

**Qillenso**

**July 2, 2013**



**Province of Ethiopia**

**Evangelization Among the Gujji**

## **First Diocesan Synod of Hawassa:**

### **Most Relevant Pastoral Issues**

*Fr. Giuseppe Cavallilni*

#### **Some historical hints**

The major reasons justifying the decision to have a Synod, 15 years ago, were the great and ever-increasing number of socio-pastoral activities of the parishes, the multiplication of male and female Congregations joining the Vicariate, each with its own charism and vision, the first groups of local clergy and religious Sisters, and the complexity of the challenges emerging from Christian communities rich in numbers but with insufficient depth in their faith and Christian formation.

A situation which could become critical if nothing was done, as in fact it happened in the unfortunate events which arouse between 2002-2003, the slandering campaign started by a group of ex-Catholics, ex-seminarians, people with hidden agendas and obscure political aims against bishop Ceresoli and some missionaries, with the aim of forcing the bishop to resign so as to replace him with a priest of their liking.

Be as it may, after 40 years of evangelizing activity, the picture of the Vicariate was extremely complicated, and we needed to find some sort of convergence and common policy in terms of pastoral approach and methodology, as well as at the level of our future standing before the government, facing the fast changing social tissue of the Ethiopian society at large. What else better than a Synod could help to reach these objectives?

It is worth recalling briefly the genesis of the Synodal Assembly!

The Synod was celebrated in 2 different sessions between April 13-17 and April 26 – may 1 - 2004 , namely about 40 years from the II-Vatican Council and the arrival of the first Comboni missionaries in Southern Ethiopia after World War II.

It took place also exactly ten years after the 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the Synod of African bishops in Rome, and indeed it made often reference to it.

The Synod, however, had a long period of preparation, starting off from a personal conviction which I cultivated in dialogue with Fr. Sebhatleab, whom I had replaced at the Pastoral Centre of Dongora at the beginning of 1998.

At that time, with the blessing of the then bishop Msgr. Ceresoli, two 'pastoral teams' made up of religious and lay people had already been formed and were operating at Vicariate level in the fields of pastoral animation and Christian formation: one led by our confrere Fr. Adelmo, of loving memory, who moved from Hawassa to the parishes of the Vicariate and to other Vicariates or Dioceses whenever called to animate the Christian communities; and the second at Dongora Pastoral Centre, aimed especially at the formation of lay leaders of the Vicariate, made up of myself, two trained lay catechists and a number of external helpers when needed.

For almost six years, following a thorough awareness-making plan of the parishes through week-ends of formation, assemblies, courses and seminars as well as plenty of pastoral initiatives organized at parish level and addressed to the various socio-pastoral agents and all categories of the faithful, we laid the ground for the actual Synod's celebration.

A peak moment in this journey was the incoming new Millennium, when we tried to make the Synod's preparation converge with the Jubilee celebrations.

A working paper, drawn up following the trace of similar documents laid out in other dioceses of east Africa, became the most important guidelines in the work of the synodal assembly.

Those of you who had the chance to read the final documents of the Synod describing the ten major topics discussed, the resolutions presented to the Bishop and the final message to the faithful know that we dealt not only with the themes discussed in the 1<sup>st</sup> Synod of African bishops in Rome ten years earlier, but also with the specific challenges present in this Vicariate: *Biblical formation, unity and collaboration among socio-pastoral agents, formation of lay leaders and ministries in the Christian community, youth pastoral care, evangelization, inculturation and ecumenism etc...*).

### Assessment of the Synod's implementation

1. In spite of the support and constant presence of Bishop Ceresoli, as it usually happens, some pastoral agents at first objected to the Synod's idea, convinced that it was not yet time to hold a Synod. During the years of preparation, they joined in the process but only when the initiative appeared successful, and in some cases giving also a precious contribution.
2. The Synod saw the positive involvement of the laity representing all Parishes. It was a real experience of renewed communion and commitment to the welfare of the churches. It appeared also as a 'kairos' which might have enhanced the final healing of the wounds left after the unfortunate campaign which I briefly described earlier. I dare to suggest here that, from what I could gather, the evolution of the general situation of the parishes in the years following the Synod confirmed that the indispensable process of internalization of the Synod's spirit was almost totally absent.

A post Synod's Commission had been formed and, on the basis of the guidelines issued by the Bishop and fruit of the Synod, was able to produce in time various documents among which:

- a) A Five-Year-Pastoral Plan which should have been implemented between 2005-2010.
- b) Statutes of Pastoral Councils;
- c) Guidelines for the Journey towards Self-Reliance;
- d) Catechists' Guidelines, and other materials.

I do not have enough elements allowing me to make an assessment concerning the implementation of the Plan and the other Guidelines, since I left the Province and the Vicariate in 2005.

Before my return to Ethiopia, the new bishop wrote to me in various occasions re-affirming his intention of taking up the Synod's Guidelines and the Pastoral Plan, which included the launching of the new Catholic Youth Pastoral Centre of Hawassa. Since then, I did not have the chance to talk to him about it.

### Local Ordinaries

After Msgr. Ceresoli completed his service, I had the chance, a month after his ordination, to interview the newly elected bishop, Msgr. Migliorati for Nigrizia.

I'd like to report here some of his comment which may be very enlightening concerning the Synod and the optimistic vision the new bishop cultivated at that time:

*The local Church of Hawassa has made along the years important steps towards self-sufficiency. What is your impression regarding this issue?*

“We still have a long journey ahead -the Bishop answers- the Catholic Church is seen by the government as an NGO with money and material means. There is -on the other hand- still a rather paternalistic attitude in some missionaries and, on the opposite side, the search of many to get personal benefits from the church. We need to put greater trust in the communities we formed and in the pastoral agents arisen from them, but also the need of a maturation of conscience on their part, concerning their capacity to give, and not only to receive. The way to self-sufficiency is still long and this is confirmed by the fact that once

again a 'foreign bishop' has been chosen. I can testify, however, that good steps have been made and the many written documents and concrete directives issued along the years confirm this. It's a question of putting them into practice, aware that this church can become, even if gradually, self-sufficient both at financial and ministerial level. 45 years of evangelization are still too short to expect a full assumption of responsibility. A relevant event which has taken place few years ago in the life of the diocese is the first diocesan Synod. The bishop newly ordained (himself...) had just returned to this country, but had the chance to insert himself in the process and to know the topics been discussed".

*The bishop continues giving a personal assessment of that event:*

"The 1<sup>st</sup> Diocesan Synod organized in Ethiopia, which ended 5 years ago in the Solemnity of Pentecost, has had the merit of carrying out a global analysis of the set up of our church, underlining many aspects still valid today. The many articles and resolutions of the final document, divided into 10 major chapters, are still valid and up to date, and if we could say that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, after 44 years since its conclusion has not yet been fully understood, known and thus also fully realized, this holds true of our diocesan Synod to which, thank God, I had the opportunity to participate in its final stage. In my short message to priests, religious and faithful gathered in Hawassa's cathedral on April 16<sup>th</sup> for the Chrism Mass, after my nomination as Bishop I simply said: *"I don't have any special plan, since the diocesan Synod has indicated the way to go: let us all be committed to its concrete implementation"*.

The fields of work (especially the Youth, catechesis and biblical formation, Gospel inculturation and inter-religious dialogue...) are very clearly spelled out. We only need to be committed. I think that my Episcopal 'motto' "CHRIST OUR HOPE" could be 'programmatic' and most of all could indicate to us the road we should take in this new phase of growth of the Church the Lord has entrusted to me: He is the model but at the same time He is present in us to build up His Kingdom. Human promotion, but with Christ at the centre. God wants the integral development of every human person, and without Christ no one can reach the fullness of his/her humanity".

*I finally asked one word concerning the pastoral agents, especially the young local clergy:*

“Relationship between local clergy and religious on the one hand and foreign pastoral workers on the other are difficult in all parts of Africa -says the Bishop.- My diocese has probably still some wounds which ask to be healed through reciprocal esteem and recognition, being aware that we are all working for a common cause, witnessing that the Catholic Church is truly God's family gathering and expressing different charisms for the common welfare. Since the beginning of my Episcopal service I thus say: let's get rid of all prejudices, let us courageously face together an enterprise which requires time, patience and reciprocal trust. I'm not pessimistic, in these recent years there has been an improvement and from both sides there has been a better acceptance. With God's grace I'm sure that there will be even better relationships”.

### **The present challenges**

I might probably be biased in evaluating the present situation of this Vicariate based upon the dream cultivated at the time of the Synod, but after almost a year from my return I'm convinced that all the major issues faced during the Synod, were considered then challenges, and are still present!:

The biggest challenge regards still the understanding among the church leaders and religious. Namely, the need to establish a deeper collaboration, encounter and reciprocal knowledge among the various Institutes, male and female, the local clergy and religious as well as other lay leaders of the different ethnic groups. Indeed, it appears as if the various entities tend to follow each one their own ways and methods both in the pastoral settings and in the structures of human promotion.

3. The challenge and urgency of imparting deeper instruction on biblical formation, Catholic identity and catechesis for all appears even more critical than in the past, given on the one hand the increased number of children and youth 'borne Catholic', who never followed a sufficient catechetical-sacramental education and, on the other, the much greater influence exercised by Protestant churches, new

denominations and sects especially once Catholic youth move to towns.

4. The challenge of a stronger presence in the towns, aimed originally at offering pastoral care to the youth and the Catholic families living there, was partially taken up with the building of some infra-structures, but in many cases such buildings have not been sufficiently used or have seen a very irregular presence of the pastoral agents.

5. Nothing appears having been done to study ways of establishing any sort of inter-ecclesial or inter-religious dialogue. The impression is of a church sticking to the defense of its existence, lacking strong leadership and pastoral creativity, a situation which pushes easily especially the new generation of Catholics to imitate and follow Protestant models of prayer and singing in liturgies and large gatherings. This may lead also to a gradual weakening and loss of meaning of essential sacraments like confession, marriage and Holy Communion.

6. Concerning self-reliance and church-administration, there is certainly a long way to go, in spite of a good financial contribution of the faithful in many parishes aimed at covering the costs of pastoral activities and remuneration of catechists. There is, however, in most parishes still a heavy dependence on external help to cover expenses for development projects, maintenance of infrastructure and salaries. Accountability and transparency in the collection, the use and the financial reporting in many instances seem to be lacking. Very few parishes seem to have established a financial committee.

It is not my task to propose here possible ways of facing and try to respond to these challenges and others not mentioned here. I can only add an aspect which may become extremely relevant if things will develop according to what the bishop himself has hinted in various circumstances, namely the possibility of a future division of this Vicariate and the creation of a new ecclesiastical circumscription. If and when this had to happen, the set up of this local church will in many ways be revolutionized, and a totally new chapter will open up in the development of the work of evangelization in this part of South Ethiopia.



## Concluding remark

I would like to say as a way of conclusion that, if we are to consider more specifically the parishes in the Gujji-Oromo areas, it seems to me that they are going through an important period of transition and critical evolution.

In their search for a clearer and better defined Catholic identity, they can offer more favorable conditions than other territories of the Vicariate for the implementation of some of the concrete guidelines given by the 1<sup>st</sup> Diocesan Synod of Hawassa.

But this is a whole different topic to be studied and properly considered. Thank you.

# **PROJECTION INTO THE FUTURE:**

## **Expansion and foreseen developments**

*Fr. Pedro Pablo L. Hernández*

### 1. Introduction

To speak of “Projection into the Future” in the MCCJ missions among the Gujji is good news. It is good news at least for us, the missionaries working in Gujji land, because the words themselves carry a sense of confidence in what has been done, of optimism for what it’s to come, and mostly of commitment to plan and prepare the road that will lead our steps in the future.

I give a word of thanks to all the missionaries who have spent a few months or many years in the missions among the Gujji. Thanks to their presence, efforts and dedicated service we arrived to these missions too and try to do our best from where they left, developing our missionary vocation.

However, to speak about “projection into the future” among the Gujji means to consider also where we come from and where we are at this moment, in order to take the right direction. Therefore, allow me to recall a little bit of history:

### 2. Origen of the MCCJ missions among the Gujji

Reading the history of how the Catholic Missions started among the Gujji, I have the impression that the mission(s) among the Gujji people did not start as a premeditated choice of the dioceses nor of the MCCJ as a planned pastoral program. In short, I can say that the first missions in Gujji land were born *accidentally*.

In the East of Hawassa (Qillenso), the MCCJ entered into Gujji territory in 1973 to give pastoral assistance to a group of Sidama Catholic families who moved from Teticha. As a consequence of a quarry between Sidama and Gujji people in the whole area, the Sidama left Qillenso and the missionaries, who remained behind with the structures already set up, began to work among the Gujji people.

In the South (Galcha), between 1984-1986, the vicariate and the MCCJ started a presence with the purpose of building the second MCCJ mission among the Gedeo people (Arramo was opened in 1973), not knowing that they have entered in Gujji territory, or if they did, it was not considered very important.

In both places, the establishment of the missions had some conflicts. The provincial was not very convinced that a new mission could be opened in Qillenso, but somehow he was 'forced' to do it under the pressure of Msgr. Gaparini, the Vicar of Hawassa, and Fr. Bruno Lonfernini. In Galcha, the missionaries faced many difficulties to find its ethnic identity; sometimes it was considered a Gedeo mission and others a Gujji one... Nowadays is both; it is a mission set up in Gedeo territory (politically speaking) with most of its chapels in Gujji land. Consequently, the missionaries have to learn the two languages.

### 3. Developments

In 1981, January, Qillenso was opened.

In 1981, Gosa, a chapel of Qillenso was opened, 35km to the West.

In 1981, Fr. Lonfernini opened the Chapel of Soddu Abala, 47km to the East.

In 1982, Gosa became the center for the Government's Relief Program for Ganalle region (between 82-85.)

In 1984, Soddu Abala is officially opened as an independent parish and it is attended by the *Fidei Donum* priests from Bari, Italy.

In 1985, November 17<sup>th</sup>, Gosa is opened as an independent parish from Qillenso. The Jesuits and the FMM Sisters decided to stay in the mission and run it accepting the invitation of Msgr. Gasparini once their Relief Program was closed.

In 1986, The mission of Galcha is opened.

In 1989, Fr. Carlo Giana started developing the mission of Qillenso in a new direction (geographically and pastorally) towards the South, to the Uruga area in Haro-Wato.

In 1992, Fr. Franco, the parish priest of Soddu Abala, was killed on the road between Adoola and Qillenso.

In 1993, Fr. Joe Van de Lou dies and the Jesuits withdrew from Gosa. The bishop asked the Combonis to help the community of Gosa, until 1997 (first period of 4 years.)

In 1994, the MCCJ handed over the mission of Galcha to the Apostles of Jesus.

In 1995, in January, the mission of Haro-Wato was opened.

In 1997, the *Fidei Donum* priests took over the parish of Gosa, but left Soddu Abala, which was followed by the MCCJ for 11 years, until April 2008.

In 2004, after 7 years of presence, the *Fidei Donum* priests left Gosa. The bishop asked the Combonis to help the community of Gosa, until February 2012 (second period of 8 years.)

From November 2004 to April 2008, the missionaries from Qillenso run the three parishes: Qillenso, Gosa and Soddu Abala.

In 2008, April 16<sup>th</sup>, a *Fidei Donum* priest together with a MCCJ missionary took over Soddu Abala parish.

In 2008, April 16<sup>th</sup>, the Bishop makes what used to be the Parish of Gosa a chapel of Qillenso.

In 2012, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, a diocesan priest from Adigrat Eparchy took over the pastoral activities in Gosa.

From 1995 to 2013, the mission of Haro-Wato remained in many ways solid and stable.

In these 40 years of presence of the Catholic Church in Gujji land, since the first visit to the region to follow the Sidama Catholics to the present day, the missionaries had to face many challenges with solid endurance, strong faith, good health, and tons of patience.

#### 4. Challenges

From the first day the Gujji missions were opened, the missionaries had to convince the others members of the province that, besides the Sidama territory, this mission was also a good area to be missionaries.

People had already been influenced by the Protestant Churches (mainly *Mekane-Yesus* and *Qali-hiwet*); therefore, since the first years from their arrival, missionaries worked hard to make feel the Catholic identity among the Gujji, namely, to remove or to change the idea that the missionaries are there to offer only material goods for the benefit of those who accept to become members of the Catholic Church. In other words, to erase what it is known as “*wild assistencialism*”.

Through the years, the missionaries have struggled to find a common methodology to evangelize the leaders and the Christian communities and to offer better proposals of worship to those who come with a Protestant mentality, emphasizing above all the positive elements the culture already has in it.

To assist regularly all the Christian communities, the missionaries had to cover long distance to reach the chapels, either on foot, mainly in Haro-Wato (6-8 hours) or by car (Qillenso covers 111 km from East to West.)

## 5. Present Day

In spite of its turbulent beginnings and all the difficulties and the many challenges the missionaries faced, the mission among the Gujji has an acceptable result mainly in two areas:

- a/ regarding the formation of its Christians (including their numbers;) and
- b/ the conviction of the province to see the Gujji also as a priority to invest and evangelize.

a/ The numbers in short:

| Parish         | # Catholics | # Chapels | # Catechists | # Catechumens |
|----------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Qillenso    | 3,293       | 20        | 21           | 364           |
| 2. Haro-Wato   | 12,688      | 32        | 36           | 400           |
| 3. Soddu Abala | 3,013       | 6         | 7            | 200           |
| 4. Galcha      | 6,843       | 25        | 31           | 367           |
| Total:         | 25,837      | 83        | 95           | 1,331         |

- b/ The last three editions of the “Six-Years-Plan” of the province made reference to the Gujji, making it every time a higher priority. However, and even if it is not yet the Highest, we hope it will become so now that the Gumuz has been staffed properly with personnel.

| 6-Y-P | Year        | On Gujji Missions  |
|-------|-------------|--|
| 1.    | 1999 – 2004 | 27.6: It is our priority “to strengthen our presence among the Gujji population: have a full community in Qillenso”.   |
| 2.    | 2005 – 2011 | A priority to see the possibility “to open a third community among the Gujji”  |
| 3.    | 2012 - 2017 | 53.3.1: Presently we are working in two missions (Qillenso and Haro-Wato). We consider that the Gujji area offers good perspectives for the expansion of our presence.<br>53.3.2: The province, according to the availability of personnel will consider the opening of a community placed in a so-called frontier situation by June 2015 (cf. no. 62.2)<br>62.2: Gujji zone: In line with previous orientations and after due evaluation, within the next six years we plan to open a third community in this zone. |

## 6. Difficulties

The BIG ‘*but*’ had to make its appearance, as we could expect it:

We are somehow stacked!!!!!! It is good that there is somehow an ‘acceptable’ result in the pastoral work in the two MCCJ missions among the Gujji and that the province sees Gujji land as an area that “offers good perspectives for the expansion of our presence”. But reality cuts our winds and helps us to put our feet on earth:

Numbers are not very important, but they help us to indicate a reality. We are stacked because in 40 years of presence the Catholic community did not grow much. Each of the two MCCJ communities in Gujji land has an average of opening only one Christian community every two years and baptizing 200 people per year.

We are stacked because our Catholic communities are more and more surrounded by Protestant groups. The mentality (belief) and their style of worship make many of our faithful to join them. But also many of our youth who remain with us, grab the Protestant mentality (regarding several issues mainly on

sacraments, Mary, Bible...) and a tendency to worship the Protestant way. In other words, the number of our faithful is diminishing, and the missionaries have to make double effort to find better and more effective ways to help our Catholics keep their identity.

We are stacked because in the places where we are right now and where we have most of our communities (the more we go to the East the less) there is the presence already of several Protestant communities wherever we turn our head to look at.

We are stacked because we cannot follow in a deeper way the new and developing communities (towards the East) because we are tied to assist the old communities or even worse: to keep the structures, where the community is based (particularly Qillenso).

We are stacked because the province opts to open a third community in Gujji zone, “*in a frontier situation*” by June 2015 (in two years time, exactly!!!!) but only if two requirements are met:

1. “According to the availability of personnel;” and
2. “After a due evaluation.”

We are stacked because we know that now there is no personnel available in the province. The priority has been the Gumuz and the personnel has been given to them. And there will not be need of evaluation, as it was announced, if there is no personnel for Gujji territory. As simple as that!

## 7. What is the Projection into the Future?

A quick answer is: Ok, let us keep doing what we are doing the best we can and with a humble attitude hoping in God so that our Christian communities may somehow be more rooted in their identity, become more mature, proud, joyful and attractive to other people.

In short, a consideration and a proposal from my side:

**The consideration** is that, the MCCJ are sent as missionaries mainly to preach the Gospel to those who haven't heard it. However, for whatever reasons, as we saw above, we have been working in predominately Protestant areas. The fact is that we

have come to a place where the Protestants have already arrived before us. The latest General Chapter challenges the whole Institute to make a process of requalification about the MCCJ priorities we ought to have, and invites us to risk and to have a presence in a Frontier Situation. I see those places not very far from where we are.

**My proposal:** If we want to move according to the directives of the General Chapter on Requalification and Frontier Situation; if we want to follow the missionary voice that exhort us to go to places of First Announcement, as essential part of our charisma, we need to have a common vision and start moving from Qillenso and Haro-Wato towards the East where there are still many Gujji who are not touched by the Gospel. We could follow the example of our Gumuz missionaries who went to new lands to extend our missionary vision to places where Christianity is not present. Let us study and plan and let us move on, focusing our attention on the East, the new “*evangelization frontiers*” of our areas, towards Wadara, Negeli Borana and Filtu, towards the area between Magado and Qarcha (road to Ageremariam) or both.

Let us hope the time may come soon to hand over our mission to the local church and be able to enter more deeply in the East of the vicariate where the Gospel has not been preached.

Let us hope the division of the vicariate may accelerate this process and help us to move on towards those areas.