

THE FASCIST INVASION OF ETHIOPIA AND THE PAPACY

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1. The Attitude of the Vatican

The Vatican took a somewhat equivocal attitude throughout the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. The pope, Pius XI, tried to display a kind of neutrality in all his official political positions regarding the Italo-Ethiopian dispute. He kept silent while Mussolini was making military preparations for war against Ethiopia and while the League of Nations was trying its best to bring peaceful settlement to the dispute.¹ The Pope neither spoke in support of the League's attempt to avert hostility and the subsequent war between the two belligerent countries nor did he himself take any initiative to bring peace while church leaders in different countries strongly expressed their concern about the matter and appealed to the League of Nations to do everything possible to bring peace.²

G. W. Baer, commenting on the Vatican attitude, has the following to say:

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,³ Pius XI gave no encouragement to the League of Nations, whose ethical and juridical foundations corresponded so closely to Christian precepts.⁴

Many expected in vain that the pope would intervene and try to reconcile the two belligerent countries. He might have exerted his influence on Mussolini to settle the differences by arbitration as Ethiopia was ready to do so in accordance to the terms of the

¹ Walters, **A History of the League of Nations**, II, 647-671.

² Walters writes: "On July 25th [1935] the Archbishops of Canterbury and Uppsala addressed a joint appeal to the Council [of the League]. On August 24th the Universal Christian Council proclaimed that the League of Nations could count on the wholehearted support to the Christian Churches." He added that "only the Vatican remained aloof." **Ibid.** 647.

³ During the 1st World War Pope Benedict XV played an important part of peace-maker. In his letter of August 1, 1917 sent to the different governments, Benedict proposed an interesting peace plan. He wrote:

The fundamental point must be the substitution of the moral force of Right for the material force of arms, hence a just accord of all for the simultaneous and reciprocal decrease of armaments ... the institution of arbitration ... sanction to be determined against the State that might refuse either to submit international questions to arbitration, or to accept its decisions.

See L. Sturzo, **Church and State**, II, trans. A. R. Caponigri (University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 472-473. He had also supported strongly the League of Nations in its time of crisis. In his encyclical **Pacem Dei** of May 23, 1920, he declared:

To the nations united in a league founded on the Christian law, the Church will faithfully lend her active and eager cooperation in all their undertakings inspired by justice and charity.

Sturzo, **op. cit.**, 475.

⁴ Baer, **The Coming of Italian-Ethiopian War**, 287-288.

Treaty of Friendship of 1928 signed by the two countries.⁵ Wm. J. W. Roome was sure that “one word from the Pope would have nipped Mussolini’s bandit-raid at the start. That word was never spoken.”⁶

Many attempts have been made to find excuses for the Pope’s silence at this critical time. The late Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Hensley, devoted an address especially to this and said:

What can the pope do to prevent this or any other war? He is a helpless old man, with a small police force to guard himself and the priceless treasures of the Vatican. ... Can he denounce a neighbouring Power, a power armed with absolute control of everything and with every modern instrument of force? It is said that he could excommunicate. Yes! And thus make war with his dictator-neighbour inevitable, besides upsetting the peace and the consciences of the great mass of Italians with the result of a fierce anticlerical outbreak.⁷

Actually, that the Pope was a helpless man “with a small police force to guard himself” was irrelevant to the real issue. The Pope was never expected to give any military support against Mussolini. What was actually expected of him was a purely moral leadership, a true Christian witness, a condemnation of injustice.⁸ Commenting on the untrue neutrality of the Pope, the New Times and Ethiopia News said:

The Vatican is now a temporal power and as such it has the right to political neutrality, but it must be driven home that the Pope’s temporal function arises out of an antecedent moral power, and that the Pope has no right to moral neutrality. When a clear moral issue and principle is at stake, the world has the right to expect a peculiar and particular leadership from the Pope, otherwise his temporal power is just Gilbert an.⁹

Another excuse brought forward by some writers for the Pope’s silence and tolerance of the Fascist action of aggression against Ethiopia which created an international moral crisis was his obligation to the Lateran Treaty of 1929 signed between Pope Pius XI and Mussolini ending the fifty-years-old quarrel between Italy and the Holy See. By this Treaty the Pope was re-established in his dual capacity as both a spiritual

⁵ League of Nations Treaty Series, 94, 1929, 423-416. The League of Nations, Official Journal, 1935, 270-274.

⁶ Wm. J. W. Roome, Ethiopia the Valiant (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott Co. Ltd., 1936), 72.

⁷ Ibid., 72-73. Toynbee, Survey of International Affairs, 1935, II, Abyssinia and Italy, 103-104. Archbishop Hensley is reported to have said of Mussolini’s government during the war: “If Fascism goes under, God’s cause goes under too.” See Edith Moore, The Vatican in War and Peace (London: International Publication Co., 1944), 2. Following the example of its leader, Archbishop Hensley, “the Roman Catholic Church in Britain identified itself with the support for Italy’s case.” This they did not do publicly but “behind the scenes.” A. J. Barker, The Civilizing Mission: A History of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-36 (London: The Dial Press, 1968), 120-121.

⁸ The argument of Archbishop Hensley that the Pope was an old man was regarded by Sir Lukas W. Teeling as “something of an exaggeration, or even to this day there is nobody more strong-willed, or determined when he wants to be.” L. W. Teeling, The Pope in Politics (London: Dickson, 1937), 128.

⁹ New Times and Ethiopia News, January 13, 1936.

leader of a world-wide Church and a temporal prince of the independent State of the Vatican. In his political capacity as a temporal prince, the Pope agreed, by article 24 of the Treaty that the Holy See should remain “extraneous to the temporal competition between the other states and to the international conferences summoned for such an object, unless the contending parties agree to appeal to its mission of peace.”¹⁰ Criticizing those who condemned the Pope for his silence and even support to the Fascist policy particularly during its aggression against Ethiopia, Daniel Binchy said: “Had there been no Lateran Treaty the Vatican would have remained neutral in the Second Abyssinian War as it had already done in the first.”¹¹ But it is impossible to ignore the fact that the Holy See had reserved to itself in the same article 24 of the Treaty “the right to make its moral and spiritual protest heard.”¹² And, therefore, the Papacy could not be bound by this article not to speak on the question of moral issue. The Ethiopian case was undoubtedly a moral issue, a weak being attacked by a mighty power.

There were, however, some other reasons for the Pope’s failure to condemn the Italian aggression, which probably shows his actual position at the time. First, it was reported that Pope Pius XI was afraid that by condemning the Italian aggression he would provoke conflict in the Italian Catholic Church between the Pope and his immediate circle of cardinals, on one hand, and the vast mass of Italian clergy, who had shown themselves ultrapatriotic, on the other.¹³

The Second reason for the Pope’s pro-fascist attitude is that the Pope, disturbed at the strong anticlerical movement in Italy, did not wish to do anything which would weaken Fascism lest this should mean the return of anticlericalism. ‘Bolshevism’ and anticlericalism were regarded in the Vatican as the only possible alternatives to Fascism.¹⁴ Pope Pius XI was apparently worried about the spread of communism in Italy and other countries and about its menace to Christianity in general and to his church in particular. He was convinced that “**democracy was too feeble and incoherent to serve as a dam against the communist tide,**” said D. Binchy, “**and a strange irony made him turn to the new form of authoritarian government as offering the only hope of successful resistance**” against communism.¹⁵ “**The Pope thus made the Church’s peace with Fascism,**” said G. W. Baer, “**and accepted Mussolini as a man of Providence, a man not deluded by liberalism.**”¹⁶ The Catholic Times justified the Pope’s friendly attitude towards the Fascist regime of Italy on the same ground and said:

... the Pope was right to be patient with the crudities of jejune Fascism, to be patient even now with the excesses of Nazism. ... He has borne with insults in Italy, with fanaticism and persecution in Germany, because he sees that Fascism and Nazism and Imperialism, though their excesses are evil, are in any case an incomparably

¹⁰ Sturzo, op. cit., 501-502.

¹¹ Daniel Binchy, Church and State in Fascist Italy (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 639.

¹² Sturzo op. cit., 501-502. See also Baer, op. cit., 283.

¹³ The Manchester Guardian, Feb. 24, 1936.

¹⁴ Ibid. See PRO, FO 371, 20419, R1250/782/22, D. G. Osborne. British Consul, to Foreign Office, Vatican City, Feb. 26, 1936.

¹⁵ Binchy, op. cit., 85.

¹⁶ Baer, op. cit., 284. Teeling, op. cit., 130. L. Salvatorelli and G. Mira, Storia d’Italia nel periodo fascista (Roma: Einaudi, 1959), 3rd ed., 419-494.

smaller evil than Communism. ... Our mission, the mission of salvation for Europe, is to establish a united anti-communist Front. We must restore friendly relations with Italy and Germany, even at a great sacrifice.¹⁷

The third reason for the Pope's pro-Fascist attitude is thought to be the fear that Mussolini and his Fascist colleagues might themselves turn anticlerical and adopt the Nazi methods if defied by the Church.¹⁸

The fourth and the main reason for the Pope's pro-Italian attitude during the Italo-Ethiopian conflict could be found in that the Pope hoped to see the spread of Roman Catholicism in Ethiopia, and "he felt sure," said Wm. Teeling, "that would only be possible with the support of Italy." Teeling added that "it is equally true that he [the Pope] has thrown his weight on the side of the totalitarian leaders, and he has felt that the imperial policy of Italy must mean an advance for his own Church in the conquered territories."¹⁹ It was on this very assumption that Cardinal Archbishop Schuster of Milan exalted the Italian army in a speech on the 28th October, 1935, a few days after the war broke out, saying that they "are opening the gates of Ethiopia to the Catholic faith and the Roman civilization."²⁰

In an interview by the press on October 22, 1936, about six months after the conquest of Ethiopia, Cardinal Tisserant spoke about the brightest prospects for the Catholic mission in the occupied empire. The Cardinal said:

With the conquest of the empire a vast field is opened to Catholic Missions whose work has hitherto been hampered in Abyssinia by the unyielding opposition of the Monophysite clergy. ... The work of the Catholic missionary will nobly go hand in hand with the civilizing actions which Italy, under the Fascist Government, has already begun.²¹

Cardinal Tisserant disclosed the programme of missionary activities to be undertaken very soon in Ethiopia.

Although the Pope looked unwilling to be involved in the Italo-Ethiopian dispute and thus kept silent to prove his formal neutrality, his whole attitude throughout the conflict and his occasional speeches referring slightly to the conflict clearly indicate that the Vatican was on the side of Mussolini and supported the Fascist policy. In a few occasions the Pope broke his silence and expressed his mind on the conflict; but never spoke out against what was clearly an unjust war.

On June 15, 1935, about 7,000 veterans of the First World War were gathered in Rome from all parts of Italy in one of those mass demonstrations organized by the Fascist government by which Mussolini was arousing the war spirit of the people. Pope Pius XI

¹⁷ The Catholic Times, June 26, 1936.

¹⁸ The Manchester Guardian, February 24, 1936. See also PRO, FO 371, 20419, R1250/782/22, D. G. Osborne to Foreign Office, Vatican City, Feb. 26, 1936. Baker, op. cit., 290.

¹⁹ Teeling, op. cit. 128-129. Cf. G. A. Garratt, Mussolini's Roman Empire (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1938), 106-107.

²⁰ Popolo d'Italia, October 29, 1935. See also Toynbee, op. cit., 104. Binchy, op. cit., 679.

²¹ Gazetta del Popolo, Oct. 22, 1936. An English translation of the article on the interview is deposited in the IMC Archives at Edinburgh House. IMC, Box 262, file - "Foreign Office 1925-1943," folder - "1936/38."

granted an audience to these veterans and celebrated mass in their presence. This was thought to have given an encouragement to these men, many of whom were going to fight in Ethiopia, on one hand, and moral support to the Fascist government on the other.²²

It was on July 28, 1935, that Pope Pius XI made his first public reference to the impending war between Italy and Ethiopia. He considered the time “historically solemn and important” and proclaimed the “moral worth” and eventual beatification of Giustino de Jacobis, an Italian missionary who had preached Catholic faith in Ethiopia from 1838 to 1860 and was the first Apostolic Vicar to Ethiopia.²³ Nothing exceptional had ever been heard of de Jacobis before and previously no one ever thought of him as a case for beatification. According to the Roman Catholic rules and practices only those Christians who have given proofs of exceptional virtue during their lives and shown miracles after their death are considered for canonization and this is done after a long process of thorough examination.²⁴ But de Jacobis had died a natural death at the age of 60 without suffering any harm in his apostolate. Professor G. Salvemini commented that “**Brother Justin can hardly have performed any miracles in view of the fact that seventy-five years elapsed before Pius XI admitted him to first grade in the career.**”²⁵ What was the significance of this ceremony? Why did Pius choose specifically this time to extol the virtues of this friar? One can only assume that the Pope wished to emphasize the significance of the Italian war and the eventual occupation of Ethiopia for the expansion of the Catholic Church there. The Pope was reported to have exhorted in his speech those priests present at the ceremony “**to follow the very high example of heroism**” of De Jacobis when they arrived in Africa.²⁶ On the other hand, Professor Salvemini believes that the ceremony should be “**construed as propaganda for Mussolini’s war.**”²⁷

In a speech at the ceremony the Pope said:

Between Italy and Abyssinia there crossed a cloudy sky, of which no one is able to evade the presence, the significance, indeed the mystery, because there is yet more cloudiness to come. ... We trust, we will always continue to trust, in the peace of Christ within the reign of Christ, and we cherish full faith that nothing will happen except according to truth, according to justice, according mercy.²⁸

He did not say a word appealing to the countries concerned to refrain from war and settle their differences in peace.

²² Gaetano Salvemini, “**The Vatican and the Ethiopian War**” in F. Keen, ed., **Neither Liberty Nor Bread** (New York: Harper, 1940), 195.

²³ Roome, op. cit., 74. Baer op. cit., 125. Kifelew Zelake, **The History of the Independence of the Ethiopian Church**, Ph.D. thesis, University of Athens, 1969, 53-54. (Greek).

²⁴ John L. Mackenzie, **The Roman Catholic Church** (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 227-228.

²⁵ Salvemini, op. cit., 195. About de Jacobi’s missionary activities in Ethiopia see D. Crummey, **Priests and Politicians**, 59-114.

²⁶ Rome, op. cit., 75.

²⁷ Salvemini, op. cit., 195.

²⁸ An extract of the speech is found in Baer, op. cit., 285. See also paraphrase in Toynbee, op. cit., 101. Salvemini, op. cit., 195.

On August 27, 1935 Pope Pius XI granted an audience to an international congress of Catholic nurses at Castel Gandolfo and addressed them making special reference to the Italo-Ethiopian conflict. He said:

We see that abroad there is talk of a war of conquest, of a war of aggression. ... A war which is only a war of conquest would be clearly unjust war. ... On the other hand, it is said in Italy that the war of which there is question would be a just war, because it is a war of defense, to secure the frontiers against repeated and incessant attacks, a war becomes necessary because of the expansion of a population which is daily increasing, that it is a war undertaken to defend or assure the material security of a country, that such a war justifies itself. It is, however, true, and we cannot but reflect on this truth, that if there is this need for expansion, if there is this need to defend the frontiers ... we can only wish that some other means than war can be found to resolve these difficulties. ... If the need of expansion is a fact which must be taken into account, the right of defense has its limit and must observe certain moderation in order to be itself blameless.²⁹ (underlining is mine)

The speech was widely reported both in Italy and abroad and was taken everywhere to be a distinct tribute of sympathy for Italy's desire for expansion. The foreign press, therefore, sharply criticized the Pope for this while the Fascist papers praised him highly.³⁰ In his expression "**it is said in Italy that the war ... would be a just war because of the expansion of a population ...**," the Pope clearly reflected Mussolini's point of view and argument for his war against Ethiopia, and he seems to have believed that the war was just and, therefore, entreated only for "limits and moderation." It is also interesting to note that Pope Pius appears to have recognized that "**the need for expansion is a fact which must be taken into account**," and endorsed the Fascist expansionist policy. Committing on this address of the Pope, Salvemini writes:

To anyone reading without close attention, Pius XI's address to the nurses gives an impression of condemning not only war but also this particular war as an abominable crime. In actual fact it does not condemn the imminent war. It condones it as a war of self-defense. In addition it puts in a plea for indulgence and leniency, should Mussolini, in the exercise of his rights of self-defense, exceed the limits of moderation.³¹

In this address the Pope did not make a slightest mention of the moral obligation of keeping treaties and of the pledge of arbitration which bound Italy to Ethiopia.³²

²⁹ Baer, *op. cit.*, 286. See *The Times* (London), Aug. 29, 1935, 10. *The Manchester Guardian*, Aug. 29, 1935. Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 102.

³⁰ Binchy, *op. cit.*, 640.

³¹ Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 197.

³² The Pope seems to have found himself in a very difficult position because of the strong criticism against him abroad because of his speech, and thus the Vatican tried to find some excuses. The *Osservatore Romano* complained that the brief summaries of the Pope's address which appeared in some newspapers only partially and incompletely conveyed the pope's thoughts. Explaining the controversial point of the speech, the Paper wrote: "The need of expansion is not a right per se; it is a fact that must be taken into

Again on September 7, 1935, at the very day when the Assembly of the League of Nations was about to discuss the Italo-Ethiopian conflict at Geneva, the Pope made another pronouncement in reference to the conflict. A group of about 15,000 ex-servicemen gathered in Rome to demonstrate in favour of the Franco-Italian solidarity and in support of the Ethiopian policy of Laval and Mussolini. In an audience, the Pope addressed the ex-servicemen and assured them that he was praying for peace. In actual fact the Pope spoke to the group not as a father of very many Christians of the World or as the head of an international organization, the Catholic Church, but as an Italian and specially as a patriotic Italian. Among other things he said:

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.³³

Here the Pope very clearly expressed his love and wholehearted support to Italy and the Fascist government. He no more used any diplomatic languages in his speech to indicate his view on the question. He spoke distinctly and wished that **“the hopes, requirements and needs [needs of expansion] of the great and good people”** of Italy be fulfilled. **“Justice and peace,”** said Salvemini, **“were brought in at the end to sugar the pill.”**³⁴

When the Fascist government organized an unprecedented mass rally throughout Italy on the afternoon of October 2, 1935, the eve of the day when the Italian invasion of Ethiopia began, the bells of all the churches in Italy rang out to mobilize the people for the rally and also to celebrate the occasion. The Rome correspondent of the London Times reported that the peals of the bells **“from one thousand towers”** in Rome broke the air, and that the Campanone (the great bell) and the five minor bells of St. Peter’s had also tolled at the moment of Mussolini’s speech announcing the invasion of Ethiopia.³⁵

But Daniel Binchy, basing himself on the argument made by the Osservatore Romano,³⁶ rejected the news as “a complete misapprehension” and stated that the bells of St. Peter’s sounded for the daily vesper at 3:30 pm.³⁷ On the other hand, Salvemini, who strongly accused Pope Pius XI of partisanship by supporting Mussolini, argued that one can find from the manual of St. Peter’s that the vesper hour on October 2, 1935 fell at 4:15 pm. and not earlier. He writes:

account but which is not identified with lawful right.” Osservatore Romano, Aug. 30, 1935. See also The Times (London), Aug. 31, 1935, 10.

³³ See extract of the speech in Baer, op. cit., 287. Salvemini, op. cit., 198. Toynbee, op. cit., 102. Civiltà Cattolica, 3, 1935, 638.

³⁴ Salvemini, op. cit., 198. It will be difficult to accept as genuine what the New Times and Ethiopia News reported about what the Pope had said at this audience. The Paper writes: **“The Pope drew a careful analogy between war of defense and war of conquest and said that either sort of war could be approved if it was in defense of Christian rights and treasures.”** New Times and Ethiopia News. “The Pope and the War,” July 4, 1936.

³⁵ The Times (London), Oct. 3, 1935. See also New Times and Ethiopia News, Oct. 17, 1936.

³⁶ Osservatore Romano, Oct. 7-8, 1935. Civiltà Cattolica, Oct. 4, 1935, 164.

³⁷ Binchy, op. cit., 641.

The writers of the *Osservatore Romano* tried to conceal the Pope's responsibility by a denial of a fact which they well knew to be true. They lied ad majorem Dei gloriam.³⁸

Salvemini said that a Roman lady who had for many years lived in the vicinity of St. Peter's and who knew "the habits of those bells" assured him that the vesper hour was announced "by very few peals of only one of the small bells." But "on October 2, 1935, all the bells rang out long and loud together with the other Roman bells throughout the entire period of the 'mobilization.'" ³⁹

"According to canon law", says Salvemini, "church bells may not be used for profane purposes except with the explicit permission of the Bishop."⁴⁰ He added that "the diocese of Rome is the diocese of the Pope" and therefore, "had he not given his consent, those Roman bells would not have sounded" during the Fascists demonstration of the Ethiopian invasion.⁴¹

When the League of Nations imposed sanctions against Italy because of its aggression against Ethiopia in violation of the League's Covenant, most of the Catholic bishops, clergy and Catholic press strongly condemned the League's decisions.⁴² Sanctions were described by them as immoral.⁴³ The Vatican which was certainly hampered and embarrassed by the sanctions was reported to have acted behind the scenes to have sanctions lifted and, therefore, the Pope's envoys in South America used all their influence with the Catholic South American States "to induce them to vote in Geneva to have sanctions raised."⁴⁴ Subsequently, when the Italian aggression was discussed in the League of Nations and members expressed their loyalty and support to the obligation or the Covenant of the League, the representatives of the Latin American States "were reluctant to declare themselves. Their feelings for Italy were cordial."⁴⁵

The *Osservatore Romano*, the official organ of the Vatican, which contrived to preserve a precarious neutrality towards the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, maintained "a general attitude of hostility towards sanctions or any measures likely to prove

³⁸ Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 198-199.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴² A. C. Jemolo, *Church and State in Italy 1850-1950*, trans. by D. Moore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), 260. Sturzo, *op. cit.*, 503.

⁴³ Sturzo, *op. cit.*, 503.

⁴⁴ Teeling, *op. cit.*, 253. With regard to the effect of the sanctions upon the Holy See Daniel Binchy writes the following:

It is at least certain that the adoption of sanctions against Italy raised several awkward problems for the Vatican State. For example, the prohibition of all banking transactions, direct or indirect with individuals or corporations on Italian soil, if applied to the national colleges of the sanctionist states in Rome (which were not accorded extraterritorial privileges under the Lateran Treaty), would make it impossible for these to carry on their work. The matter was raised at the Assembly of the League, and eventually all religious institutes were exempted from the sanctionist measures.

See also Binchy, *op. cit.*, 642-643.

⁴⁵ Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, II, 650.

uncomfortable to Italy.”⁴⁶ The paper never admitted that Italy was guilty of an act of aggression.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the Vatican was accused of having given a substantial financial support to the Italian Government towards the expenses of the Ethiopian campaign.⁴⁸ A certain A. E. Guillaume stated in an article in the Paris Revue Politique et Parlementaire that during the ten months from August 1935 to June 1936 the Vatican had given at least five hundred million Francs to the Italian Government. He asserted that a large part of the sum had been derived from the contributions known as “**Peter’s Pence**,” which was collected from outside Italy. This, the informant said, had been brought to Italy in foreign currency in the Vatican diplomatic bag.⁴⁹ I am not able, however, to test the accuracy of this report. But, it was commonly believed that the Vatican gave essential support to the Italian lira by bringing into the country foreign currency it held abroad.⁵⁰ Apparently the main revenue of the Vatican in those days was derived from the “**Peter’s Pence**,” the vast bulk of which used to come from outside Italy.⁵¹

It is worth noting that Dr. J. H. Warnshuis, Secretary of the IMC in New York, expressed great concern that **“the Church of Rome is working in complete understanding with the Government [Italian] in regard to the present adventures in Africa with the full expectation that the Roman Church will have full freedom of missionary action in the conquered provinces or in all of Ethiopia if Italy takes it all.”** Referring to the Vatican financial support to the Italian Government at the same time, Dr. Warnshuis said:

It seems that the Church has given orders to various Catholic organizations in Italy holding funds to subscribe to Italian defense bonds. It is not known how large these subscriptions are but there are those in Italy who believe that this constitutes one of the very important sources of money for enabling Italy to carry on the present conflict in Africa.⁵²

It is perhaps unfair to pass judgment on the Pope, for the obvious reasons, for not joining the world in condemning the use of poison gas and the deliberate bombardment of the Red Cross ambulance units by the Italian army in Ethiopia in breach of the international covenant to which Italy itself subscribed. But it is not surprising that many sharply blamed and criticized the Pope when he publicly expressed his joy at the victory of the Italian army over Ethiopia and described it as a **“happy triumph.”** On May 12,

⁴⁶ PRO, FO 371, 20419, fol. 300, D.G. Osborne, Britain Consul to the Vatican, to A. Eden, Rome, March 12, 1936.

⁴⁷ Ibid., FO 371, 20179, J2944/180/1, D. G. Osborne to Foreign Office, Rome, April 3, 1936.

⁴⁸ New Times and Ethiopia News, April 30, 1938.

⁴⁹ Revue Politique et Parlementaire, Paris, Oct. 10, 1936. See also PRO, FO 371, 20419, R6476/782/22, Mallet to A. Eden, Rome, Oct. 27, 1936. Ibid. FO 371, 20410, R2422/226/22, Admiralty to Foreign Office, April 29, 1936.

⁵⁰ A. McLeish and K. G. Grubb, “Situation of Missions in Ethiopia,” IMC, Edinburgh House, file – “Religious Freedom: British group.”

⁵¹ Binchy, op. cit., 313.

⁵² IMC, Box 262, folder – “Dr. A. L. Warnshuis (USA),” A. L. Warnshuis to J. H. Oldham, New York, Nov, 29, 1935.

1936, just ten days after Emperor Haile Sellassie left Ethiopia for exile and the Fascist army occupied Addis Ababa, the Pope, addressing the world Exhibition of the Catholic Press, said that **“it has almost exactly coincided with the happy triumph of a great and good people for a peace which we desire.”**⁵³ (Underling is mine)

The news of this joyous statement about the victory of the aggressor by Pope Pius XI created great excitement and indignation in almost every country and was regarded as a distinct tribute of sympathy for Italy’s victory over Ethiopia and the foundation of the Italian Empire in Africa.⁵⁴ In Italy **“the Fascist press welcomed the speech with delirious enthusiasm as a kind of posthumous benediction of Italian policy and Italian arms.”**⁵⁵ But in other countries, specially in Britain, the Pope’s speech met with great denunciation. In an address to the Diocesan Conference, the Angelical Bishop of Southwark said:

I say with a sad heart, a victory won by flagrant breaking of covenants, by bombs deliberately flung on Red Cross Hospitals, by mustard gas scattered to torture defenseless noncombatants, has been hailed as ‘the happy triumph of a great and good people.’ In the name of Christ, we must most clearly disassociate ourselves from such an utterance, lest it be thought we think lightly of covenants, and admire the successful bully.⁵⁶

The Catholic press in other countries was greatly embarrassed by this pronouncement of the Pope.⁵⁷ Some writers, however, tried to assert the Fascist authorities constantly brought all possible pressure on the Pope to induce him to come out wholeheartedly for Italy and make an open declaration in favour of their policy.⁵⁸ But Daniel Binchy asserts that Pope Pius was not a man to yield to pressure from any quarter. He said:

The decision to speak was his won, and there can be little doubt that it was the Italian in him that prompted his words: it was Achilles Ratti, the patriotic son of Lombardy, rejoicing with his country in her hour of gladness. ... Pius XI’s love of Italy was always deep and abiding; on this occasion it led him to make an imprudent utterance.⁵⁹

As the Pope maintained such a feeling towards Italy it is not surprising to see him turning a deaf ear to the atrocities carried out by the Fascists on the people of Ethiopia especially on February 19-21, 1937. Not only non-Catholics but also Catholics throughout the world looked in vain for some pronouncement from the Pope on this evil act of Fascism against innocent people of Ethiopia.⁶⁰

⁵³ The extract of the speech is taken from the New Times and Ethiopia News, “The Silence of His Holiness,” June 13, 1936. The full text of the speech is found in Civiltà Cattolica, 2, 1936, 422.

⁵⁴ News Times and Ethiopia News, June 13, 1936, Barker, The Civilizing Mission, 290.

⁵⁵ Binchy, op. cit., 649.

⁵⁶ Rome, op. cit., 75

⁵⁷ Binchy, op. cit., 649.

⁵⁸ Teeling, op. cit., 129.

⁵⁹ Binchy, op. cit., 650.

⁶⁰ Teeling, op. cit. 3-4.

It is not surprising to see that the success of the Fascist venture in Ethiopia was immediately followed by the Vatican recognition of the Italian conquest and their subsequent rule of Ethiopia, and “the example was followed within a relatively short period of time by other powers, including those who had far more reason for withholding recognition.”⁶¹ And moreover, when the Queen of Italy was proclaimed Empress of Ethiopia Pope Pius presented her with his Golden Rose.⁶² But, although Mussolini made every effort to induce the Pope to crown Victor Emmanuel as Emperor of Ethiopia, the Pope refused to do so probably for political reasons.⁶³

2. The Attitude of the Italian Hierarchy

Members of the Italian hierarchy and the clergy apparently took a clear position in favour of the Italian war against Ethiopia and gave every possible support, moral and material, to the Fascist leaders and the army in their adventure of invading Ethiopia.⁶⁴ At every opportune occasion they made chauvinistic speeches in favour of Mussolini’s policy of war. Salvemini gave a selected list of 103 bishops and archbishops of Italy who had every now and then made bellicose speeches in support of the Italian war against Ethiopia.⁶⁵ At the opening or closing of numerous diocesan and other religious conferences, held in Italy from the spring of 1935 onward, declarations of loyalty to Mussolini and support to his policy were made with fervent enthusiasm by the clergy. A National Eucharistic Congress, held at Teramo on September 5, 1935 and attended by a papal legate, 19 archbishops and 57 bishops, passed by acclamation a message to Mussolini which says:

Catholic Italy prays for the ever-increasing greatness of the beloved mother country, rendered more compact and stronger by your government. ...⁶⁶

Mussolini made every effort to induce the Pope to bless the departing armies and their colours. Although the Pope did not do this himself, yet he did not at all try to stop the Italian bishops up and down the country from going on Fascist platforms and doing everything possible to encourage and bless the departing regiments.⁶⁷ The **Osservatore Romano** gave the following explanation or reasons for the attitude of the Italian bishops in doing this:

Just as a Christian mother blesses her son who leaves for distant and dangerous regions, so the church gives its sons, leaving for war, the viaticum

⁶¹ Binchy, **op. cit.**, 647-648. Binchy thinks that the Pope “as the king’s nest-door neighbour” could not do otherwise.

⁶² Teeling, **op. cit.**, 107. Baker, **op. cit.**, 290..

⁶³ **Giustizia e Libertà**, May 15, 1936, quoted in Binchy, **op. cit.**, 650

⁶⁴ McLeish and Grubb, “Situation on Missions in Ethiopia.” See also Barker, **op. cit.**, 68. Sturzo, **op. cit.**, 503.

⁶⁵ Salvemini, **op. cit.**, 191-192.

⁶⁶ **Ibid.**, 192.

⁶⁷ Teeling, **op. cit.**, 129. Jemolo, **op. cit.**, 260.

of its prayers and wishes for both body and soul. Ignorance and ill will alone can distort this fact.⁶⁸

The Italian hierarchy not only blessed the departing regiments and their colours, but also delivered war-mongering speeches and wrote circular letters justifying the Italian war in Ethiopia, and protesting against the League of Nations and Great Britain for imposing sanctions against Italy.⁶⁹

Apparently the Italian hierarchy viewed the conquest of Italy on Ethiopia as a missionary enterprise.⁷⁰ 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 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.⁷¹

Speaking again on the 16th anniversary of the March on Rome Cardinal Schuster hailed the March as having “**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.**”⁷² The Cardinal Archbishop of Palermo was reported to have followed the example of his colleague Cardinal Schuster in making warlike speeches. In his speech delivered at the ceremony of presentation of colours to a Sicilian artillery regiment, the Cardinal said *inter alia* that sanctions were unchristian and that the Italian armies were bringing Christianity and civilization to Africa.⁷³

In a speech on November 18, 1935, the Archbishop of Brindisi condemned

⁶⁸ Osservatore Romano, Oct. 25, 1935. Cf. Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 192.

⁶⁹ The Tablet, July 4, 1936, 7. Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 192. Manchester Guardian, Feb, 24, 1936, writing on the attitude of the Italian clergy towards the Italo-Ethiopian war said:

The vast mass of the Italian clergy, headed by the Archbishop of Milan, has succumbed to the militarist inebriation of Fascism; the universal in religion is forgotten before the appeal to the national. The standards of departing troops receive benediction; the clergy take part in all patriotic demonstrations; and the familiar tale of the civilizing mission is translated into the crusading task of bearing the cross of Christ into the pagan wilds of Africa.

⁷⁰ The Tablet, July 4, 1936, 7.

⁷¹ People d'Italia, Oct. 29, 1935.

⁷² Ibid., Oct. 29, 1936. Cf. The Tablet, Nov. 7, 1936.

⁷³ PRO, FO 371, 20179, Montgomery of the British Legation in the Vatican to Foreign Office, Rome, Jan. 10, 1936.

the action which Great Britain's cold egotism and haughtiness have organized to injure Italy and to support the semi-barbarous and slave-owing king who holds an unpopulated and miserable territory four times the size of Italy.⁷⁴

The Bishop of Nocera Umbra in a pastoral letter to the faithful of his diocese considered the Ethiopian war just and holy.⁷⁵ Similarly the Archbishop of Taranto in a speech on February 23, 1936 justified the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia saying:

The Italian victory would open Ethiopia, a country of infidels and schismatics, to the expansion of the Catholic faith; therefore the war against Ethiopia should be considered as a holy war, as a crusade.⁷⁶ (underlining mine)

The most striking act of the Italian clergy was the handing over of the sacred objects of gold and silver by a number of churches to the Fascist authorities to meet the financial strain of the war.⁷⁷ A. C. Jemolo writes that on a specially proclaimed "Day of Faith" the clergy and the laity zealously collected gold and silver, and **"in a number of churches some of the ex-veto offerings, the oldest and most dilapidated, were handed over to the state."**⁷⁸ The editor of the *New Times* strongly condemned the Italian clergy for having **"sold their crosses and contributed the money to the Italian treasury, in order that more ammunition might be sent to Ethiopia for the destruction of the Christian people."**⁷⁹ The Bishop of Civiltà Castellani, speaking in the presence of Mussolini on December 8, 1935, thanked God for allowing him to see "these days of epic grandeur," and approaching Mussolini slipped off his golden pastoral chain and handed it to him "with the Fascist salute."⁸⁰ Then the Bishop of San Miniato declared to the Duce that **"for the victory of Italy the Italian clergy are ready to melt down the gold of the churches and the bronze of the bells."**⁸¹ And moreover, very many members of the Italian hierarchy surrendered their Episcopal rings and pectoral crosses to the Fascist authorities as a personal gesture of patriotism and expression of sympathy towards the Fascist policy of the Ethiopian war.⁸² The report by *The Tablet* that "the Vatican interfered to forbid the Italian bishops to give up their pectoral crosses to the government" cannot be substantiated.⁸³

One can ask why the Pope, who claimed he was maintaining neutrality on this war, did not check and instruct his Italian bishops to abstain from such warlike and ultrapatriotic pronouncements. It is evident that the Pope, besides his being the head of the Catholic Church in general, is the Primate of the Church of Italy in particular. This,

⁷⁴ Salvemini *op. cit.*, 192-193. Cf. *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Oct. 3, 1936

⁷⁵ Binchy, *op. cit.*, 678.

⁷⁶ *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Oct. 3, 1936. See also Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 193.

⁷⁷ Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 193. Jemolo, *op. cit.*, 260.

⁷⁸ Jemolo, *op. cit.*, 260.

⁷⁹ *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Jan. 30, 1937, 3.

⁸⁰ Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 193. *New Times and Ethiopia News*, Oct. 17, 1936.

⁸¹ Binchy, *op. cit.*, 678. See also Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 193.

⁸² Binchy, *op. cit.*, 678.

⁸³ *The Tablet*, July 4, 1936, 7.

according to Binchy, makes his administrative relationship with the Italian Church and its bishops closer and more intimate, “not only in practice but also in Canon Law.” Therefore, he could have “exercised a more direct and extensive control over the hierarchy of Italy than in other countries.”⁸⁴ The Pope could have effectively intervened and at least privately intimated the Italian bishops to refrain from such an active involvement in the war propaganda if he really wished to do so. One would be compelled to believe that the absence of such intervention by the Pope would only mean that he silently approved the behaviour of the Italian hierarchy. That is why many violently accused the Holy See of having encouraged the Fascist leaders and supported the Fascist cause by tolerating the chauvinist speeches and behaviour of many members of the Italian hierarchy and of the Cardinals.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Binchy, *op. cit.*, 87, 645.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 643. Baer, *op. cit.*, 288. Salvemini, *op. cit.*, 193-194.