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Cari amici,

questo bollettino è per commemorare monsignor Angelo Moreschi, vescovo di Gambella (Etiopia), deceduto a Brescia il 25 marzo 2020.

È stato il mio vescovo negli anni passati presso il Centro Sanitario di Abobo: di lui conservo un piacevolissimo ricordo.

Per essere sufficientemente rapido ho deciso di trarre dal mio libro, *First Evangelization of the Anyuak*, AAUPH, Addis Ababa 2018, 105-115, i paragrafi del sesto capitolo relativi ad “abba Angelo”. Se qualcuno volenterosamente traducesse questo testo in italiano, lo si potrà riproporre a breve per coloro che non sanno l’inglese.

7. The erection of the Apostolic Prefecture of Gambella

7.1 Preliminaries

[...] Nevertheless, even in the eyes of the Apostolic Nuncio Silvano Tomasi¹ the church was fast growing in Gambella Region. Two things were clear for him: being the Region on the border with Sudan and so different from the neighbouring ones, it deserved a special attention with an increment of forces in the pastoral field. Second, the need of a group of missionaries (i.e. an Order or a Congregation) rather than some singles, to take care of this Region.

When father Berhaneyesus was appointed bishop of Addis Ababa, I dedicated a lot of time to his succession in Jimma and to the possibility of detaching Gambella area; thanks to God the Salesians accepted the responsibility of the plan of the new Prefecture of Gambella after a number of talks with the Provincial, father Alfredo Roca. Providence wanted that father Angelo Moreschi would accept to leave the beautiful

¹ From 1996 to 2003 Archbishop Silvano Mario Tomasi CS served as Apostolic Nuncio to Ethiopia, to Eritrea and to Djibouti and as Observer to the African Union.

mission of Dilla, where in many years he built the big church, organized the school and the farm, etc. to move to Gambella.²

7.2 The official start

The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II has created (November 16, 2000) the Prefecture Apostolic of Gambella (Ethiopia) with territory taken from the Prefecture Apostolic of Jimma-Bonga. [...] The new circumscription will ensure adequate evangelization *ad gentes* for this vast territory. [...] In the region there are Catholic communities: villages of Kambatta peoples and Sudanese refugees.³

A new Apostolic Prefecture should be established there for the greater welfare of the Christian faithful. [...] We entrust it to the zealous care of the religious of the Society of St. Francis of Sales.⁴

The Apostolic Holy See, in its desire to provide for the spiritual government of the new Apostolic Prefecture of Gambella in Ethiopia, [...] through the present decree appoints and establishes as Apostolic Prefect of Gambella the Very Reverend Father Angelo Moreschi a member of the Society of St. Francis de Sales until now pastor in the town of Dilla in Southern Ethiopia.⁵

Therefore, on 25 February 2001 father Angelo Moreschi was installed as the first Apostolic Prefect of Gambella.

² Personal translation of the interview with His Excellency Silvano M. Tomasi CS, 27-7-2014.

³ Fides, December 8th 2000, quoted at http://1996.katolsk.no/utenriks/kronologi/ethiopia_gambella.htm (retrieved on 16-11-2014).

⁴ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II, «Cum esset petatum ut, divisa Praefectura Apostolica Gimmaënsi-Bongana in Aethiopia, nova constitueretur Apostolica Praefectura», Romae 16 Novembris 2000, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 93(2001), 82.

⁵ CONGREGATIO PRO GENTIUM EVANGELIZATIONE, *Decretum R.P. Angelum Moreschi [...] Praefectum Apostolicum Gambellensem [...] constituit*, Romae 16 Novembris 2000.



8. The Apostolic Prefect, father Angelo Moreschi SDB

8.1 His beginnings in Ethiopia

Maria Teresa Reale well recalls those years, being herself in a nearby mission.

A few months after his priest ordination in 1982, father Angelo arrived in Ethiopia, being assigned to the mission of Dilla in the south by his superiors. There, the small mission, founded by Comboni Missionaries in 1973, had just been handed over to the Salesians. In the following years, many new activities were implemented: the secondary school, the vocational school, the orphanage. Besides, father Angelo developed from the scratch a large agricultural and husbandry project.

However, his biggest achievement was pastoral, being himself the parish priest. He dedicated much time to establishing several new chapels in the neighbourhood (especially on the mountains), thus significantly enlarging the number of catholic catechumens and faithful. Last but not least the new church building, completed soon after his departure for Gambella.⁶

8.2 His call to Gambella

For the jubilee of the year 2000, the Salesian Circumscription of Ethiopia-Eritrea, decided to gift two new projects to Ethiopia: a street children rehabilitation program

⁶ Interviews n.1 and n.2 with Doctor Maria Teresa Reale, 31-12-2014 and 11-1-2015.

in Addis Ababa and a vocational school in Gambella town. In this second project entered Nuncio Silvano Tomasi, insisting with the Salesians to take over the whole Gambella area, after its detachment from Jimma Bonga Prefecture. His main ideas were:

- arriving in new territories before Islam;
- going in territories which would not disturb much the Orthodox Church, which has its strongholds in the north and the centre of the country;
- evangelizing the pagans living in the villages along the Baro river.

The Salesians chose me as the person in charge for the establishment of the vocational school in Gambella; it was easy then for Nuncio Tomasi to candidate me as the Apostolic Prefect.⁷

8.3 His views

First a clarification. On arrival in Gambella, he asked people to continue calling him as before, father Angelo: this was natural for him. As Prefect he did not want any special distinction. Furthermore, after episcopal ordination the faithful soon wanted to address him as bishop. For the second time, he insisted to remain the «Father Angelo» everybody has known.

From my point of view, I can witness father Angelo great affability since I have first met him, in May 2013. Even elsewhere I found that, «in every village of the Vicariate the old and ramshackle white off-road car of monsignor Angelo Moreschi [...] is always welcome by a big feast. "Children start to shout, 'Abba Angelo, Abba Angelo!' and even soldiers stop to greet him".»⁸ And, «Here streets have no name, but if you arrive in Gambella town and want to go to the Catholic Church, it is enough to ask: "Abba Angelo" and anybody can direct you to the Prefecture.»⁹

Now, his own words,

I arrived here when the Catholic Church was just at the beginning. With me arrived some other Salesians and a Congregation of missionaries from Colombia. [...] The Vicariate (previously the Prefecture) has worked as a team of missionaries. Therefore, our activities were and still are simple; besides, receiving the episcopal ordination, I committed myself to an ecclesial coat of arms, which carries as well social meanings.

A) The Alpha and the Omega¹⁰ letters, intend the Word of God.

The Prefecture (now the Vicariate) has been established and

⁷ Interview n.2 with His Excellency Angelo Moreschi SDB, 4-1-2015.

⁸ Personal translation of sentences of Eva Maria Kolmann, Aid to the Church in Need Information Department, quoted at <http://acs-italia.org/notizie-dal-mondo/etiopia-dovela-chiesa-arriva-anche-in-motoscafo/#.VKhJDCusX19> (retrieved on 16-11-2014).

⁹ Personal translation of LORINI A. (ed.), *Gambella l'ultima frontiera della missione d'Etiopia*, 21.

¹⁰ Revelation 1:8.

does exist only because of the Gospel. The missionaries are here primarily for the pastoral activity. In short, this is two-fold: on one hand, there are some Christian communities with a reasonable number of years, so that the activities run by the priest are not significantly different from those of any other parish. On the other hand, the first evangelization: in some places, where we officially received a request to open a new mission, we have started from the scratch. Nowadays, some of the people who join the catholic church are from other churches, attracted by different reasons, while some other are from traditional beliefs.

B) The seven-pointed star symbolizes Mary, Help of Christians.

Pope Paul VI called her, «the Star of the evangelization.»¹¹

C) The plough.

The wheat represents the bread of life.¹² By analogy, the plough recalls the land of our people, the wealth of our country. «The plough for us means "bread." It means the possibility to work for about forty farmers,»¹³ I wrote some years ago to a support group. Let's not forget that up to mid XX century, Italy was a largely agricultural country: nevertheless, majority of people were making a living on it with dignity. Within the Vicariate, having already two missions with large and well established agricultural compounds, we push even further because of the great land potentials experienced so far. In practice this means that the Vicariate one day will be able to rely on a significant and stable income for self-sufficiency. Furthermore, in all the places where there is none, we set up a grinding mill: this is highly requested by women, as it is essential for the staple food of the family.

D) The rivers.

Jesus is the one who gives living water.¹⁴ As well, we are in a land of big rivers, but the drinking water has always been short. What could be done without safe drinking water? Therefore, in every mission and in almost all chapels we have bore holes with hand pumps for the people. Again, we receive great signs of appreciation when the water starts to flow. Besides, even in other places we helped to provide water pumps: for example, the two prisons of Abobo have been benefiting for a number of years of this very basic minimum. Up to now, counting both the deep and the shallow ones, I have completed 57 wells!¹⁵

About water, again Maria Teresa Reale.

Father Angelo has achieved on «water» what few could just think about.

First, it has always been in his mind as the top social priority.

Second, he has created a network of overseas benefactors assisting his water supply projects.

Third, in his early years in Gambella, he set up and it is still functional a tanker truck!¹⁶ this has reached all possible

corners of the Region, and not only once, whenever he heard people without drinking water.¹⁷

His care for the needy is evident yet in another area: children education. Despite not being directly involved in schooling, the Prefecture has established kindergarten in the missions. The reasons are two: taking small children away from roads while teaching them the alphabet; monitoring their nutritional status, so that the malnourished would be supplemented with hyperproteic biscuits.

8.4 His pastoral ministry

Beyond the previous overview, I enter here more in details.

Father Abraha declared that, «The evangelization in Anyuak villages started with energy and enthusiasm with His Excellency Msgr. Angelo.»¹⁸

In the first years, alone or with MC sisters, I was going every 3-4 days for evangelization. It was in new places: it was really an evangelization from the scratch! Examples are Ilea, Abobo and some villages of Kambatta settlers. Small groups got formed, soon followed by the catechumenate. In some areas, I found that many people were just traditional believers.¹⁹

About missionary proclamation, «Catechesis is at the heart of evangelization in the church. [...] The Catechist is one of the main protagonists in this journey of evangelization. Where there are informed and zealous catechists, the community flourishes and grows.»²⁰

Therefore, father Angelo has devoted time and energies in this wide field.

About formation, two possibilities are planned. «One model for catechists who will undergo a complete course of training and be employed as full time catechists. [...] The other catechists must undergo a training programme of a week's duration at least four to six times a year.»²¹

About logistics, a Catechetical Centre was purposely built in the Apostolic Prefecture compound. About catechetical content, as a number of catechists were no more using the Kenyan *Our Journey Together*, judged too difficult, eventually a new «text suited to our situation»²² was selected.²³

Concerning church growth,

¹¹ PAUL PP. VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, n. 82.

¹² John 6:35.

¹³ Personal translation of father Angelo's sentences, quoted at <http://www.aggiungiunpostoaavola.org/tag/gambella> (retrieved on 16-11-2014).

¹⁴ John 4:10.

¹⁵ Interview n.1 with His Excellency Angelo Moreschi SDB, 21-2-2014.

¹⁶ A new state of the art tanker truck will arrive in 2015 to replace the present one.

¹⁷ Interviews n.1 and n.2 with Doctor Maria Teresa Reale, 31-12-2014 and 11-1-2015.

¹⁸ Interview with father Abraha Fitwi, 7-1-2014.

¹⁹ Interview n.2 with His Excellency Angelo Moreschi SDB, 4-1-2015.

²⁰ ANONYMOUS, *Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in the Vicariate of Gambella*, n.d., (terminus a quo 8-12-2009), 3.

²¹ ANONYMOUS, *Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in the Vicariate of Gambella*, 4.

the way we start a new place is always the same: we go there for catechism and the celebration of Mass, just under a big tree. If the number of catechumens grows well, we build a grass house, being it both the church and the gathering place. Eventually after some years, when the new ecclesial community is stabilized, the final step arrives: a permanent wall-bricked church. This actually, is a way of entering deeply inside people's life, because our evangelization is inseparably combined with social promotion. I chose five steps to show the Catholic Church milestones for each community: the kindergarten, the water, the agricultural activity (10 hectares), the grinding mill, and of course the above mentioned church building.²⁴

Not only: he pointed out as well the progressive presence of church buildings.

If today I look back to what the Prefecture-Vicariate has done so far, I can say that the Catholic Church is well established in the Region, with a good number of parishes and chapels. From Gambella:

- to the east on the way to the highlands, we have nine places (Karmi, Jawe, Bonga are Anyuak);²⁵
- to the west on the north bank of Baro, there are nine places (Pinkyo, Akwaya Jwøk, Pokong, Openga, Akado, Itang, Paul, Pin Mal are Anyuak);²⁶
- to the west on the south bank of Baro, we have five places (Nikow, Ilea, Ibage are Anyuak);²⁷
- to the south on the way to Piny Udu, there are twenty-three places (Abobo and Piny Udu, of course. Further on to the east: Ateti, Gog Dipach, Gog Jan Jor, Aukoy; to the west: Thata, Pochalla, Otiel, Burangher, Two, Olaw, Shintowa. All are Anyuak)^{28, 29}.

At last of course the refugees, who have been coming in large waves whenever there are fights beyond the border. Upon entering Ethiopia, a big number of international organizations care for them. Obviously that is not enough, yet,

for us priests, refugees do have great importance. We don't treat them only as human beings,³⁰ but we approach them as

²² ANONYMOUS, *Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in the Vicariate of Gambella*, 5.

²³ APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF GAMBELLA, *My Katechism. Catechism Anyuak Language*, Santa Maria la Longa 2013.

²⁴ Interview n.2 with His Excellency Angelo Moreschi SDB, 4-1-2015.

²⁵ The other six are Siri, Bure, Goma, Gore, Metu, Bedele.

²⁶ The other one is Lare.

²⁷ The other two are Nyinenyang, Matar.

²⁸ The other twelve are village 7, village 8, village 9, village 11, village 13, village 14, village 17, all of Kambatta and Hadiya ethnic groups; inside Piny Udu Refugee Camp there are three chapels.

²⁹ Interview n.2 with His Excellency Angelo Moreschi SDB, 4-1-2015.

³⁰ Highly recommended is this wonderful narration: YOHANNES KEBEDE, «Treated as a human being», in JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE (ed.), *God in exile. Towards a shared spirituality with refugees*, Roma 2005, 64-65. Available at <https://jrssa.org/assets/Publications/File/GodinExile.pdf> (retrieved on 31-12-2014).

children of God. Majority of them lost everything or even saw death in the eyes! They have been for decades the very first stable presence of the Catholic church in this part of Ethiopia; nevertheless, they are not at all an historical reminiscence. Since my arrival, I have seen them in huge numbers! As many are third-fourth generation Catholics, they soon ask us religious assistance, which we provide in various ways.

We celebrate the sacraments in a number of different languages. We select catechists to join our scheduled training program. We set up temporary and permanent churches as close as possible to them. I remember very well what I said at the official opening of the new church of Nyinenyang. It is important to have the house of God so near to the people. The new building helps to feel God closer amidst His children. Very important is the consciousness of becoming a Christian community, rather than just a community.³¹

Brevi testi in italiano su: L'Osservatore Romano del 26-3-2020,
[https://www.vaticannews.va/it/chiesa/news/2020-03/salesiani-etioopia.html?](https://www.vaticannews.va/it/chiesa/news/2020-03/salesiani-etioopia.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewsletterVN-IT)
[utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewsletterVN-IT](https://www.vaticannews.va/it/chiesa/news/2020-03/salesiani-etioopia.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewsletterVN-IT)

³¹ Interview n.1 with His Excellency Angelo Moreschi SDB, 21-2-2014.