ANCIENT AND ENDANGERED

Posted on April 4, 2010 by Eddie

Categories: Observations, Politics

I was saddened to come across two related news items today. The first was from the Telegraph and concerns the Christian minority in Iraq.

> *The campaign of violence against Christians is one of the most under-reported stories of Iraq since the invasion of 2003. And it could change the country's character in a fundamental way; by the time the dust finally settles on the chaotic current chapter of Iraq's history, the Christian community may have disappeared altogether â€“ after 2,000 years as a significant presence. About 200,000 Iraqi Christians have already fled the country; they once made up three per cent of its population, and they now account for half of its refugees...*
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> *... Fr Rayan took me to Ainkawa's oldest church, St George's. It has a cool, whitewashed interior, and its domes are supported on massively thick pillars. No one knows quite how old it is; there is a stone with*
> *an inscription recording the rebuilding of the church in the seventh century, but Fr Rayan believes the first church on the site was established in the third or fourth century. It would have been a centre of Christian life long before St Augustine turned up in Canterbury, and probably pre-dates the birth of the Prophet Mohammed by several centuries.*
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> *The antiquity of Iraqi Christianity was brought home to me during Vespers at St Joseph's, a big new church in the centre of Ainkawa. The prayers were in Aramaic, the language that Jesus would have spoken. (Read the whole story.)*

Mention of Aramaic, links us into a story on the BBC website which you can see here. (Does anyone know why the BBC won't let you embed their videos on your own site?)

One of the great strengths of Christianity is that since its earliest days it has been a multilingual, multicultural faith. In that context, Aramaic is no more a holy language than any other, but I still can't help but be saddened by the threatened loss of a language and a Christian tradition that are each two thousand or so years old.