

Catholicism in Eritrea and Ethiopia

Geez Rite

Summary of History of Christianity in Eritrea and Ethiopia

- Syrian refugees St. Frumentius and Aedesius from a plundered ship became important officials in the then Axumite Kingdom (current Northern Ethiopia and Southern Eritrea) during the reign of King Ella Amida and helped in governance until King Ezana is old enough to assume the throne after the death of King Ella.
- They took advantage of their positions to create conditions for introduction of Christianity.
- Frumentius returned to Alexandria and was sent back in 331 AD by the Alexandrian Patriarch Athanasius assigned as first Bishop of the Axumites.
- King Ezana made the kingdom the first Christian kingdom in Africa.
- Bible translated into Geez by 5th and 6th Century.
- At the end of 5th century the arrival of two groups of Syriac monks (Tzadquan and Nine Roman Saints) expanded Christianity far beyond the caravan routes and the royal court through monastic communities and missionary settlements from which Christianity was taught. The Tzadquan were active in current Southern Eritrea and the nine saints established communities and monasteries in Northern Ethiopia.
- The majority of Eritrean and Ethiopian Christians are members of The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church and The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church which originate from the Alexandrian/Coptic Rite.

Summary of History of Catholicism in Eritrea and Ethiopia

- Contact between Rome and the Ethiopian Church resumed in the 15th century. Dominicans, Capuchins, Franciscans and Jesuits all made many attempts to unite the two churches.
- The most successful was Jesuit Pedro Paez, who lived in Ethiopia for 19 years (1604-1622) and studied Geez and Amharic. Two emperors and thousands were converted to Catholicism.
- But his successor Patriarch Mendez tried to introduce Latin into the liturgy and caused civil unrest and all Jesuits were forced out and two hundred years passed without any contact.
- In 1788 convert orthodox monk Msgr. Tobias Ghiorghis, trained in Rome ,was consecrated bishop and nominated Apostolic Vicar of Adulis(Eritrea).
- In 1839, a series of conciliatory letters between Pope Gregory XVI and the governor of Tigray province, Dejach Wubie, and other religious people in Adwa, prompted the Pope to appoint Justin De Jacobis, a Lazarist (Vincentian) monk, as Prefect Apostolic of Abyssinia/Ethiopia.

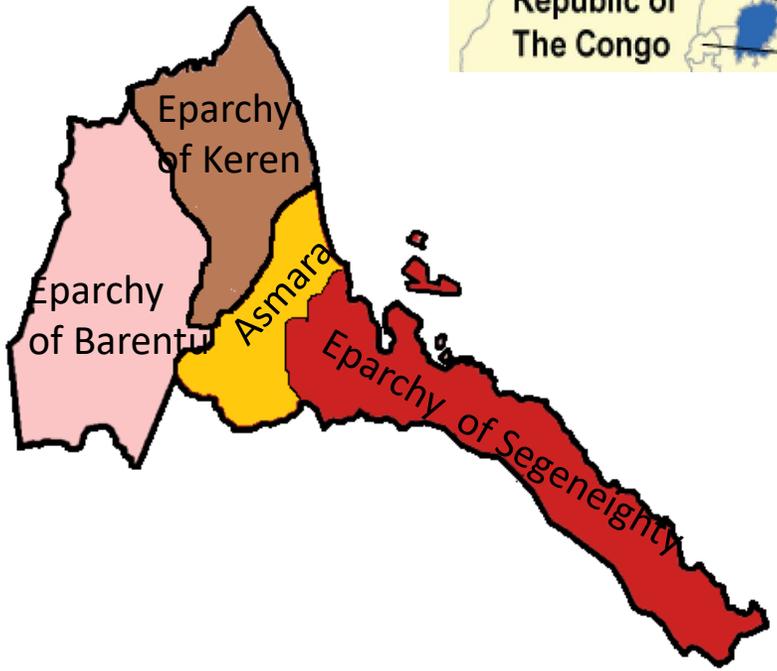
Summary of History of Catholicism in Eritrea and Ethiopia

- Justin De Jacobis (Abune Yaqob) began his mission by studying the Ethiopian/Eritrean liturgy and local languages of Geez, Amharic and Tigrigna. His activity started in Adowa, Tigray.
- By 1846, Abune Yaqob had established a seminary, housing thirty, in Gual'a, Agame province of Tigray. By that time, the Lazarists had also established four churches with their own clergy and many faithful lay people. Around the same time he also established the first parish in Eritrea in a village called Halay.
- By 1855 five villages in the current Eparchy of Segheneighty were converted to Catholicism.
- On June 19, 1847, Abune Yaqob was appointed bishop of the Prefecture of Abyssinia which was raised to the Vicariate of Abyssinia. Rome divided Ethiopia into two vicariates: Apostolic Vicariate of Abyssinia, which comprised Tigray, including today's Eritrea, Gonder, Wello, Shewa and Gojam, and the Vicariate Apostolic of Galla, which comprised Oromia and the rest of southern Ethiopia.
- Abune Yaqob's determination to found an authentic Geez Rite Catholic Church was made official when on July 6, 1847 Rome granted him permission to carry out all sacred functions according to the Geez Rite.

Map of Eritrea & Ethiopia and the Two Geez Rite Metropolitans



Archeparchy of Asmara



Archdiocese of Addis Ababa

