

# CRY JUSTICE

BY

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## Historical Synopses

The interest of Europeans to dominate Ethiopia is complex and multi-dimensional. It is fascinating to explore how politics, economy and religion, as the combined segments of colonialism function. Italy tried to get control of Ethiopia in 1800s, usually by pretending to be a friend of Ethiopia. Government representatives and emissaries continued presenting expensive gifts to Ethiopian political leaders including to Emperor Menilek and Empress Taytu. The strategy did not deceive Ethiopians, who usually handled foreigners with prudence. The "Treaty of Wuchale" negotiation concerning northern Ethiopian borders and the adjacent Italian colony was at a stand still due to article 17. The Italian version stated that Ethiopia was obliged to conduct all foreign affairs through Italian authorities, in effect making Ethiopia an Italian protectorate, while the Amharic version gave Ethiopia considerable autonomy, with the option of communicating with third powers through Italy. The negotiation broke down when this was discovered. If the emperor had signed the Italian version of the document, Ethiopia would have been the protectorate (colony) of Italy. The dispute led to the first Italian-Ethiopian war.

In the first conventional Italian-Ethiopian war, when Italy invaded Ethiopia, its desire to acquire the nation was crushed. Italy faced a devastatingly defeat by the Ethiopian army at the Battle of Adwa on March 1, 1896. The symbolic dimension of the victory conveyed a powerful message to every Ethiopian, to the nation, to Africa and the world. For Italy, a colonial power, the event was an agonizing humiliation. Conceivably, the experience was never forgotten and that revenge was anticipated.

## The Vatican and Mussolini's War in Ethiopia

Wior to the second Italian-Ethiopian war, a rapid progression of socio-political developments occurred in Italy. The leader of Italy at the time, Benito Mussolini carried out extensive maneuvers to develop fascism. He courted the Vatican to

legitimise himself and his fascist party. Gradually, his popularity expanded among the clergy. He even attained international admiration from Catholic Church leaders. Gaetano Salvemini and George LaPiana addressed manifestation of Mussolini's admiration in "What to Do With Italy,"

"In 1925, Cardinal Mundelein, the Archbishop of Chicago, stated in an interview: that "Mussolini is a great man, the man of the time." In October 1926, Cardinal Dougherty, the Archbishop of Philadelphia referred to the "admirable" work of Duce and the Fascist government." Cardinal Hayes of New York accepted four high decorations from the Duce and each in turn expressed high praise to the donor."

Eventually, the landmark of the relation between the Vatican and Mussolini's government came with the Lateran Treaty that was signed on February 11, 1929 between the Vatican and the Italian Government. According to the agreement, the Italian Government recognized Vatican's sovereignty. In addition, the Vatican's provision of 1,500,000,000 lire was also acknowledged. Two days later, on February 13, 1929, Pope Pius XI proclaimed Benito Mussolini as a man sent by "Divine Providence".<sup>2</sup> The Pope's reference to Mussolini "as the man of Divine Providence", strengthened Mussolini's popularity even more.

When Mussolini's unjustified aggression against Ethiopia started on October 3, 1935, the enthusiasm of the clergy of the Italian Catholic Church was almost boundless. Italian Bishops one after the other poured out their backing of the government and the army:

"In a letter of 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1935 the Bishop of Udine wrote, "It is neither timely nor fitting for us to pronounce on the right or wrong of the case. Our duty as Italians, and still more as Christians is to contribute to the success of our arms." The Bishop of Padua wrote on the 21<sup>st</sup>

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' Gaetano Salvemini and George LaPiana; "What To Do With Italy": from: Fourth International. Vol.4 No10. October 1943, pp. 308-311. <sup>2</sup>Baer, op. cit., 284. Teeling, op. cit., 130.

October, " In the difficult hours through which we are passing, we ask you to have faith in our statesmen and armed forces. On the 24th of October, the Bishop of Cremona consecrated a number of regimental flags and said: "The blessing of God be upon these soldiers who, on African soil, will conquer new and fertile lands for the Italian genius thereby bringing to them Roman and Christian culture. May Italy stand again as the Christian mentor to the whole world." The Archbishop of Tarano declared: "The war against Ethiopia should be considered as a holy war, a crusade" because the Italian victory would "open Ethiopia, a country of infidels and schismatics, to the expansion of the Catholic faith."<sup>3</sup>

Arcibishop of Tarano's positions demonstrate that the invasion of Ethiopia was not only for economic gain but also for religious advantage. Perhaps the bishop did not know that the Ethiopian Christianity existed long before the Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, his statement also conveys the ethnocentric nature of the church leaders of the time as well their racist dispositions.

Throughout the course of Mussolini's preparation for invasion of Ethiopia and also through the subsequently period of brutal war crimes by the fascists on Ethiopian people, Pope Pius XI remained silent. The quietness of the Pope may have led to negative consequences. Karlheinz Deschner addressed the issue of the pontiff's disposition in, "God and the Fascists" (2013) as follows:

"Even Catholic papers flatly admitted that Pius XI had admitted colonial war. The conscience of the world condemned Italy's vigorous approach."<sup>4</sup>

It is also alleged that the Roman Catholic Church demanded donation from the bishops to finance the war. This important matter, was also discussed by Gert Bucliheit in 1938:

<sup>3</sup> Karlheinz Deachner. "God and the Fascists", 2013.

**""What did the Pope do?...The Church demanded that the bishops hand in their gold crosses and chains...Yes the Pope even gave Il Duce the church's frozen assets in Germany so that Italy could purchase the necessary raw materials".<sup>5</sup>**

**He may not have spoken openly about it, but the Pope's support of Mussolini is a well-known fact. It is also assumed that the Secretary of State of the Vatican, Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli had an influence on the Pope. In "The Pope and Mussolini", 2014, David Kertzer reported:**

**"The Vatican played a central role both in making the fascist regime possible and in keeping it in power... The central player in the effort to keep Pope Pius XI was Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, who was later Pope Pius XII."<sup>6</sup>**

**Addressing the power and influence of the Secretary of the Vatican, Jeff Pearce wrote in, "Prevail":**

**"By mid-September, 1935, Eugenio Pacelli, Cardinal Secretary of State sent word to Mussolini that the Pope would not stand in the way of invasion".<sup>7</sup>**

**The Italian church hierarchy not only blessed the departing regiments and their colors, but also delivered speeches and wrote circular letters justifying the Italian war in Ethiopia as well as protesting against the League of Nations for imposing sanction against Italy. Apparently, the Italian hierarchy viewed the conquest of Ethiopia as a crusade, a holy war.<sup>8</sup>**

**The Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, Monsignor Schuster, speaking in his Cathedral on October 28, 1935, the 15th anniversary of the March on Rome, said that:**

**"the commemoration of this event is not a mere political celebration but an essentially religious festival." He exhorted his audience, "to cooperate fully in this national and Catholic work, more particularly**

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<sup>5</sup> Gert Buchheit, 1938, cited in "God and the Fascists", 2013.

<sup>6</sup> David Kertzer , The Pope and Mussolini. Random. House, 2014

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Pearce, "Prevail", 2014

<sup>8</sup> Refer to "God and the Fascists", 2013.

at the present moment when, on the plains of Ethiopia, the Italian standard carries forward in triumph the Cross of Christ, smashes the chains of slavery, and opens the way for the missionaries of the Gospel. ...He then exalted the Italian army as: "the gallant army which, in fearless obedience to the command of the fatherland, is opening the gates of Ethiopia to the Catholic faith and the Roman civilization."<sup>9</sup>

Speaking again on the 16th anniversary of the March on Rome, Cardinal Schuster:

"prepared souls for the redemption of Ethiopia from the bondage of slavery and heresy and for the Christian renewal of the ancient Empire of Rome"<sup>10</sup>

The church also gave uncontrollable support for the war. In "*Fascist Voices*", Professor Christopher Duggan provided evidence to this effect:

"cardinals, twenty-nine archbishops, and seventy-five bishops offering public endorsements to the press."<sup>11</sup>

When the League of Nations voted to condemn Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and the grotesque war crimes committed by Mussolini and the fascists, the Pope was silent. G. W. Baer, commented on the Vatican's attitude:

"The Holy See did not warn or condemn the potential aggressor or offer succor to the intended victim; nor did it support the efforts at mediation or the principles of international law. ... Unlike his predecessor Benedict XV, Pius XI gave no encouragement to the League of Nations, whose ethical and juridical foundations corresponded so closely to Christian precepts."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> People d'Italia, Oct 29 1935. As cited by Rev. Dr. Mikre-Selassie G/Ammanuel.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct 29, 1936. Cf. The Tablet, Nov. 7, 1936. As cited by Rev. Dr. Mikre-Selassie G/Ammanuel.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Duggan, *fascist voices: The intimate History of Mussolini's Italy*, Oxford University Press, July 25, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> G. W. Baer, The Coming of Italian-Ethiopian War, Harvard University Press, HUB eBook, January 1967 287-288.

**On September 7, 1935, the Pope broke his silence and made a statement to a group of about 15,000 ex-servicemen gathered in Rome to demonstrate in favor of the Franco-Italian solidarity and in support of the Ethiopian policy of Mussolini:**

**"Together with peace we desire that the hopes, requirements and needs of the great and good people, our people, may be recognized and satisfied, that its rights be recognized and assured but with justice and peace." <sup>13</sup>**

**In his address to archbishops, bishops and priests, Mussolini expressed his appreciation of the clergy for the assistance to the war:**

**"the efficient cooperation given by the clergy during the war against the Abyssinians...remembering with particular sympathy the example of patriotism shown by Italian bishops, who brought their gold to the local office of the Fascist P ••1,14**

**Italy's invasion of Ethiopia occurred with the knowledge and perhaps with agreement of the Vatican. The support of the Catholic Church leaders and clergy to Mussolini's war in Ethiopia, for expansion of the Roman Empire, was overwhelming. This is a documented fact. Therefore, the Vatican is ultimately responsible for the actions taken by the clergy and by the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. Possibly, considering the gruesome nature of the war crimes committed by the fascists may demonstrate the unjust and immoral position they had advocated. Perhaps it will convince the Vatican that an apology is in order.**

### **Fascist War Crime in Ethiopia**

**One million Ethiopians were massacred including 30,000 people who were killed within only three days in Addis Ababa.<sup>15</sup>**

**What happened in Ethiopia? War drums were beating, trumpets were blowing:"  
"Defend your country, an enemy is coming"! The gallant Ethiopian army made preparations to go to war. The warrior polished his gun, sword, dusted his shield,**

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<sup>13</sup> Extract of the speech in Baer, op. cit., 287, Savemini, op. cit., 198. Toynbee, op.cit., 102. Citiva Cattolica, 3, 1935, 638.

is Corriere della Sera, January 10, 1938.

<sup>15</sup> Kidane Alemayehu, Letter of Appeal to Pope Francis I.

wrapped his "dig" around, added his bullet belt (zenar) and prayed for victory. War is not a stranger to him, he remembers "Adwa" and he remembers "Welwel". He is ready to defend the motherland.

But the second Italian-Ethiopian war of 1935 was not a conventional warfare. It was a planned mass distraction of unimaginable magnitude. Illegal poison gas was poured down from planes not only on the army but also on non-combatant civilians throughout the countryside. The Red-Cross units and hospitals were continuously bombarded. In 1936, Italy declared victory. From 1935-1941, Ethiopians were subjected to a period of merciless terror and unbelievable inhuman war crimes. Let us consider what happened to men, women and children. Some of their experiences cannot be quantified but they can only be felt. Stories of Ethiopians of the fascist era may help us envisage the terror of the time.

#### Case 1:

My uncle told me once that he was a soldier and went to Maichew to fight for his country. He told me that what he experienced was not war it was facing a rain of bombs. There was smoke and a terrible smell. Bodies were everywhere. The smoke gets in your eyes, in your throat. People were screaming. Oh God!

#### Case 2:

An eyewitness account by the 97-year old, General Lema Gabremariam<sup>16</sup> a participant in the war at Maichew in 1936 states, in his open letter to Pope Francis I: " .. the battle of Maichew, 1936...was my first experience of war. I witnessed the deadly poison gas, yperite, raining from aircrafts, which was a routine of the Fascist warfare. As a result of the acidic-rain, my eyes were affected and I was nearly blinded and made unconscious.... When I regained my consciousness, I found myself in the middle of heaps of dead bodies of humans and pack animals...."

I hear the scream of terror feel the burn of  
flames I dreamt of choking, gagging, of heat, of  
fires my head aches, beats like a hundred drums  
swells and swells cracks and explodes  
blood flows from my nose like winter's floods  
dark smoky clouds covered my eyes

<sup>16</sup> Kidane Alemayehu, Letter of Appeal to Pope Francis I.

Burning throat scratchy mouth opens  
I cry for death for god's mercies

Cry justice!

Case 3:

My mother's adopted aunt was a Red-Cross nurse during the war. She was working in the hospital when the bombs came one after the other. She told me people were screaming. She said that they did not have much medication and what little they had was blown up. So many people needed help and we could not keep up. She said that the bombs came down fast. There was no interruption. The bombs were like rain. Those of us who survived were forced to vacate and go to a shelter. For years after that she said she had nightmares.

Mountains of forms, heaps of bodies  
have you brothers, sisters, mothers  
have you fathers, children, wives are  
you just bodies lifeless corpse so  
many, many just numbers

Cry Justice

Case 4:

I interview a lady about her experience during the time of Gaziani's massacre. Her house was in Addis Ababa. She said that there was fire everywhere. The soldiers closed houses with children and women inside and set them on fire. They shot indiscriminately at any passer by. They came and took her husband, a Western educated man who had high hopes to help develop his country. The city was in flames and no one knew what was going on. The noise of gunshots was deafening. The next morning, they came and took me, and my two children. They put us in prison at "Akaki" ("nefas silk"). A couple of days later, she said that she was taken to a concentration camp on the shore of Italy with her children. Her younger child died there.

She was never told what happened to her husband until she saw his photograph. He was in chain and they have plucked his eyes out before they killed him. He was fortunate. She said that fascists have a pleasure of dismembering dead bodies and putting them on display. Fascist soldier also used to wear decapitated heads (of Ethiopians) on a rope around their necks (like necklace).

I have heard from a number of women who have been sent to concentration camps out of the country with their children. One can guess the fear and confusion of those children. Island concentration camps like Denane, Nokra, and Azinara were used to imprison Ethiopian men, women and children. Diseases and malnutrition were common. Torture, abuse and killings occurred regularly.

How many faced firing squads  
many dead dismembered bodies  
how long will the terror lasts tell  
me when the torment stops and  
the flow of my tears ends

Cry justice

Case: 5

The story of the following woman took place in the rural area in southwestern Ethiopia from where the Ethiopian freedom fighters, the "Black Lions" operated. It is a story of a wife of one of the fighters. When they could not find the husband, they took her to their post and tortured her for several days to extract information of his whereabouts. She did not know. Ultimately, a couple of soldiers came with a prisoner, her husband, The commander of the post was to go to Addis Ababa. So he took the prisoner with him on the plane. When the plane reached cruising height, he dropped her husband down from the sky. The woman was traumatized, lost her mind and became gravely ill. She could not care for her very young children. The youngest was six months old. She died a few months later leaving her boys as orphans.

Such sad stories were common in Ethiopia during the fascists' time. I have heard many similar horrible stories. Since I am professionally interested in issues of gender during times of war, I interviewed a number of people who have experience of live during the five years of the Italian occupation.

I thought you were coming  
thought the war was ending  
I have been calling and calling  
Aren't you listening  
the children are crying  
when I saw you falling  
I thought you were coming  
it was only a dream, dreaming

## Cry Justice

### Case: 6

The next case is about a beautiful young girl who lived in the countryside. The soldiers had a camp not too far from her parent's farm. A month ago, they had executed her father, after keeping him in prison for a year. When she goes to fetch water from the river, the soldiers will wait for her and whistle at her. When she goes to gather woods they whistle at her. So, her mother told her to go with her younger brother to herd the cattle, thinking that she will be safer with him. One day, they came after her, tied up her small brother and gang-raped her. It is easy to say that she was traumatized. She could not tell her mother because she was ashamed, a typical reaction of a rape victim. Two weeks later, when her mother returned from the market, she found her hanging from the pillar of the roof. Her mother told me that raping women by fascist soldiers was a common occurrence.

graceful body like lioness  
cascade of shiny braids  
sparkly bright pretty eyes  
captivating lovely smiles  
give me water I am thirsty  
fetch me food I am hungry  
I lost you suddenly be my  
judge God almighty

Cry justice

### Case: 7

The next case represents how the Catholic Church used to lure individuals to adapt the Catholic faith. In his own words Dr. Syoum Gebregziabher tells us about his experience:

"Symphony of my Life", 2012: "From my book you can note, how one of the Catholic priests took the personal responsibility to entice me to be a priest! How we the seminarians marched outside Harar in aheavily Moslem region protected by Fascist military to attend church every week! This was a clear policy of the Catholic Church in support of Fascism.

The establishment of "Collegio Ethiopico" within the Vatican compound was to train and indoctrinate Ethiopian seminarians. We were then told that if we become good potential priests, we will be eligible to go to Rome for further education (indoctrination)! There was a definite crusade to propagate Catholicism in Ethiopia with the help of fascism based on apartheid policy I had faced on my way to priesthood!"<sup>17</sup>

**Bishops Abune Petrous, Abune Mikael and Over 2,000 monks and parishioners were murdered at the Debra Lebanon monastery as well as numerous Patriots, women and children were also massacre<sup>15</sup>**

Abune Petros was an Archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in 1920s and early 1930s." When Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia, in 1935, Abune Petros went to the frontline to help the wounded, consecrate the dead and preach the Gospel. He then went to Debre Libanos to encourage the priests and the monks to fast and pray for Ethiopia. When he was arrested and was warned to stop his subversive activities, he said the following before he was executed on July 29, 1936:

"The cry of my countrymen who died due to your nerve-gas and terror machines will never allow my conscious to accept your ultimatum. How can I see my God if I give a blind eye to such a crime <sup>20</sup>

Abune Mikael was another Ethiopian Church leader, who was also murdered by the fascists. Grazian's revenge, among other crimes, is the massacre of the entire population of Debre Libanos Monastery.<sup>21</sup> In addition, 2,000 churches and 525,000 homes were demolished. The number of destroyed animals is estimated at 14 million. The war also perpetrated expansive Pollution and environmental hazards. Fascists' Looting of vast quantities of Ethiopian properties was reported. Among the items appropriated by the fascist rulers were 500 manuscripts which are still in the Vatican's possession.

**CONCLUSIONS AND APPEAL:**

From what was given above, it is evident that a grave injustice had been committed on the Ethiopian people. An unprovoked poison gas attack has been launched on a

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<sup>17</sup>M. Syoum Gebregziabher, *Symphony of my Life*, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Kidane Alemayehu, letter of appeal to Pope Francis I.

<sup>19</sup> [EthiopianStories.com](http://EthiopianStories.com), "Archbishop Abune Petros", Thursday, September 24, 2015. [EthiopianStories.com](http://EthiopianStories.com): "Archbishop Abune Petros", Thursday, September 24, 2015. <sup>21</sup>

Mocker, Anthony (2003) Haile Selassie's War, pp. 163-169.

peacefill country. The crime of the Italian war and the five years occupation have gravely affected the lives of families, men, women and children. Live and dead bodies were mutilated. Our ancestors were mocked. Our churches burned and desecrated. Our religion was ridiculed and our dignity was stolen. Our properties have ben robbed. Ethiopia was raped.

I cry for justice

**"Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God"! Palms**

**68:31 WE CRY FOR JUSTICE**

Over 4,500 people from 30 countries have signed the petition presented on our website appealing to the Vatican to apologize to the Ethiopian people.

**WE CRY FOR JUSTICE**