

Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis: Exponent of the Needy and Champion of Development

By Alema Tesfaye, Washington DC, USA

1. Introduction

Prior to proceeding with my article, please allow me to write down very little of many accomplishments of very respected figures of the Irob people, Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay and his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis, who dedicated all their life dreaming for the betterment of Irob people and land. Their love and attachment for Irobs were incredibly enormous and thus, they are unforgettable role models in recent Irob people's history. They are our monuments and will be remembered forever.

Irobland has been one of the most needy and neglected regions in Ethiopia. Understanding this, Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay and his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis struggled a lot to create a common endeavor and alleviate the socio-economic problems of Irob people. They assisted Irobs through their viable developmental strategies and educational platforms. They played a great role for Irobs to achieve their educational dreams, goals and aspirations. And to overcome various problems of Irob people, several attempts were made by Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay and his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis, whom I can confidently call: 'unforgettable figures' of the Irob people.

Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay is one of the most honorable and high ranked scholars that have tried their best to change the bitter life of Irob people. He is the one who started from scratch the current Lideta School in 1959 which had been closed and abandoned from the time of the fascist Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Today, nobody would be enjoying all the gates of education in Irobland without the good efforts of this respected Irob scholar, Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay. He is also credited for persistent struggle for the Catholic rights in Adigrat.

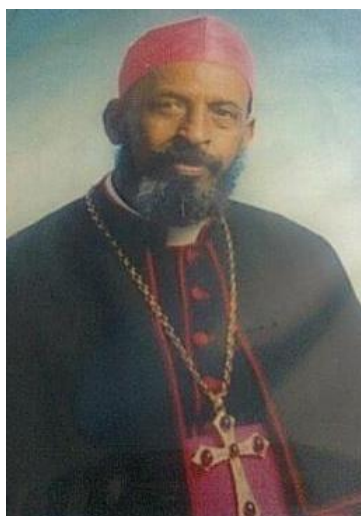
Although Lideta School has been facing a lot of day-to-day challenges; it has never been closed starting from those times. Instead it has been a gate way of education for many Irobs and others in the region. After it was opened by the Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam, it became a place where the social and educational atmosphere provided the groundwork for Irobs and other Ethiopians so as to become morally and ethically built self-esteemed productive citizens. Lideta's education was valued not only as a means to achieve academic earning, but also as a means to mature as a confident and well-rounded individual. Thus, I always feel a sense of loyalty and responsibility to give back what Lideta has given to me during my formative years. A special Thanks goes to the particular endeavor and commitment of Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay, Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis, and other concerned Irob priests and laymen who worked tirelessly to create conducive environment for our education and to preserve its academic excellence until recent times.

Both his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis and Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay are children of Irob people and products of Lidetamariam School, Alitena. They both attended their advanced level of education in the Urbanian university of Rome and Cambridge University of England. They followed the same road, they blossomed themselves first and then Irobs. What Irobs achieved until today is strictly related to their endeavor. Their hard work, full commitment and suffering they passed through for the betterment of Irobs was incredibly high. They are our iconic historical figures who formed the bedrock of our Irob society's development. Thus, they are our most respected icons and we all are their living monuments honoring them every moment of our lives.

The author would be much happier than any time ever to write and present to the public many endeavors of Reverend Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay. However, unfortunately I couldn't find much written information or documents on this great figure of Irobs. Therefore, I am inviting and pushing my Irob colleagues to write about his many endeavors. On the contrary, some documents have been obtained about another very important historic figure of Irob people, his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis. Thus, I took my time to write very few of his many endeavors and accomplishments for Irobs and other Ethiopian people.

To start with his background, his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis was born from his father Mr. Woldegiorgis Danne and his mother Mrs. Eleni Gebray on December 27, 1921. He was born in Asa-Aleita village, Alitena, Irobland which is geographically located in Northeastern part of the country, Ethiopia. He was a very bright and gifted child. Ever since his childhood, he displayed remarkable affection and love to everyone. His respected parents were also pious and dedicated Christians to the Catholic faith.

In between, the young boy, Yohannes Woldegiorgis went to Addis Ababa by the considerable effort and responsibility of his respected uncle, Mr. Beyene Gebray, who used to live in Addis Ababa. The aim was to pursue education. Young Yohannes Woldegiorgis arrived in Addis Ababa and meet his uncle Mr. Beyene Gebray and Abba Tesfaselasia Weldegerima, another much respected and well known Irob priest and intellectual. When he arrived at Addis Ababa, coincidentally they were together at certain place. Then, Abba Tesfaselasia Weldegerima looked at the little Yohannes' face and joked at him "you will become the disciple of the south" (Fikir ena Selam, oct. 2002) which was testified and became true. It was a miracle and he became the real disciple of south demonstrating deep spirituality, passion for justice, as well as witnessing, loving plus serving the church and the poor from his doorsteps to the end of his life time.



He was ordained priest at the age of 33, the age of Jesus Christ at death. He was a priest of 47.9 years and a bishop of 10.4 years. Until his unexpected death in 2002, he was bishop of Meki in southern Ethiopia.

The following table summarizes the overall events that Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis went through.

Date	Age	Event	Title
27 Dec 1921		Born	Alitena
31 Oct 1954	32.8	Ordained Priest	Priest of Adigrat, Ethiopia
8 Sep 1981	59.7	Appointed	Prefect of Meki, Ethiopia
21 Dec 1991	70.0	Appointed	Titular Bishop of Forma
21 Dec 1991	70.0	Appointed	Vicar Apostolic of Meki, Ethiopia
3 May 1992	70.4	Ordained Bishop	Titular Bishop of Forma
19 Sep 2002	80.7	Died	Vicar Apostolic of Meki, Ethiopia

Source: Fikir ena Selam, oct. 2002

Thirty three, 33, has a great symbolic meaning. The Christ in the Gospels accomplishes 33 miracles of which 24 were cures. Christ was crucified at the age of 33. King Solomon temple stood 33 years and latter it was fully destroyed. David ruled in Jerusalem for 33 years (1 Ch 3, 4). The Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome counts 33 chapels: 29 in the Basilica itself and 4 of more in the crypt. The United Nation logo represents a terrestrial globe divided in 33 fragments. The human backbone consists of 33 segments, and it is also the age at which his Holiness pope Francis and his Excellency Abune Yohannes were ordained humble priests dedicated themselves to serve the disadvantaged and the poor.

Eventually, everybody in Irobland between the era of Emperor Haileselassie and Col. Mengistu knows and enjoyed the good deeds of Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis such as public services, spiritual aspects, infrastructures, etc. But the new generation

knows very little about the good accomplishments of this important figure of Irob people. Therefore, I am writing this small note just to pass his historic background to those who don't know about his excellent and extraordinary accomplishment devoted for the good of neglected and poor people.

His Excellency Abune Yohannes was a great pillar of development, an advocate of peace and cherished figure of reconciliation. He was a hard working visionary who dedicated his life to serve the poorest of the poor. He was foresighted, determined, original, charismatic, loving, kind, playful, courageous, outstanding, humanitarian and spiritual model with easily approachable personality. He was an institution in himself. His soul radiated a pure and honest love. His humanity and humility impressed many. He was all-embracing - a bear-hugging, performed in plays and determined from the start to make the difference and thus, loved by all ages and all faiths.

He was a real voice for the voiceless and vulnerable. He was a man of simple image and complex past. His overriding image, though, was built around his leaning toward austerity. Lowly but chosen, a humble and outspoken man and the choice of humility, the humble bishop with practical approach towards poverty and excellent follower of the true example of Christ: His grace Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis.

He was a real agent of people's betterment, father of the poor and representative of the disadvantaged, powerhouse of intellectual knowledge, the mover of the poor's mind and a symbol of peace in every sphere. His affection for his beloved people, the concern to help them and improve their life status was extremely appreciable. Not only he has proved himself to be smart and motivated icon but also his passion and enthusiasm for public services and the spiritual activities of the church were also keenly demonstrated. He was really 'people and action oriented', natural caregiver, young at his heart and progressive in his practices. His actions were the disarmingly simple outcome of an intricate set of his personal values. He was very simple; open to people and lived simply, even low.

He put aside his own personal sufferings to bring comfort to others. He was the moral authority of our times. He brought a joy to his role, a sense of fun despite the burdens he carried. A truly great person full of genuine compassion whose goodness has been the hallmark of his entire life! He was an inspiration, a man of extraordinary faith, dignity and courage. Throughout a hard and often difficult life, he stood for development, peace, reconciliation and social justice. He was always on the side of the most poor, of the most unprotected, of the most unfortunate, those who were left behind in the development process. Until the end of his life, he carried out his mission with joy, energy and clarity.

The dream of his Excellency Abune Yohannes was to see a society in which people's spiritual, physical, economical and socio-cultural needs are met and where all people live in harmony, solidarity, equality, justice and peace. His desire was to see a reconciled, just and prosperous society. He worked day and night to improve the status of the poor through alleviation of their suffering and ensuring their sustainable livelihood. The people may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10), is the vision of Jesus Christ. Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis shares the same vision as well. He was absolutely refreshing, love his simplicity and commitment. We could all take lesson from this man of God! He had his heart in the right place with youth, disadvantaged and the poor. That's a true Christian value; to serve the poor and the needy. Thus, he is a holy man worthy of respect.

He was the symbol of strength, peace, unity, bright vision and green future for Irobs, the entire Adigrat diocese as well as the people located under Meki diocese where the public used to call him "living saint". He was a master of communication with great humor. He built bridges between different local religions, among community members, and worked day and night for mutual advancement. He was a great healer of old wounds and rifts. He had a deep love for all people and they loved him too just as equally. **He earned respect from his people by doing what was right and touching people's hearts. He used to have a personal magnetism that connected him with people all over the society he served.**

Irobs, the Adigrat diocese and people of Meki diocese (Vicariate Apostolic of Meki), in fact the whole country, have lost a great icon who has brought forth unthinkable task only to make the lives of his impoverished people to a pinnacle of development at their respective localities. He is by far the greatest holy man that we could ever witnessed in Irobland with his shrewd and clever ability in securing peace, bringing love and development in the society. He also struggled to create the following values in the society: announcing the word of God (love), dignity of the human person creating options for the poorest of the poor, as well as advocacy for social tolerance.

Among all the impressive and varied attributes, his social skills and moral integrity takes the center stage. The willingness to listen, the patience to understand, the strength to support, and the heart to care and just to be there for the needy were some of his wonderful assets. Besides, he was intellectual, and an incredible figure of the development who complemented himself by unsurpassed personal respect, moral values, amiability toward others, being as the disciple of social prowess and genuine empathy. His faithfulness, honesty and respect towards the others were also incredibly high.

He worked tirelessly to fulfill the society's integral needs and create conducive environment for people who live in harmony. His affection for his beloved and needy people, the concern to help them in order to improve their life status, and building them to be a source of spiritual enlightenment was so much appreciable. He coordinated and worked to provide the basic necessities for the victimized families of fortunate, building them economically, socially and spiritually as well. He also played a key role in promoting righteousness and peace in the society that he served, addressing the problem of destitute and disabled people, providing health care services for the needy, constructing various infrastructures such as roads, schools, hospitals, developing water resources particularly potable water supply, saving human lives and livelihoods of affected people through provision of job opportunities in the form of cash-for-work while serving church at its finest.

He never got tired to serve the church and the poor. He never used church's money to help his poor family. He never tried to enrich himself and so he owned nothing. What he used to have was amazing love for all people, friends and thus achieved a lot of love and memories that will last forever in the poor and disadvantaged mind that used to know him. He sacrificed his life only to serve the poor, disadvantaged and the church with full effort and power. He wasn't 'PART-TIME' servant of the poor and God, at certain moments, in certain circumstances, in certain choices- but he was a servant at all times! In my opinion, he is one of the saints and holy men, who accomplished the mission of Jesus Christ successfully.

In 2002, a light for the good of humankind, a force for goodness and love has been extinguished and a profound void has been left in the communities that he used to serve. His departure pains many and we fervently wish his example to be lasting. I think about Abune Yohannes' modesty, his wonderful and warm smile. It would be hard to find someone who can fill his shoes. We will always remember this great soul as symbol of development, peace, integrity and brotherhood, who were equally good for the whole of humankind, his great leadership and love for every soul on his walks. Thousands of people who used to know him have loved him and continue to do so beyond his death - not only Catholics, but also Muslims, Orthodox, Protestant, etc - loved him no less and they esteemed him.

The following are a few of many Amharic phrases or sentences that his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis used to say frequently when communicating with his fellow Christians, nuns and priests. This may testify the readers to what extent he was concerned about the church and his disadvantaged poor people.

- “ጀግሪ እንጅ ፈጻሚ አይደለሁም” meaning “I am starter but not finisher”
- “ካልተጀመረ አይሰራም”, meaning “If it doesn't get started, it can't be done”
- “ከፋነት በደግነት እናሸንፍ ” meaning “Let us win evil by good deeds”
- “የሰበካው ተረካብዎች እናንተ ካህናት ናችሁ.” meaning “The successors of the Vicariate are you, the priests”
- “ቤተክርስቲያን ያለ ወጣት ባዶ ናት” meaning “Church without youth is worthless”
- “ልጆቼ አትለዩዩ፤ አንድነት ኅይል ነው” meaning “my children never get divided. Unity is strength!”
- “ከሕዝቤ ተለይቼ እረኛ የሆንኩ አይመስለኝም” meaning “being separated from my beloved people, I can't still believe that I am shepherd of the poor”

His Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis also focused much on education because he believed that it is the basis for all sorts of development. He also believed that it is a means to transmit knowledge, skill and attitude that will enable young people or generation to become productive citizens of a society. It was also his concern for the future of the community as well as the Church. Consequently, very concerned about education he sees three enemies: “ignorance, famine and disease.” Eliminating or reducing these targets among the various communities was his basic aim during his life time. In order to overcome these enemies, he said “we want to teach the people in various ways, not only ABCs.” (Fiker ena Selam, Oct. 2002).

In 2002, just three months before he passed away, he visited the Lideta-Mariam Secondary School, Located in Alitena, where he used to be a student, a teacher, a director and a pastor. At that time coincidentally, I used to teach there. When he visited the class in which I was teaching, in order to give us a piece of advice, everybody was extremely happy to see his smiling and happy face. Then he gave very good advice to the students. He asked the first ranked (honor) student to stand up. After he

stood up, his Excellency Abune Yohannes said to him “you must run away from all these students (meaning study even harder) and you the remaining ones have to run after him to catch him up”. Then Abune Yohannes was interrupted by applause. This was in fact a valuable advice that knocked and conquered the hearts of the youth in the class.

He was also the peace missionary. He encouraged dialogues in different community members and other faiths in areas where he served acting as a symbol of peace. Whenever disagreement arises, he was the first one to reach the scene and create peace and reconciliation among the individuals and communities. This was also one of the best qualities of this respected Irob figure. After him, all the prison centers at Dawhan (Irobland) and Adigrat are flooded with the innocent Irobs. Nobody is ready to take care of disadvantaged and unprotected poor people. Nobody is also interested to create peace and reconciliation among the members of Irob community after his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis. During the time of Abune Yohannes, almost nobody or very few went to court to resolve their disagreement legally because he used to solve their disputes peacefully by traveling to the sites where a conflict or hostility erupted. After him there is no body that tries to solve contradictions that may arise among individuals and communities and harmonize the society. As a result the regional prisons are overcrowded by youngsters involved in very minor offenses or so suspected. They remain behind bars without due process of law and most of the time even without being told why they are locked up.

2. The endless struggle of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis to alleviate the poverty of Irob people

One of the aims of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis was to transform Irobland from the deep roots of poverty and backwardness to a better condition. “Action is the foundational key to all success.” said Pablo Picasso. Turning ideas into actions all for the betterment of our disadvantaged and poor people was Abune Yohannes’ main commitment. After finishing his higher education and became priest, he returned to his motherland, Ethiopia. As he returned he was appointed to serve in Tsinseta School of Adigrat and finally appointed to serve his Irob people. By using this window of opportunity, he struggled and worked day and night to change the bitter life of the forgotten and disadvantaged Irob people who are located on the raged escarpment of the Ethiopian rift valley.

“Abune Yohannes (then Abba) was truly motivated person for helping Irobs and all Ethiopian people. At that time he was in charge of the largest parish in the region, director of the local Catholic School and many other things in Alitena. Then as a founder of ADDA project, which was soil and water conservation activities” said Reverend Abba Hagos woldu in his article written in 2009. The roots of the present day ADCS (then called ADDA) were first planted on 11th November 1976 with the ‘Adigrat Social Action Committee’ which was coordinated by his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis as our elders say. During this time, Abune Yohannes initiated food for work programme for the first time that included digging of wells, road construction, soil conservation, as well as other social and welfare activities that will be mentioned below in detailed manner. His Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis initiated the ‘committee’ with the particular orientation towards developmental activities as well as to fulfill the spiritual and material needs of all Irob and other people of the region. Out of the committee’s preoccupation with roads and soil conservation, the Adigrat Diocesan Development Action (ADDA) was born and began to develop under the professional direction of Dr. Bruno Strebel and funded by Swiss Caritas and MISEREOR (Germany).

Following the footsteps of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis, and coordinating ADDA for consecutive 12 years, Rev. Abba Hagos Woldu made Irobland the land of various projects and developmental activities. Irobs have enjoyed exclusively 12 years of developmental activities under Rev. Abba Hagos Woldu’s Administration of ADDA. Thus, he can be considered as 3rd developmental strategist who worked hard for the betterment of the Irob people.

“In May 1969 the then parish priest in Alitena, Abba Yohannes Woldegiorgis, realized that the immediate future only held two alternatives: the migration of the people, but to where? (Two petitions to the provincial government requesting land elsewhere had failed); or building of a road to break through an inaccessible region and make it accessible.

Thus, his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis who worried deeply about Irob conditions tried to answer the following question:

1. How could the people living in Irobland on the steep slopes of the rift valley be saved from repeated droughts and hunger?
2. How could those people be provided with a minimum of food security?
3. How could the quality of their lives be improved?

Abba Hagos Woldu said in his article written 2009 that the poverty problems of Irob people were identified by Abune (then Abba) Yohannes when he was assigned to Alitena. Abba Hagos states that Abba Yohannes shared his concerns for the Irob people with Brother Max Gmur, a member of Missionaries of Africa and a Swiss native. In May 1969, both Abba Yohannes and Brother Max, after discussing all the identified and assessed problems of the Irobland, came to the realization of the fact that the first step to solve (alleviate) the problems would be to build a rural road in order to have an access from Zallambessa to Alitena, the traditional and historical centre of Irobland as the first and the only practical alternative.”

In 1960s and 1970s Abba Yohannes had also worked tirelessly to boost or enhance the quality of education in Lideta School, Alitena, and in elevating it to higher level. On those good times, he served as a vital link between the Lideta School and its private donors (mainly Catholic Church and friends of the school) whose technical and material support facilitated its educational programming, and students' opportunity in the school keeping the school's efforts to maintain, preserve and improve academic quality. For more than a half century, this helped the school to keep the tradition of academic excellence alive, fundamental skills and knowledge to help students succeed in their pursuit for higher education. Many generations of Irob family have passed through this school. For many of us, this is more than our alma mater -- it is the school that nurtured us and our family members -- our parents, brothers, sisters and relatives. Thanks to the great endeavour of Dr. Abba Woldemariam Kahsay and Abune Yohannes woldegiorgis.

After the evangelical displacement of Abba Yohannes Woldegiorgis to Meki, southern Ethiopia, the quality of the education in Lideta School has been dramatically degraded and obtaining professional teachers for the school equipped well with academics have been becoming very difficult because of unattractive salary and luck of initiatives that attract the teachers to teach at the school. Currently, this has become very serious issue and it must get public attention.

In addition to his church mission, the following were few of many infrastructures, public services and offerings that Abba Yohannes Woldegiorgis contributed to the Irob public and its surroundings:

- Principal of student affairs of Tsinseta-Mariam Catholic School of Adigrat Eparchy, (1950-1962). In addition to that he was the main teacher of Mathematics, Science and Geography in Tsinseta Middle and Secondary school, Adigrat. He was also in charge of medical needs of students at the school.
- Parish priest of Lideta-Mariam Catholic Church, Alitena, (1962-1974) and director of Lideta-Mariam school, Alitena, while providing medical care for those school students and Irob public in general.
- Played key role in establishing of ADDA, dedicated to conserve the soil and water resource of Irobland.
- Worked tirelessly to open the Irob region to the outside world for the first time,
- Provided the car service in Irobland for the first time,
- Opened the first ever clinic in Irobland and provided needed medical services
- Built vehicle road that connects Zalambesa to Alitena for the first time.
- Instated cash-for-work and work-for-food programs in Irobland for the first time which is continued and held as the norm in the working environment of the Irobland and its surrounding regions until today.
- Instated drinking water supply facilities at different part of Irobland for first time. Starting his early priesthood times, he did marvelous job to satisfy the drinking water demand of the people of Irob. He dug a lot of hand dug wells and developed various spring waters to provide clean groundwater resources at various localities of Irobland.
- Instated milling machine in Alitena, Irobland for the first time.
- Constructed many road networks that connect different localities of Irobland. "The roads are gate to all development" said his Excellency Abune Yohannes woldegiorgis. To provide very few examples of his many road construction works at Irob vicinity and surrounding areas:
 - Construction of dry weather road that connects Alitena with Arae,
 - Construction of dry weather road that connects Alitena with Sangade pasture land,
 - Construction of dry weather road that connects Mangalalo in to Awo village,
 - Construction of dry weather road that runs from Arae to Gunda-Gunde monastery. By constructing this, he created easy and fast access for the Arae people who used to travel for about more than 5 hours to reach the Gunda-Gunde monastery.
 - Construction of dry weather road that divides Arae-geta in to two parts creating easy access between Are-koma and Dabuda (Galelo). He made impossible, possible in Arae-Geta. Nobody can imagine creating incredible road cutting in to two parts this very steep cliff of about more than 1 km.
 - Construction of dry weather road that runs from Alitena to Adgadi-Are, etc

As developmental and spiritual icon, he was also deeply concerned about how different phenomenon could affect the life of Irob people particularly the religious and ethical sense of our brothers and sisters who untiringly seek the improvement of their livelihood conditions and spiritual satisfaction. He dedicated all his precious life for this and related worries in addition to his developmental activities for the poor.

During his stay in Irobland, due to his loyalty for Irob people and land's betterment, many gifted Irobs used to say for him 'the words of praise' locally called 'Adar'. Many words of love and affection from the hearts of people that he touched and inspired were said to him at several occasions. The words of praise were devoted to describe his good deeds or big endeavors that he contributed for the disadvantaged Irob people and land. On those times, he used to describe to the public "Dr. Abba woldemariam first started and I just followed his footsteps. Thus, don't forget to honor him more than you do to me". This clearly shows how humble and good natured person he was, who never worked for fame but only for the betterment of vulnerable people.

Thus, he was very dedicated, committed Irob born, humble leader and spiritual bishop who set the platform for Irob region's overall development. He started to work hard in order to establish a working spirit and scientific mind within Irob community, giving much emphasis to education, moral values and other impressive developmental matters that we could witnessed. In fact he can be considered as the role model and single pillar for the Irob society's development. The saddest part was he didn't fulfill all the dreams that he had for Irob people and land's betterment. In between he moved from Irobland to southern Ethiopia where he has accomplished remarkable results that could easily change the lives of the local people.

3. The successful effort of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis to alleviate the poverty of people under Meki diocese (Vicariate Apostolic of Meki)

The success of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis wasn't only limited to the betterment of Irob people and land but also on the accomplishment of many developmental and spiritual activities in Meki area during his 20 years of stay leading the diocese (Vicariate Apostolic of Meki).

The first major accomplishments of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis in Meki were establishment of spiritual centers such as:

1. The first ever seminary center for priesthood in the southern Ethiopia
2. Founding of Daughters of Mary Immaculate, DMI, which is the first one to be established in the country, Ethiopia. Within the Diocese of Meki in southern Ethiopia, on 8 December 1985 his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis founded the religious Institute of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI), after an adequate period of experience as a public lay association called "Maids of Mary Help of Christians" with the aim of integral promotion of woman, to raise them from their condition of social inferiority, spiritual ignorance, cultural and structural oppressions to the dignity of the daughters of God. Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis moved by the Holy Spirit responded to the call of God to found this Institute gathering young girls around him sharing in the church and with the church, in the 'salvific' work of Christ for the salvation of the humanity, in particular way for the oppressed woman.

His accomplishments weren't only limited to the advancement of the above two spiritual activities but also the following social and developmental activities that improved the quality of daily life of the local poor people.

To list few of them:

- establishment of ten (10) parishes,
- construction of two (2) recreational centers
- construction of sixty eight (68) outstations
- construction of sixteen (16) kindergartens
- construction of twenty-four (24) schools (13 primary schools, 9 junior secondary school, 2 higher secondary school)
- construction of one (1) technical vocational school

- construction of one (1) minor seminary
- establishment of eleven (11) women promotion centers
- construction of one (1) rural hospital
- construction of one (1) school for blind
- construction of six (6) clinics
- construction of one (1) child development center
- construction of one (1) home for disabled and destitute center
- construction of one (1) Mother Tereza charity center,
- construction of one (1) orphan children center (ወላጅ አልባ ህፃናት ማእከል)
- Besides the above listed developmental activities, his Excellency Abune Yohannes woldegiorgis did great effort and succeeded to install the wind power driven community water services (wind-pump dug wells) that can be seen at everywhere around Meki to alleviate the drinking water supply demand of the local poor people.

Moreover, his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis was successful in establishing parishes with a very good number of out-stations, building good collaboration and sense of family among the priests, religious, the lay people and the faithful in order to put together a new spirit in the Parishes under Meki diocese. Because of the above accomplishments, he was one of the most respected and honored figure (icon) of people of the Meki diocese. Local People and church members used to call him "southern disciple" and some of them were also calling him the "living saint", which indicates how much he was loved and respected by them.

4. Conclusion

We Irobs as well as all his beneficiaries have been deeply saddened by the unexpected death of this brave scholar and developmental champion. Death is the final fate of every human being but leaving behind success stories and practices is blessing and we owe our most sincere appreciation and gratitude to our 'father of the poor', spiritual and developmental figure/model: Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis.

He was one of the greatest and most noble individuals that Irobland gave birth to. He was a revered cultural, developmental and reconciliation icon. He was a role model, courageous, visionary, dreamer, optimistic, humorous, a mentor, realistic man with awesome inspiration of the better side of the humanity and an epitome of good guidance or servant with full of critical mind, determination and versatility.

Let us learn from this holy figure. Everything is possible. Our dreams, our ideas, and our vision can be implemented. Let us not allow anybody to tell us 'you can't do it'. He is true example of a leader: not a king, but a servant of the poor who knows how to really minister to the least, the last and the lost! Breaking with tradition to serve the needy and demonstration of true humility! Hope the youth understand the message in life from this holy man! This is what we need more than ever, a humble, earth walking man just like Jesus and the Prince of Peace! May his wonderful example of service to those lying on the outskirts of society be emulated by many more bishops, priests, anyone who is a follower of Christ!

Faith is not built on mountain tops where the world leaders, celebrities, and top donors are. It is built in the valleys where the poor, misfortunate, the incarcerated, and the sick and dying are...!! He followed the right direction. The poor need to be reached first. His grace Abune Yohannes did it. We thank God for bringing us the fisherman who tends to the hungry! "Then they also shall answer him, saying: Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee?" (Matthew 25:44). Bishop Yohannes Weldegiorgis has responded to Jesus' call! He was refreshing, reaching out to the lost; Jesus came to save the lost. A wonderful example of leadership and humility! Helping and caring for the lowly and disadvantaged people!

The great saints of the Church were those who visited the poor, the sick and the sinners. Abune Yohannes did all that and passed away like other human beings do. Thus, he really deserves to be beatified/blessed and sanctified because he was the holy man, peace lover and caregiver of the poor. And I plead the Catholic Church to look at this matter.

Abune Yohannes did what his ordination called him to do...to be a 'father'. He lived his life as Jesus would. He never fall for words, rather fall for actions. He was an individual who did "what is right" and not "what is expected". He lived like an apostle and served the lowly. He was true example of a leader.

I have tremendous respect for Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis. I wish more church leaders were like him. He was a bishop who followed the teachings of Christ. God bless the saintly father and be at his right hand in heaven. His example is a true Christian beacon for those of us who call ourselves Christians. We always talk about being humble but tend to forget what it really and truly means to be humble, not just to speak it but to live with it. He was humble and lived with it until he died.

Please allow me to say the following Amharic words to this model before ending my article.

የ እምነታችን ሊቅ ብፁዕ አባታችን
የ ጽናት ምሳሌ የውሃንስ ሓዋሪያችን
ብሞትም አይረሳም ዛሬ በሕዝባችን
ስታወስ ይኖራል ሁሌም በህልናችን

Last but not least, I don't want to pass without expressing my great appreciation and deepest respect to Mr. Tesfalidet Besserat, who provided me with data in order to write this small note for this great, unforgettable and visionary figure of Irobs.

5. Final Remark

Some good aspects of Irob history and culture are presented in the 'Irob Documentary film'. However, in some aspects, especially concerning contemporary history of the region, it is based in subjectivism and so it is very partial; it should have been more inclusive. Contemporary Irob History that excludes personalities like Rev. Dr. Abba Woldemariam and his Excellency Abune Yohannes is biased and deceptive to say the least.

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Appendix 1. Picture of his Excellency Abune yohannes Woldegiorgis (on right) and His Holiness John Paul II (left)



Appendix 2. Life history of his Excellency Abune Yohannes Woldegiorgis

Bishop Yohannes WOLDEGIORGIS (1991.12.21 – 2002.09.19)	
Born: 1921.12.27 (Ethiopia)	Prefect Apostolic of Meki (Ethiopia) (1981.09.08 – 1991.12.21)
Ordained Priest: 1954.10.31	Titular Bishop of Forma (1991.12.21 – 2002.09.19)
Consecrated Bishop: 1992.05.03	Vicar Apostolic of Meki (Ethiopia) (1991.12.21 – 2002.09.19)
Died: 2002.09.19 (+ 80)	
Prefects Apostolic of Meki (Roman Rite)	

