

A Concise Report from Ethiopia – April - June, 2019

Phil. 4: 6-7 can serve as an apt opening for this Report, which so declares:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

This is quite an unusual report, which I will call a ‘diploma ordeal.’ Under this theme 4 headings have been developed as follows:

The why surging up of this ordeal? By the end of March, as we were processing for a Support letter from the Religious Bureau, an officer asked us to provide for the details of Joseph’s MA degree, as pertaining to what that MA embraces and the Transcript of that degree. That request didn’t quite surprise us as in more recent years, the Ethiopian government have been asking for the details of educational credentials, which must be accompanied by their authentications up to the highest level of foreign governments.

The bottom line of that policy could best be explained from the Director of the Religious Bureau of the Federal Ministry, when asked by Joseph whether a foreigner who is a qualified engineer or a medical personnel be able to get a Support letter from him, he so pointed out to me: *“unless he possesses credentials in the spiritual and religious realms, none will get a Support letter from this Bureau.”* If no Support letter then no Work Permit and no Foreigner Residence ID. Thus it has become clear that spiritual credentials, such as diploma or degree in Bible or Theology or Missions, are crucially necessary for new missionaries coming to Ethiopia to serve under a spiritual organization these days.

The technicalities of Authentications: Joseph’s case can serve as a vivid example. In just about 2 weeks’ time, Columbia International University (formerly Columbia Bible College & Columbia Graduate School of Bible & Missions) had the new re-issued MA degree and its Transcript notarized by the South Carolina State and sent to Addis Ababa through DHL.

Yet under the new requirements by the Ethiopian government in recent years, the American Embassy here told me to send the documents to Washington DC for the State Department to authenticate them. After this process, it must be again authenticated either by the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington DC or the American Embassy in Addis Ababa. For my case, it was done through the latter. If the documents were from Canada, it has to follow the same procedure, which is the provincial notarization first then going to “Global Affairs Canada” in Ottawa for the highest level of authentication. After that, again it has to be authenticated either by the Ethiopian Embassy in Ottawa or the Canadian Embassy in Addis Ababa.

How about the authentication process from Hong Kong – an important base of sending forth mission laborers in our time? To find the answers, Joseph paid a visit to the Chinese Embassy here in the middle of June. The information provided has been encouraging with basically the same procedure, i.e. first get the diploma or degree notarized by the City authorities of HK then go to the Ethiopian Consulate in Hong Kong to get it authenticated the 2nd time. Under this order the chief officer, who is Ethiopian, told me that would be sufficient which means no need to come to the Chinese Embassy for their authentication. (Note: in the past we heard about denial of authentication from the Embassy for mainland China nationals whose Christian diploma was issued from a foreign country)

Short-term volunteers made simple: Not a few younger brothers and sisters in our Lord, some still in college or university, are carrying a desire to go overseas to serve as a volunteer. Of course most of them may not possess any theological credential yet they can come to this ancient land simple and not complex. Any short-termer, coming for one or two weeks, can travel to Ethiopia with a tourist visa, which usually could last for a month.

For volunteers, say coming to teach languages or music or serving in sports or in construction..., whose service will need over one month's time, they should apply for a 3-month long single-entry business visa from the Ethiopian Embassy or Consulate in their country or city of residence, submitting an invitation letter from an organization registered with the government of Ethiopia. When that 3 months expire, it is possible to extend for another 3 months without having to leave Ethiopia. So all these do look positive. (Note: with the American citizens, under a reciprocal agreement with Ethiopia, they can obtain a 2-year long business visa with multiple entries. Yet the Immigration Bureau here still recommends a proper Work Permit for any foreigner coming for long-term services but not on a business visa.)

Pleading for laborers before the Lord of harvest: If you were to ask Joseph what is the most urgent prayer request here on this field, without a moment of hesitation I will say: "*Plead with our Lord, who is the Lord of harvests, to send laborers into this whitened field of Ethiopia!*" Note I do not say pleading for missionaries as missionaries have been serving in diverse areas like education, medical care, welfare for children, and other charitable or development endeavors. Missionaries serving in these realms have their legitimate roles to play. As our Lord saw multitudes of people scattered like lost sheep without a shepherd, his compassion arose so delivered this instruction to His disciples (**Matt. 9: 37-38**) to plead with Him to thrust forth laborers into His harvest. This plea is in total harmony with His Great Commission given before His departure.

Ethiopia is a ripened field where multitudes after multitudes are heading for an eternity without Christ. In the past 10 to 15 years, we have seen very few new career missionaries, particularly those who are directly involved in His harvest. Can we blame the scantiness of laborers upon our Lord? Never! The problem always lies with us in our slothfulness in pleading for laborers. Is the harvest field here simple and easy? Not at all, in spite of the traditional thick religious atmosphere in this land, the strongholds of the enemy are many and they are deep-rooted in resisting the gospel. Trials and oppositions will keep coming yet seeing millions upon millions are traveling on the broad road leading to destruction our spirits did often grieve!

This 'diploma ordeal' did not happen by chance and I believe it is leading us to what many seasoned servants of our Lord call the prayer of all prayers, which is pleading with the Lord of harvest to eject His laborers into His many harvests worldwide, including the tremendous one right here in Ethiopia. How urgent and unceasing, with fasting, we need to plead for laborers coming to sow the seed of the gospel, the living Word of God which abide forever, and with tears in their eyes! The Apostle Paul is a most prominent example in sowing the seed. And equally important we need laborers, like Timothy and Titus, who water so the living seed will sprout and grow, to make disciples and to teach them to obey everything our Lord commands. Our present perilous days are quite similar, if not much more, to those of Timothy and Titus, when heretical and demonic doctrines abound. Ethiopia is definitely included in this spreading of deadly doctrines like cancer. Let us plead with intensity and sharp focus and enduring faith for laborers who will bring many into His kingdom of light, and will divide the Word of God accurately so to build believers up in sound doctrines, and finally but not least in inflicting much damage to Satan's kingdom of darkness in this land formerly called Abyssinia!