Dr. Wendy LeMarquand instituted a program of health training to teach Mothers' Union members basic skills that could save the lives of their children (see ARDF 2025). The Mothers' Union members who bring this health training to local communities have seen not only greater degrees of children's health, but also community members joining the church as a result of being cared for.

When I went to live in Gambella to be the Area Bishop for the Horn of Africa in 2012, I was told by the Bishop of Egypt (the Most Rev. Dr. Mouneer Anis) that he thought there were thirty-eight churches in the Gambella and Assosa regions. I discovered that, during the interregnum of about a year, at least twelve more churches had been established, some worshipping under trees, or using a plastic tarpaulin sheets to shield themselves from sun and rain. Although I played no direct part in planting churches during my six-year tenure, the number of churches eventually grew to about 150. Part of this growth was a result of a major influx of refugees as the newly established country of South Sudan engaged in their own civil war. New refugee camps were built, and so new churches were established in those camps. But new evangelistic efforts reached towns and small villages.

One recent and rather large church plant was established recently. When the former Episcopal Area of the Horn of Africa had been divided into two separate dioceses within the Province of Alexandria (The Horn of Africa, which includes all the churches outside of the Gambella region, and Gambella itself), it was decided that the Diocese of Gambella needed a cathedral. With funds from Singapore, the cathedral was built in a new section of the town near where the government was building a university. That new congregation already has approximately 700 worshippers on Sunday mornings. Self-propagating is not a major problem for the two new dioceses.

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Second, *self-governance* is developing, but faces major hurdles. The extreme poverty of the Gambella and Assosa regions, both inside and outside of the refugee camps, means that education levels are low. Low education levels mean that few prospective clergy have the resources (financially or educationally) to engage in full-time theological education. When I went to Gambella in 2012, none of the indigenous clergy had a theological degree. Many of the clergy had been ordained with almost no pastoral training. The legendary and heroic bishop Nathaniel Garang would apparently ordain someone if he could read and showed some kind of leadership capability, sometimes with only a day of training. I inherited some of those clergy and, perhaps not surprisingly, some of them failed in ministry. In his time, Andrew Proud engaged his clergy in a variety of schemes of theological education. In my time, a small theological college (St. Frumentius) had some success for a time. More recently, short part-time courses have been used to help train clergy, prospective clergy, and lay readers. Some of these courses were taught in local languages.

Several clergy were brought to Addis Ababa to study at the Mekane Yesus Seminary or the Evangelical Theological College. None of these students has returned to Gambella, although one is now ministering in Assosa. The Rev. (now Rt. Rev.) Jeremiah Meat Paul Koryom studied at the Alexandria School of Theology in Cairo and has returned to Gambella, where he is now the bishop. The new Diocese of the Horn of Africa, however, has an expatriate bishop (the Rt. Rev. Martin Reekes-Williams), and only two priests with formal theological education (one in Assosa and one doing Somali ministry in Addis). Another priest, a former Roman Catholic, is engaged in development work. Sadly, two other theologically trained clergy are, as of the time of writing, under suspension.

Although most parishes have lay and ordained indigenous leaders, the future of the church will be put on much firmer foundations if higher levels of pastoral training can be established—but experience has shown that removing these clergy from their local context has not usually been successful. So there has been moderate success in achieving self-governance.

Finally, Venn argued that churches should be *self-supporting*. From the beginning of the establishment of the relationship between Gambella and Assosa churches and the diocese, the churches of these regions have been dependent. Upon arriving in Gambella, I discovered that there was little recognition of the need for churches to support themselves financially. The keen awareness of being poor, paired with an apprehension that churches in other places (whether Addis, Cairo, Singapore, or the West) had resources and were often willing to share, has led to a passivity on the part of the Gambella and Assosa churches. I became aware that any time I ordained someone, I

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would be required to find new funds for the salary of that priest. Only about 10% of the congregations actually had a priest, who was then responsible for multiple churches, leaving the leading of Morning Prayer and preaching in the hands of Lay Readers, most of whom had virtually no training. This also meant that for many churches, access to the sacraments was severely limited.

After a year in Gambella, I informed all the clergy and congregation members that each "Mission Center" (group of churches under the supervision of a priest) needed to provide 5% of the priest's salary and that that assessment would increase every year. Although there was resistance at first, the church members were actually proud of the fact that they could achieve these goals. When I left Ethiopia, churches were providing 25% of their priests' salaries. There was an interregnum after I left, followed by a failed episcopacy, and then COVID-19. The scheme of each mission center providing the salary for their clergy completely fell apart. Presently, in Gambella, only the regional deans and the bishop receive any salary at all. Other clergy are non-stipendiary. This could lead (and has led) to competition for dean positions, to discouragement, and to clergy leaving for better paying positions working for NGOs, the government, or as pastors of other churches.

If Ethiopian Anglicans are asked why they are Anglicans and not some other denomination, there are two common answers: organization and liturgy. Apparently, the hierarchical, episcopal structure of Anglicanism appeals to these people groups. There is a sense that decisions will not be lost in committee and that with a bishop, there is a final court of appeal for issues and problems. The liturgy of the Anglican church makes Anglicanism, according to one Anuak leader, a church for grown-ups. Rather than worship being led by the whim of the leader, there is a structure to follow. The lectionary also provides a check on preachers sticking with a small number of familiar texts, and the church year helps to remind the church of the most important events in the biblical story. Although perhaps only 10-20% of the people in any of these churches are literate, more and more of the congregations in the area have memorized the liturgy, and liturgical music is beginning to develop.

There may also be another reason why many are Anglican, although it is largely unspoken. The global nature of the Anglican Communion is attractive—for two very different reasons. First, positively, these Anglican Christians appreciate that their church is not simply local. They belong to a worldwide family. In Africa, where African Traditional Religions are not unified, but consist of a diversity of stories, traditions, cultures, and practices (even if there may be commonalities between versions of ATR), the notion of being allied to the one God who made the world and has revealed himself

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in Jesus has been a major factor in attracting conversions to Christianity across the continent. At the same time, this notion of a global church has a major drawback—the poor of the world now know that some members of this worldwide family are rich in comparison to themselves. And, in African culture, if a member of your family is in need, you are required to help them. Someone who helps his or her family is honored; the one who does not supply for the needs of his or her own family is shamed. Poor African Christians do not understand the idea that there are rich Christians who hesitate to provide for them in their need. As a result, dependency is not simply a pattern to fall into; it is almost expected. Culture dictates that the richer relatives should supply the needs of the poorer relatives.

Conclusion

After years of existing only as a chaplaincy ministry in the Horn of Africa, Anglicanism has been planted in Ethiopia, through the surprising missionary work of impoverished and persecuted refugees. Help from the outside (whether from Egypt, Singapore, or the West) has been welcomed and appreciated. Much of this help has enabled the Anglican churches of Ethiopia to develop. They have liturgies in local languages. Clergy have received basic training and, in some cases, more advanced theological education. Evangelism has continued to thrive—local people are becoming Christians and are forming caring Christian communities. But there continue to be major obstacles to full maturity. Poverty and ethnic tensions are obvious to all. More subtle and seemingly intractable is the problem of dependency. The consecration of an indigenous bishop in Gambella and the emergence of more lay and ordained leadership in both new dioceses provide hope for the future maturation of Gambella and the Horn of Africa.

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