

# REPORT ON THE FIRST VISIT BY THE ABBOT OF THE APOSTOLIC ORDER OF ST HADRIAN OF CANTERBURY, TO THE ABBEY OF ST MAURICE

AGUANE, SWITZERLAND: 8<sup>TH</sup> -9<sup>TH</sup> SEPT, 2011

**"CELEBRATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICAN CHRISTIANS TO THE WESTERN CHURCH"**

## INTRODUCTION

Bishop Doyé T. Agama was a special guest of Bishop Joseph Roduit the Abbot of the ancient Monastic Abbey of Saint Maurice of Aguane, in Switzerland recently.



Bishop Doyé Agama's invitation to visit was in Christian fellowship, but was also in recognition of his founding role as Bishop and Abbot of the Apostolic Order of St Hadrian of Canterbury. The Order of St Hadrian works ecumenically to research and celebrate the contributions of both ancient and modern African Churches and other churches "birthed" outside Europe; to global Christianity.

As such Bishop Doyé Agama's visit to the Monastic Abbey of Saint Maurice of Aguane, was an opportunity for him and Bishop Joseph Roduit, his host; to share aspects of their work and discuss possibilities for relationship between their projects in the future. We look forward to a continuing relationship at some level.

Saint Maurice (also known as Moritz, Morris, or Mauritius) was a senior officer in the Roman Army. He and his "Theban Legion" were from Southern Egypt. He was the patron saint of several professions, locales, and kingdoms in Europe until The Slave Trade degraded the previously noble view of Africans that was once so widespread among Europeans. Saint Maurice however remains one of the most widely venerated saints of his time among European Christians, the Royal Houses of Europe and in the Coptic Orthodox Church.



It has been claimed (by some) that the "Moors Head" on the personal coat of arms of Pope Benedict XVI is actually that of St Maurice, who was thought by some to have been a Moor.



There is a statue of Saint Maurice in the Cathedral of Magdeburg, Germany, next to the grave of Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor. The cathedral is actually named "The Cathedral of Saints Catherine and Maurice" after Saint Maurice and Saint Catherine of Alexandria (who was also an Egyptian).

Maurice and his soldiers who were all African Christians had been recruited by the Emperor Maximian and were being deployed to Gaul to help put down a local revolt. However Maurice and his men refused to kill fellow Christians or to worship Roman gods, including the emperor. For this they were martyred in around 287AD in the mountain pass of the Aguane (Aguanum). The Order of St Hadrian of Canterbury holds that beyond historical embellishments and legends lies the real story of Saint Maurice of Thebes. Today the place once known as Aguanum in Switzerland is now Saint Maurice-en-Valais, site of the Abbey of Saint Maurice-en-Valais.

The Abbey of St. Maurice is now probably the oldest continuously inhabited abbey in the Christian West. The African soldiers lay buried on the battlefield for nearly one hundred years, with the grave of Saint Maurice marked by a huge stone. Today a small chapel stands on that spot on the battlefield, and Bishop Doyé Agama and his host were able to visit and spend some time there in reflection.



St. Theodorus, the first Bishop of Valais, moved the remains of the Africans to the current site and commemorated them there around 370. The first real tomb for Saint Maurice the Theban is still visible in the ruins of that old church beside the existing Abbey. The picture below shows Bishop Doyé Agama at that ancient tomb. The accompanying picture shows the extensive archaeological excavations at the site which are now being scientifically preserved.



The first tomb and church built in the 4th century was enlarged in 515 by Sigismund, King of the Burgundians, at the time of the foundation of the Abbey. There have been various restorations expansions and renovations of the buildings on the site since then. In 1948 it was granted in the title of a minor basilica. The Abbey of Saint-Maurice remained a monastery until the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, when canons succeeded the monks; adopting the Rule of Saint Augustine in 1128, to become Canons Regular. Today the Abbey of Saint-Maurice is a “territorial Abbey”. Like a Diocesan Bishop, its Abbot has jurisdiction over the territory belonging to the Abbey.

During his time at the Abbey, Bishop Doyé Agama attended the worship services with the Canons who wear the distinctive red Mozzeta; a short cape.



He also took time to enjoy the peaceful surroundings including the ancient cloisters of the Abbey, as well as to visit the treasury, the archives and the library.



The abbey is served by its own spring and near the site of the martyrdom of Saint Maurice, a waterfall cascades down the mountain.

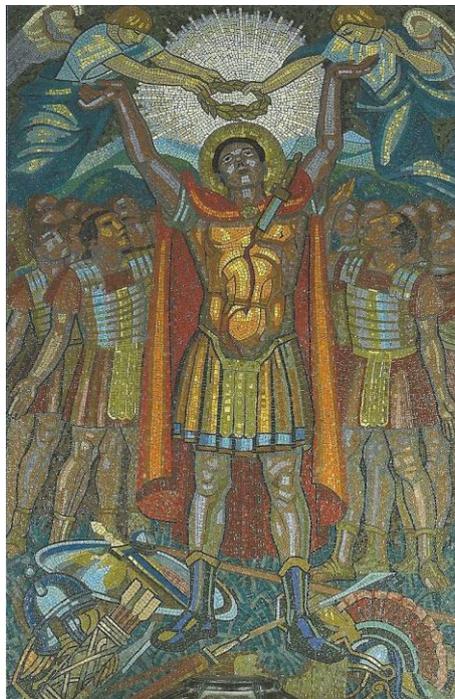


## **CONCLUSION**

The glorious martyrdom testimony of Saint Maurice of Thebes is a great inspiration to us all even today. His dedication and discipline as a soldier, and above all the calm decision of this great son of Africa and his friends to lay down their lives for their Christian faith puts the choices we must make today into context.

Their decision to hold true to Christ, led to many thousands of Europeans becoming Christians and more than 30 towns and villages across Europe still bear his name. Over the centuries many of the greatest sons and daughters of Europe have made their pilgrimage to pray at the tomb of the ancient African warrior.

The Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus is one of the highest orders of chivalry awarded by the House of Savoy, the former Kings of Italy. The Order of Saint Maurice is awarded by the National Infantry Association and the Chief of Infantry of the United States Army. That too is named after Saint Maurice, the African. The list is indeed endless. He being dead... yet speaketh...



We too must choose whether to serve the gods of the world or remain true to our Creator and Saviour; leaving a testimony far beyond our generation. May the Lord strengthen us to steadfastness in our faith in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen.

I remain ever-grateful to Bishop Joseph Roduit and his Canons at the Abbey of Saint Maurice for their work in keeping the memory of this African Saint alive... and for so kindly allowing me to share their world over these couple of days.

Grace and Peace!  
To God be all the glory!

*In His Service*

Bishop Dr. Doyé T Agama OSH, GCSE, SChLJ  
Manchester, England, 13 September 2011AD