

THE DIOCESE OF BUKOBA, TANZANIA

Introductory Remarks

From its creation by the Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in 1997, the Diocese has been a success story in its mission work over the past nine years. The number of communities has gone from 55 to 164, the number of faithful has increased from 17,000 to over 41,000, permanent churches constructed have risen from 5 to 70, while the number of clergy has more than tripled, from 9 to 34; a seminary was opened and is now operating with 12 students in each academic year; two monasteries (one for women and other for men) are under construction; two secondary schools have been built; four clinics and one hospital have been constructed. In addition, 7 mission houses have been constructed, a drilling machine has been acquired, a carpentry workshop has been opened, and we are receiving each year not less than 300 missionaries on short term basis to help us. All these successes are indeed owed to Christ Himself, for without Him nothing can be done. Additionally, the prayers of all the Saints. And last but not least, the prayers and blessings of His Beatitude Theodore, the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and all Africa.

Mission Work

Much attention and effort has been put into moving from rural missionary work to urban missionary work. While maintaining our presence continuing to expand in rural settings, we have moved to some of the small and larger towns in the five regions of Kagera, Kigoma, Shinyanga, Mwanza and Musoma of the Diocese. In towns like Nkwenda, Kyaka, Kayanga, Bunazi, Muleba, Mugaza Muhutwe, Ibale, Buseresere, Geita, Magu, etc. an Orthodox Church has been planted over the past five or so years. However, we have

had many challenges to face in towns, particularly because of the lack of capable personnel to administratively and pastorally manage town affairs. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church is popular in both the rural and urban areas of the above mentioned regions.

In order to prepare for the future, we have encouraged education and training for our young men and women. Because most of our faithful are from the peasantry or lower classes of the urban dwellers, we have set up a scholarship program to enable them to pursue secondary and tertiary education. We have begun to reap the fruits of this program: Mr. Nestory Tibaza graduated and is now supervising the construction of the Kayanga Secondary School; Mr. Abel Eustad, a graduate of Law at Mzumbe University, is now the manager of our Church farm at Kenya; and Mr. Dionysios Mulindwa, a graduate of Muhimbili College of Dar-es-Salaam University, is now in preparation to head our Mission Hospital in Bukoba.



Bishop Jeronymos of Bukoba, Tanzania

Necessary training and continued expansion of our Diocese is accompanied by the search for spiritual quality for our faithful. This led us not only to open up a seminary to train future priests and catechists but also to organize, on regular basis, seminars for priests, catechists, women, youth and students. The attendance is good and the results are encouraging. We are also encouraging the development of liturgical and sacramental life in our Diocese. Regarding liturgical life, we recently gave a special scholarship to a

candidate named Mr. Leonard Thomas, to train in music in Nairobi-Kenya. This will help us to have our own music teacher to train our church choirs in chanting the different services of our Church well. When it comes to sacramental life, more effort has been put on marriage and frequent communion. The response from our neophytes is good and encouraging.

Monasticism

The contribution of monasticism in the history of our Church is well documented. We do feel that if we are looking for a solid way of rooting the Orthodox faith in the hearts of the African people, we have to, as early as possible, turn to monasticism. Monasteries will give the novices a chance to be exposed to the riches of the Orthodox theology and teachings, art, tradition, liturgics, and most importantly, through daily spiritual *ascesis*, to experience that communion with God which leads to enlightenment and *theosis*. Pious monks and nuns in turn will be the bearers of the Orthodox banners in their communities and the Diocese at large. Two monasteries are being erected. One, a convent, in the town of Bukoba, is just five kilometers from the town center. And the other is a monastery being erected about thirty five kilometers from the town center. These two monasteries are the hope of our future Orthodoxy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Church Construction

As we open up new communities, there is a need to set up a place of worship. Worship is the unique identity of an Orthodox community. Most worship places are huts. This has been non-pleasing to most of our pious and mission-loving faithful. And they have responded by being very generous to the cause of church construction. For our part, we have organized our neophytes to participate fully in the erecting of permanent churches for their communities. Since 1998, the year in which the first church was built, we have built over 70 permanent churches with the assistance of our Orthodox brothers and sisters in Cyprus, Greece and the U.S.A. and with the active participation of our neophytes. A permanent church, in any given Orthodox community, sends a clear message to the Orthodox people but even

beyond that the Orthodox Church is here to stay and to stay forever in order to sanctify and save her faithful.

Social Work

We do our mission work in this part of the world with concern for social work. This has been done so for two reasons: First, our mission is always holistic in the sense that salvation is for the whole person, body and soul. Second, we are doing mission in Sub-Saharan Africa where poverty, ignorance and disease have tightened their grip on the population. In our social work, we are freeing our brothers and sisters from the tyrannical bondage of the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance and disease. Always hand-cuffed by limited resources, we have acquired a drilling machine to dig wells for clean and safe drinking water. We have built a hospital in the municipality of Bukoba and clinics in rural areas for the provision of both curative and preventive medical services. We have built two secondary schools, one in Rubale and the other in Kayanga, for the provision of quality education for our young men and women. And more projects are being drawn up with the aim of fighting the poverty, ignorance and disease that so afflict our people.

Concluding Remarks

The Bukoba Diocese is situated in an area of Tanzania where there is a great potential for its growth and expansion. So if there is a collective effort from within and without, we can have a large and dynamic local Orthodox Church in this part of the world. In order to achieve this, there is a need to consolidate what has been achieved up to now by mobilizing trained personnel in different disciplines from other Orthodox countries to come and assist in training priests, teaching catechism, running schools and hospitals, etc. This should be done in close cooperation with our neophytes so that we can cultivate an Orthodox ethos in our institutions which eventually will be reflected in this pluralistic religious society of Tanzania.