Ethiopia

Children at a Barnabas-supported school in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has considered itself a Christian country since the fourth century, and its Christian roots are sometimes traced back to the Ethiopian eunuch who met Philip on the road while reading the book of Isaiah (Acts 8:26-40). Today it is the only Christian-majority country in the Horn of Africa, surrounded by a “sea” of Islam.

Islam first came to Ethiopia in 615 AD when a small group of Muhammad’s early followers fled there to escape persecution in Mecca. Ethiopia was considered a place of safety, and numerous Muslims followed in this first *hijra* (migration), living peacefully among the Christians. This relationship changed in the succeeding centuries as Islam began to spread throughout Africa and developed a negative attitude to Christians.

Muslims comprise around a third of the Ethiopian population and have generally lived quite peacefully with the Christian majority. However Muslim extremism has become increasingly influential in Ethiopia, as Islamists (for example, from Afghanistan and Somalia) come into the country to spread anti-Christian teaching and discourage local Muslims from having any contact with Christians. In addition, money from external Islamic sources has been used to build mosques and Muslim schools.

In addition, Muslims are becoming increasingly radicalised by preachers who are promoting aggressive forms of Islam from countries such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. One Christian leader said that Ethiopia was being targeted by Muslim fanatics with a strategy to Islamise the country and there was a campaign to “clear Christianity from the land by [the] sword”. A four-fold plan to Islamise the area was outlined at an Islamic conference: burn the churches, kill the men, marry the widows and send their children to Islamic schools. Yet in this context, Muslims are also coming to Christ.

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