

Edited And Unedited Writings of St. Justin De Jacobis

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St Justin wrote very much. On the one hand, during the first period of his life spent in his native country (1800-1839), we have only numerous letters from him. On the other hand, during the most difficult period of his life, the mission in Abyssinia (1839-1860), despite the absolute lack of conveniences and writing materials, he produced page after page, driven by apostolic needs.

The biographies of De Jacobis, speaking of his writings, immediately state that they are all unedited,¹ except for the *Catechismo Amarico* [Amharic Catechism], printed in Rome by Propaganda Fide in 1850. This year, on the occasion of the bicentenary of his birth, the Naples Province has undertaken the printing of his *Diario*, publishing it as Volume I of his *Scritti*, which it intends to continue publishing in their entirety.

Here is a list of all these *Scritti*, with some annotations to help understand their context and value.

1. Catechism

The title of the catechism in Amharic (the cover is in Italian), published in Rome is:

Dottrina cristiana in lingua amarica ad uso dei cattolici abissini composta da Monsig. DeJacobis Vicario Apostolico di Abissinia, e Vescovo di Nicopoli (sic), e dal Sig. Biancheri lazzarista, e missionario apostolico in Abissinia. Stampato in Roma a spese della S. Congreg. di Propaganda Fide sotto gli auspici di Sua Emza. il Cardinal Franzoni (sic) Prefetto di detta Congreg. e di Sua Ecc. Monsig. Barnabò Segretario della medesima Congreg. (sic) Roma coi tipi della S. Congreg. De Propaganda Fide 1850.

¹ Cf. L. Betta, "Spigolando fra gli scritti di Giustino De Jacobis" ["Gleaning among the writings of Justin De Jacobis"] in *Annali della Missione* 82 (1975) 26-46. Mentioned again in L. Betta, "Comunicazione circa le principali biografie di San Giustino De Jacobis" ["Communication concerning the principal biographies of St Justin De Jacobis"] in *Atti del Convegno di Studi (3-4 October, 1987) nel 12° anniversario della canonizzazione di S. Giustino De Jacobis* [Acts of the Congress of Studies (3-4 October, 1987), on the 12th anniversary of the canonization of S. Justin De Jacobis], Valsele Tipografica, Napoli 1989, 152-165.

[Christian Doctrine in the Amharic language for the use of Abyssinian Catholics composed by Msgr. De Jacobis, Apostolic Vicar of Abyssinia, and Bishop of Nicopoli (sic), and by Fr. Biancheri, Lazzarist, and apostolic missionary in Abyssinia. Printed in Rome at the expense of the S. Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith under the auspices of His Eminence, Cardinal Franzoni, (sic) Prefect of the same Congregation, and His Excellency Msgr. Barnabò, Secretary of the same Congregation (sic) Rome at the press of the S. Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith 1850].

The book is included in the *Elenchus Scriptorum* [List of Writings] in the *Positio super Introductione Causae* [Position on the Introduction of the Cause], 1904, prepared for the Cause of Beatification, and in the *Positio super virtutibus* [Position on the Virtues], 1931, at number 162.

The *Bibliotheca Missionum* [Library of the Missions] (edited by R. Streit, OMI), in volume XVII, Verlag Herder Freiburg 1952, cites it on p. 429, n. 6799.

In *Vincentiana*, 37 (1993) 560-593, we published the Italian text with the title: *Il testo italiano del “Catechesimo amarico” del De Jacobis* [The Italian text of the “Amharic Catechism” of De Jacobis], which we found in Propaganda Fide. We do not consider it merely an Italian translation, but rather the basic text which served his work in Amharic. In the Archives of Propaganda Fide² we found the Amharic text, joined to the Italian manuscript, with an *Imprimatur*.

The long title helps us understand that the book was composed with the collaboration of his confrere, Biancheri,³ whom De Jacobis later ordained bishop, and who became his successor as Apostolic Prefect of Abyssinia.

De Jacobis certainly received help and collaboration from his disciple, Ghebre Michael. Speaking of him, he says that: “*A good part of the version done by Fr. Biancheri of the Catechism of Dogmatic Theology and Moral in Ge’ez, are works done with direction from him*” (Cf. *Diario*, VI, 48).⁴

Testimony at the Process of Beatification recounted how the saint explained the catechism in the evening. He worked together with his helpers at

² *Scritture riferite nei Congressi, Etiopia Arabia V*, 205-169 [Writings referred to in the Meetings on Ethiopia, Arabia]

³ Born in Borghetto (Ventimiglia) 31 December 1804; died at Massaua 11 September 1864; ordained Bishop at Halai, 2 October 1853; notices in E. Lucatello - L. Betta, CM, *L’Abuna Jacob Mariam* [St. Justin De Jacobis], Rome 1975, 220-221.

⁴ *Positio super Introductione Causae*, Roma, 1902. Cf. *Summarium*, pp. 15, 24, 39.

the translation of the texts.⁵

He writes to Father Giovanni Guarini on 12 April 1840:

*The vigil of the feast day of St. John Chrysostom saw the beginning of the little catechism for the first time to only ten persons; I hope that the number will grow much greater each day. The translation which I did in Amharic gives me great pleasure.*⁶

De Jacobis certainly knew Amharic, and also Ge'ez (a classical and liturgical language), and Tigriño; he dedicated time and work to their study.

A marginal note at the end of the manuscript says that it is by Montuori:⁷ *Abyssinian Translation of the Catechism done by the Missionary Montuori*. But when we compare the calligraphy (cf. e.g., his letter of 19 December 1839)⁸ it seems that the handwriting is not his, but rather that of Biancheri (cf. his papers in Propaganda Fide, *Scritture riferite nei Congressi, Etiopia Arabia, V*). Moreover the letter of the Consultor who prepared the *Nihil Obstat*, says in the beginning:⁹ *"Therefore I offer my reflections to the excellent Priest ... who with great docility and solicitude renewed the work and improved the Italian Catechism..."*; a little before he was speaking properly of Biancheri.

The authors speak of existing translations, but this is not exact.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid., 291, 309. Cf. also the letter to Fr. Etienne, 26 April 1840 (Archives of the CM General Curia, Rome, *Lettres Manuscrites de M.gr De Jacobis*, vol. II) [Autograph Letters of Msgr. De Jacobis]; S. Pane, *Vita de Beato Giustino De Jacobis*, Naples, 1949, 303 [Life of Blessed Justin De Jacobis]; Abba Tecla-Haimanot, *Abouna Yacob* Paris, 1914, 16.

⁶ Cfr also *Diario I*, 55: *Ministry 26 January 1840, the vigil of St John Chrysostom and a day near the conversion of St Paul - began to teach the Catechism in the Amharic language to a group of 10 persons. The greatest ignorance, especially among the women, concerning all the points of Christian Doctrine. The best instructed told me that there are three Gods.*

⁷ Born at Priano (Salerno) 17 of October 1798, died at Naples in 1856. He went to Rome with Biancheri in 1848. Notices in E. Lucatello - L. Betta, CM, *Abuna Yacob Mariam* Rome, 1975, p. 222.

⁸ In the Archives of the General Curia of the Congregation of the Mission in Rome.

⁹ *Scritte riferite nei Congressi Etiopia Arabia, V*, 181.

¹⁰ L. Betta, *Spigolando fra gli scritti del Beato Giustino De Jacobis* in *Annali della Missione* 82 (1975), p. 29. Also in the *Bibliotheca Missionum* Verlag Herder Freiburg XVIII, R. Streit, O.M.I. says on p. 735: *He (Ghebre Michael) wrote, with Msgr. De Jacobis, a catechism in the three abyssinian dialects: Ghe'ez, Amharic, and Tigre*; and he cites Fr. Coste, *Ghebra Michael* in the *Annales de la Congregation de la Mission* 91 (1926) 512-548, which, in fact on p. 533 says: *He wrote, moreover, with the latter (Msgr. De Jacobis) a catechism in the three abyssinian dialects: Ghe'ez, Amharic, and Tigre*. B. Colubeaux is also cited: *Vers la Lumiere, le Bienheureux Abba Ghebre-Michael* [Towards the Light, Blessed Abba Ghebre-Michael] who on p. 157 speaks of a book of Ghebre Michael: *There was first a book having as its purpose to present the Catholic religion in the most simple and clear way...*; but in another work, in fact Colubeaux concludes: *This book written in Amrigna, in Ghe'ez and in Tigre, has not come down to us.*

Regarding Tigrīño, we explained in the article cited above, that the various existing catechisms in Tigrīño are not a translation of that of De Jacobis.

A presumed translation into Oromo (Galla language) is cited erroneously by Pane, to which Betta refers:¹¹ “*we have found this Catechism translated in the Oromo (Galla) language, expanded with additions of other prayers, thus entitled: Katechismos Joki Barsisa Nama Kristian, Bija Oromo Gedeti. Abuni Jakobi, Aba Kitale.*”¹² But in reality we are dealing with the catechism of Msgr. Taurin Cahagne, successor of Massaia in 1881, author of other works in the Oromo language, who also came to be called Abuni Jakobi.¹³

Therefore we have not found translations of the Amharic catechism of De Jacobis. Maybe the origin of this misunderstanding comes properly from an initial idea of De Jacobis himself. In a letter of 7 May 1840¹⁴ to Msgr. Cadolini, Secretary of Propaganda, he spoke not only of Amharic:

I thought again of sending you a version already done of the Christian Doctrine of Cardinal Bellarmine in the Amharic and Tigré languages. But because I have only one copy which serves me for the missions, which I have by the grace of the Lord already begun, and also because I thought it well, before sending so much paper — which the Wise might judge useless — to await your advice; I therefore refrained from doing this.

It was divided into *Doctrine for all Christians* (the principal Mysteries of the Faith and the basic prayers of a Christian) and *Explanation of Doctrine for Christians* (where the same preceding explanation was taken up again, in a more articulated and fuller manner, in four parts: *Creed, Sacraments, Commandments, Our Father*).

Sr. Michael Neghesti, DC has commented,¹⁵ underlining how De Jacobis

¹¹ L. Betta, "Spigolando fra gli scritti del Beato Giustino De Jacobis" in *Annali della Missione* 82 (1975), 29.

¹² S. Pane, *Vita de Beato Giustino De Jacobis*, Naples, 1949, 903 .

¹³ M. L. Mazzarello - Neghesti Michael, *Giustino De Jacobis. Inculturarsi per comunicare* [Justin De Jacobis. Become inculturated to communicate] LAS, Roma 1997, p. 75, n. 29.

¹⁴ In the *Diario* (I, 143) we find the minutes of the letter, dated 7 April 1840: *I thought of sending you this doctrine translated into Amharic and the Tigre language, which are two very different languages, and the two languages spoken by everyone; but I decided to wait for your advice, Monsignor. When you think that the copies of the translation which have been multiplied and communicated to everyone, might be advantageous to the Mission of Ethiopia, I will speedily send you the manuscripts.*

¹⁵ M. L. Mazzarello - Neghesti Michael, op. cit.

shows himself a pioneer of modern inculturation.

2. Diary

On the occasion of the bicentenary of the birth of Justin De Jacobis (9 October 1800) and also the 25th anniversary of his canonization (26 October 1975), the Naples Province of the Congregation of the Mission has undertaken the publication of the *Diario* (1839-1860), written during the years passed in Abyssinia until his death.

The *Diario*, or *Diary*, as De Jacobis called it, is the chronicle which the holy missionary wrote according to community custom.¹⁶ It is surprising to note how and when the holy missionary found it possible to annotate his observations and remembrances, without leisure and without writing materials. The writing is not smooth, and therefore the transcription was not easy. Certainly the author did not intend it for a widespread public, but for his successors, who would benefit from his experience on the mission. Very often it treats of points, details of letters, reminders, or of documents. Originally it consisted of fascicles and pages joined together — we do not know precisely how — in six bound volumes. That notwithstanding, the chronology from 1849-1860, the year of De Jacobis' death, proceeds in an orderly manner, except for some skipping or inversion, which is carefully noted in the edition¹⁷ published in only one volume, and is divided into six parts.

At the beginning of the first volume we find an explanation of how it was found at that time in Paris (in French in the text): “*This volume came from Naples. Mr. de Dominicis sent it (August 1893) saying that Msgr. Spaccapietra had taken it from Msgr. De Jacobis.*” Also at the beginning of the third volume, an initial added note says that the first volume “*is found with Fr. Vincenzo Spaccapietra, Priest of the Congregation of the Mission in Naples. The second is in the Library of the Priests of the Congregation (sic) of the Mission in Adua in Abyssinia.*” Msgr. Bel, in his Diary in French, for 11 May 1866, recounts that:

Mr. Mille, a Frenchman living at Massawa for some months and returning to Egypt aboard the Victoria, had taken on consignment our letters and also five fascicles of the journal of Msgr. De Jacobis, beginning in the year 1843 until the year 1860, with some of his discourses. I sent these to Fr. Devin, Secretary General, author of the life of this holy Prelate, who

¹⁶ At the beginning of Volume I we find in fact written: *Congreg(ation) of the Mission For the use of De Jacobis, Justin 1839.*

¹⁷ G. De Jacobis, *Scritti*, vol. I *Diario* CLV, Roma 2000, *Prefazione* di P. R. Maloney, *Introduzione* di P.G. Guerra.

asked me for these papers, which he will conserve in the archives of the Mother House.

Naturally during the Cause for the Beatification and Canonization, the volumes were at the disposition of the Postulator General in Rome (Cf. *Positio super Introductione Cause*, 1902). Later the originals were returned to Naples.

The *Diario* constitutes a precious font for knowledge of the life and spirituality of the holy missionary. It is also often an indispensable font, since it is the only one. We are able to recall the moving farewell and greeting to the confreres, Sapeto and Montuori, at Axum (I, 17ff); 11 September 1842 recalls the second anniversary of the death of J. G. Perboyre (II, 125); his devotion and diffusion of the Miraculous Medal, begun after the apparitions at Paris in 1830 (IV, 39; IV, 55; V, 15, 108); above all the famous Discourses (I, 84 ff), the first of which is used in the *Liturgy of the Hours* on the saint's feast day (30 July.)

3. Collected Letters

The letters are very numerous, and the Province of Naples, as we have said, is working on the publication of Volume II of the *Writings*. Only some of these, in fact, have been published in the *Annales de la Congregation de la Mission*, e.g. 11 (1846) 59-71, 72-80; 12 (1847) 286-321 (but the text was presented with parts omitted and adapted). We found 23 letters published in the *Bollettino Giustino DeJacobis* of Naples (in the years 1933-35). Lastly the *Annali della Missione* 106 (1999) 251-255 has published the letter of 2 February 1847 to the Prefect of Propaganda Fide.

We can list various groups:

- Manuscript Letters of Msgr. DeJacobis

They consist of two bound volumes, lacking a coherent numeration, found in the Archives of the CM General Curia at Paris until 1964, and now at Rome. Volume I consists of 148 letters, almost all to Donna Elena dell'Antoglietta dei Marchesi di Fragagnano (Taranto) from 1826-1839. Volume II, up to 1860, contains 280 letters to the Superior General, the Procurator General and to others. An index is contained in the *Positio super Introductione Causae*.

There are about fifteen other letters addressed to various persons not bound in these two volumes, but also found in the same Archives in Paris.

- Letters to Propaganda Fide

Found in the Historical Archives of Propaganda Fide¹⁸ are many letters sent to this Dicastery of the Holy See, on which De Jacobis depended. A manuscript copy of about seventy of these is found in the CM General Postulation in Rome.

- *Letters conserved in the Archives of the State in Naples*

To King Ferdinand II and to the Government of Naples.¹⁹

- *Letters conserved in the Archives of the Naples Province of the Congregation of the Mission.*

There are 22 letters (from 1833-1841) directed to Donna Giuseppina Vernaleone, who later became a Poor Clare nun of the monastery of St. Chiara di Galatine (LE). A copy, authenticated by the Curia of Lecce, is in the CM General Postulation in Rome.

There are some others addressed to different people in the same Archives.

- *Letters to the Work of the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons.*

Some of these have been published in different years in the *Annali della Propagazione della Fede*.

- *Letters in the Archives of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Paris.*
Fr. S. Pane gives a list in his biography.²⁰

4. Liturgical Book

At the end of Volume I of the *Diario*, 160 pages are inserted entitled: *Introduzione del libro liturgico etiopico (Introduction to an Ethiopian Liturgical Book)*. This is an Italian translation of the Ge'ez Liturgy, accompanied by frequent annotations, with which De Jacobis makes an interesting commentary.

The holy missionary thus fulfilled a duty of replying to an invitation made by Propaganda Fide — to give an exhaustive description of the liturgical

¹⁸ *Scritte riferite nei Congressi Etiopia Arabia.*

¹⁹ L. Betta, "Spigolando fra gli scritti del Beato Giustino De Jacobis" in *Annali della Missione*, 82 (1975), 28, writes that they are found at the Archives of the State in Naples, but we did not find them, neither in the Bourbon Archives, nor in the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, nor in the Foreign Affairs.

²⁰ S. Pane, *Vita de Beato Giustino De Jacobis*, Naples, 1949, p. 855, n. 3.

situation which he found in Abyssinia.

5. Theological Works in Amharic or in Ge'ez

The biographers²¹ list various works, composed by De Jacobis with his Italian and native collaborators:

Messale Etiopico (Ethiopian Missal), with a translation and commentary
Rituale Etiopico (Ethiopian Ritual) with a translation and commentary
Teologia Morale (Moral Theology), in Ge'ez
Storia delle eresie (History of Heresies), in Amharic
Cronologia di Abu-Sakir (Chronology of Abu-Sakir)

Regarding the last two writings, S. Pane cites M. Chaine, *Catalogue des manuscrits ethiopiens ecc. (Catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts, etc.)* . I think that this refers to *Catalogue des manuscrits ethiopiens de la collection Antoine D'Abbadie* Paris 1912 (*Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts, from the collection of Antoine D'Abbadie* Paris 1912). In reality a manuscript was written by Msgr. De Jacobis and by an Abyssinian priest, Ghebre Michael, which contains an exposition of the principal heresies: after a preface, sixteen chapters. Pane notes that the other manuscript, *Cronologia...* (*Chronology...*) was offered to the Holy Father, Pius XI on the occasion of the Beatification of Ghebre Michael,²² precisely as a work of Blessed Ghebre Michael.

The above-mentioned biographers affirm that these translations should be found at the Archives of Propaganda Fide, but this information is not precise. We think that the basis for their argumentation is found in the same affirmations of De Jacobis, scattered in his *Diary* and in his letters. For example, in the *Diario* (I, 300) he says:

“The study of the language meanwhile, of the Ethiopian Liturgy, the controversy proper to the Abyssinians, and that which the Catechism consumed, occupied all the remaining time. The Amharic vocabulary then grew, the dissertations of the Liturgy also increased; the Amharic historical Dogmatic Dialogue, and the Amharic version of the Catechism of Cardinal Bellarmine.”

On p. 30 he had spoken of a project:

²¹ L. Betta, op cit.; and S. Pane, op. cit. p. 902, n.1.

²² Cf. *La cronaca della solenne cerimonia*. [The chronicle of the solemn ceremony] *Annali della Missione*, 33 (1926) 286.

The most useful work for Catholicism in general, and for the good of Protestants, to which an Abyssinian missionary could apply himself, would be that of helping to make people see, that these Heretics had conserved the faith of almost all the dogmas, which had been denied by them. The translation of the liturgical books, with which I hope to occupy myself, could be the easiest and incontestable way to render this great service to our Mother and to the advantage of our brothers alienated from us.

And in a letter to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide:²³ (*Diario* I, 226):

I am sending Your Eminence a page which contains a dissertation on the Ethiopian Liturgy: a Dogmatic Historical Dialogue in the Amharic language on the Controversy, which keeps the Ethiopians separated from the Catholics, and a complete Catechism entirely in Amharic. Since I was not sure whether or not I should do this, I thought it well to send you the accompanying writings to better help your Eminence understand in every case, the type of studies to which we are giving preference, and the method of instruction we are using. The Liturgical Dissertation is very incomplete. Moreover, I believe that the notes which I have collected, can make it more interesting, presuming that Your Eminence does not judge it useless for me to so occupy myself in the future.

To the Dialogue I have added the literal version of one single page in order to indicate the kind of composition, which can help understand the correct meaning, for those who know the Amharic language. For the rest, I have the entire translation, which I can send at any time, if your Eminence so desires.

The Catechism then is that of Cardinal Bellarmine.

To Fr. Giovanni Guarini, Procurator General at Rome, he wrote on 30 September 1859: ²⁴

To begin with it should be known that this letter accompanies the Tract which was lacking for the Ge'ez Book of the Moral Instructions for the use of the Abyssinians, and which carries on the title page a dedicatory word for the whole Book to His Eminence Barnabò, and our....

I am also sending the principal part of the Abyssinian Missal with its

²³ Without a date, but in the *Diario* we are in 1841.

²⁴ *Lettres Manuscrites*, [Manuscript Letters] vol. II.

version at the beginning, and variants and notes at the end. This second manuscript has also a brief word of dedication to the Holy Father. When then I send these two manuscripts, they will be closed in a box, and for reasons of economy, directed to His Eminence. The written directions should bring it to your hands. I ask then this favor, my dear Father, that you present to his Eminence, all the Moral, as a work dedicated to him, and offer my excuses to him for my boldness.

It could be that these manuscripts might be among those writings which, as Betta has noted,²⁵ unfortunately no longer have an immediate and general interest, but show a linguistic commitment, and above all an effort to penetrate the Abyssinian culture.

The coming publication of the *Epistolario* [Collected Letters], which will follow the recently published *Diario*, will shed a new light on the life of our holy missionary, and show how his ecumenism and inculturation were ahead of his time.

(WILLIAM SHELDON, C.M., Translator)

²⁵ L. Betta, "Spigolando fra gli scritti del Beato Giustino De Jacobis" in *Annali della Missione*, 82 (1975) 29.