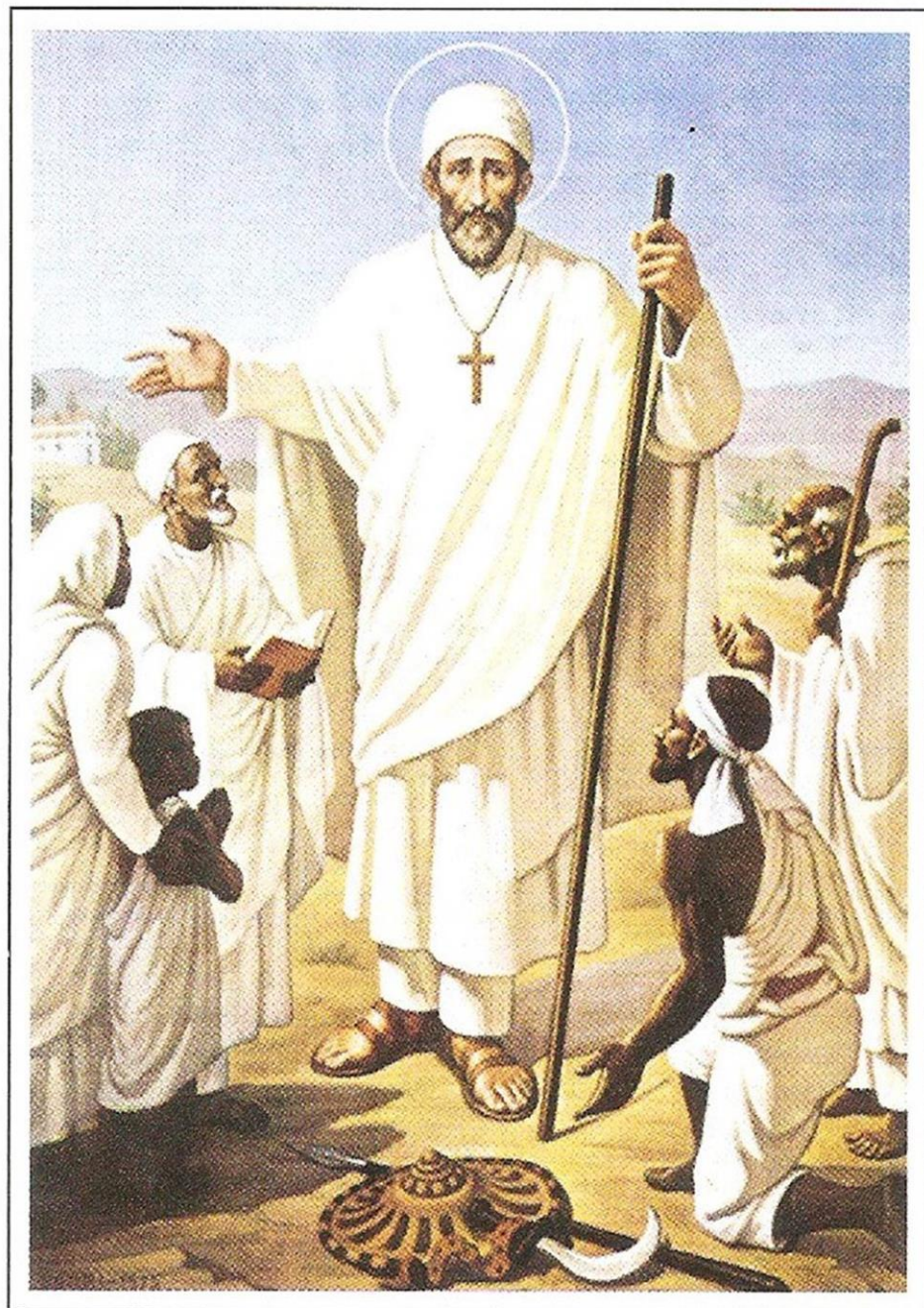


VINCENTIANA

44th YEAR, N° 6

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2000



FEATURE:

St. Justin De Jacobis
(1800-1860)

CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION
GENERAL CURIA

HOLY SEE

Appointments

The Holy Father John Paul II **has raised the Apostolic Prefecture of Tierradentro to the rank of Apostolic Vicariate**, with the same denomination and territorial configuration. Moreover, His Holiness has named **Fr. Jorge García Isaza, C.M.** as the **first Apostolic Vicar of Tierradentro** (Colombia), assigning him the Episcopal See of Budua. Until now, Fr. García was Apostolic Prefect of the same Ecclesiastical Circumscription.

(L'Osservatore Romano, February 27, 2000, p. 1)

The Holy Father John Paul II has named **Fr. Cristoforo Palmieri, C.M. Apostolic Administrator of Rrëshen** (Albania). Up to the present, he was Diocesan Administrator of this same diocese.

(L'Osservatore Romano, March 6-7, 2000, p. 1)

The Holy Father John Paul II has named **Fr. Anton Stres, C.M. Auxiliary Bishop of Maribor** in Slovenia, assigning to him the titular episcopal see of Ptuj. Up to the present, Fr. Stres has been dean of the Theology Faculty of Ljubljana.

(L'Osservatore Romano, May 14, 2000, p. 2)

Decree

On 1 July 2000, in the presence of the Holy Father, was promulgated the decree regarding the **heroic virtues** of the **Servant of God, Marco Antonio Durando**, priest of the Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul and Founder of the Institute of the Sisters of Jesus of Nazareth, born on 22 May 1801 at Mondovì (Italy) and died on 10 December 1880 at Turin (Italy).

(L'Osservatore Romano, July 2, 2000, p. 1)

Letter

The Holy Father John Paul II wrote to **His Excellency Gaston Poulain**, Bishop of Périgueux and Sarlat, **a letter** dated September 8, on the occasion of the **fourth centenary of the priestly ordination of St. Vincent De Paul**.

(L'Osservatore Romano, September 20, 2000, p. 6)

Letter of John Paul II to Gaston Poulain,
bishop of Perigueux and Sarlat, for the fourth centenary of the priestly
ordination of the great apostle of charity.

To the Most Reverend Gaston POULAIN Bishop of Perigueux and Sarlat.

1. On the occasion when the diocese of Perigueux and the Vincentian family are celebrating the fourth centenary of the priestly ordination of Saint Vincent de Paul, I am happy to join, through my prayer and thanksgiving, this event taking place in the heart of the great Jubilee of the year 2000.

On 23 September 1600, the young Vincent de Paul received the sacrament of orders from the hands of your predecessor, François de Bourdeille, bishop of Perigueux, in the church of Château-l'Évêque.

Although Vincent had aspired to an “honest retirement”, his encounter with men of faith, like Pierre de Bérulle and, even more, his discovery of the bodily and spiritual misery of the poor quickly had to lead him to a decisive change in his way of understanding and living his priesthood.

His greatest concern, something still important today, would from then on be to proclaim the Good News to the most materially and spiritually abandoned. It became clear to him that evangelization is a responsibility involving all the baptized, the entire Church. Moreover, he undertook his first great works with the laity, both women and men. But he quickly realized that the benefits of the mission would not endure if zealous and educated priests who base their life and ministry on an intimate encounter with the Christ would not maintain its flame. For Father Vincent, priests are irreplaceable in their role in the souls of those whom God confides to them. In addition, his awareness of the difficult situation that many priests, particularly country priests, experienced in the France of his day led him to participate actively in the reform of the clergy which was developing as an outcome of the Council of Trent. His commitment to the service of the clergy and to their formation, in a missionary perspective, grew and developed into retreats for ordinands, the Tuesday Conferences, the development of seminaries. Likewise, the Congregation of the Mission which he founded, to: *preach the good news of salvation to poor people, especially in rural areas*; and also to *help seminarians and priests to grow in knowledge and virtue, so that they can be effective in their ministry*. (Common Rules, I,1)

Father Vincent's vision of the priesthood, based on his personal experience of giving missions, assumed a universal dimension. He explained to his confreres: “God has chosen us as instruments of the great and paternal charity that he wishes to establish and flourish in souls . . . Therefore, our vocation is not to go just to one parish or to one diocese, but to go everywhere in the world. And to do what? To inflame human hearts, to do what the Son of God has done, who came to light a fire in

the world to illumine it with his love. Thus it is true that I am sent, not only to love God, but also to have others love Him. It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor does not love Him.” (Coste, XII, 262).

2. This jubilee year, when we especially celebrate the Incarnation of the Son of God two thousand years ago, opens us up to the messianic mission of Christ. He was consecrated by the anointing of the Holy Spirit and sent by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the poor, to bring liberty to those without it, to free prisoners and to give sight to the blind. (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente* n. 11). We find in this the basic intuition of Father Vincent, translated vigorously into action all during his life. Let us hear once again his call to conform ourselves to Jesus in his relationship to the Father and to all humanity, to the poor and the abandoned, those to whom he was sent. “You have to empty yourselves to put on Jesus Christ” (Coste XI, 343), in conforming your life to that of Christ, completely dedicated to God, completely dedicated to all humanity! In Father Vincent’s apostolic perspective, the incarnate Word occupies a central place: “Remember that we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, . . . and that your life must be hidden in Jesus Christ and filled with Jesus Christ, and in order to die as Jesus Christ, we must live as Jesus Christ.” (Coste, I, 295).

I strongly hope that the celebration of the anniversary of the priestly ordination of Saint Vincent de Paul will be, for the priests and the faithful of the diocese of Perigueux, as well as for all the members of the Vincentian family, the occasion of a spiritual and missionary renewal, and will encourage their apostolic service.

Vincent de Paul was a man who had encountered God and his brothers and sisters. He was a man open to the action of the Holy Spirit. He invites us to look in a new way on the mission in today’s world. Through a generous collaboration and constant mutual support, respecting their own vocation, priests and lay people should move with ever greater boldness to meet the men and women of our times to announce the Gospel to them! Let the Christian faithful form living communities, open to all, and open especially to the most abandoned and the most marginalized. Let them witness to each one God’s personal love for them! When they care for the human and spiritual development of individuals and groups, they will contribute to the authentic messianic mission of Jesus, the mission they are called to pursue.

3. To witness authentically to Christ, today as in the time of Father Vincent, priests and faithful alike should have a formation that is solidly human, doctrinal, pastoral and spiritual. The efforts already undertaken in this direction, and which should always be continued particularly for the youth, are a source of hope for the vitality of the Church and the credibility of its witness. I also hope that the sons of Father Vincent will pursue and renew their commitment, received from their founder, to contribution to the formation and spiritual support of priests in an ecclesial and missionary spirit.

I warmly encourage the diocese of Perigueux in its plan of resolutely undertaking, during the course of the coming year, spiritual and pastoral studies with the goal of promoting the awakening, the development and the support of priestly vocations. May your fervent prayer obtain for the Church priests totally dedicated to God and to their brothers and sisters, the kind of priests the Church needs. May the Church in France benefit from the celebrations of the fourth centenary of the ordination of Saint Vincent de Paul, and may it see new vocations flourish among the youth!

To the young people of France whom the Lord is calling, I wish to repeat here strongly: Do not let yourselves be blocked by doubt or fear! Following the example of Saint Vincent, say yes, unreservedly, and dedicate yourself completely to Him who is faithful to his promises! The Lord will make you joyful servants of your brothers and sisters and will grant you the happiness you desire.

4. Dear brother in the episcopate, I confide to the intercession of Saint Vincent de Paul the diocese of Perigueux and Sarlat, the Church in France and the Vincentian family in all its diversity. I invoke also in a special way Francis Regis Clet, a priest of the Congregation of the Mission whom I will have the joy of canonizing in a few days along with other Chinese martyrs. In making the generous gift of his life so that the name of Christ would be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, he has become a model of priestly and missionary life. To you, to the members of your diocese, to the members of the spiritual family of Father Vincent, and to all those taking part in the celebrations of this fourth centenary, I willingly grant an apostolic blessing.

From the Vatican, 8 September 2000.

Vincentiana 6/2000
Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General

DATE	NAME	OFFICE	PROVINCE
11-05-2000	KARICKAL Raju	Director DC	Southern India
17-05-2000	SOLÁS SÁNCHEZ Francisco	Director DC	Venezuela
26-05-2000	REINTJES Jacques	Director DC	Graz and Salzburg
02-06-2000	RAFTERY Eamon	Director DC	Nigeria
06-06-2000	GONÇALVES MENDES Sebastiao	Director DC	Mozambique
12-06-2000	IYOLO IYOMBE Dominique	Visitor	Congo
27-07-2000	SANZ PORRAS Enrique	Director DC	Madrid - St.Vincent
01-08-2000	MARTÍNEZ SAN JUAN Francisco J.	Director DC	San Sebastián
03-08-2000	MARTELLO Daniel	Director DC	Belgium
03-08-2000	DEVEUX Prosper	Sub-Director DC	Belgium
07-11-2000	AZCÁRATE GORRI Santiago	Visitor	Zaragoza
08-11-2000	GONZÁLEZ LÓPEZ Antonio	Visitor	Venezuela
08-11-2000	PANIAGUA David	Director DC	Bolivia
08-11-2000	PONTICELLI Silvano	Director DC	Indonesia
28-11-2000	GINETE Manuel	Visitor	Philippines
05-12-2000	DE LA RIVERA ROJAS Carlos	Visitor	Chile
05-12-2000	MARTÍNEZ Enrique	Visitor	Argentina
16-12-2000	LEÓN RENEDO Martiniano	Director DC	Ecuador
18-12-2000	AIKARA Jose	Visitor	Southern India

The “First” Justin De Jacobis

*By Biagio Falco, C.M.
Province of Naples*

Infancy

Justin De Jacobis was born in San Fele on 9 October 1800. His father, John Baptist, orphaned when he was eight months old, was entrusted together with two sisters, to his paternal grandmother, and to his priest-uncle, Sebastian. Very early on he had to involve himself in his hereditary landed property, and even though inclined to study, he was unable to obtain any degree. On 10 August 1790, John Baptist wed Mary Josephine Muccia, the daughter of a notary, who was to bear him fourteen children: eight boys and four girls, born in San Fele, and two boys born in Naples. Fate was not very kind to the large family: only five boys were able to survive. Justin, the seventh child, spent the most beautiful part of his life, his infancy, in San Fele, where he received his primary education and first sacraments. Little Justin’s first and most influential teacher was his mother, a pious woman of great virtue, who by word and, more importantly, by example handed on to him Christian sentiments and introduced him to the Gospels.

As a child, Justin’s life was in peril on two occasions. The first time when he was one year-old, the result of a grave illness. His mother, realizing the gravity of the situation, consecrated him to God, praying that he would save her son, if his life would be useful to the Church; otherwise she would be willing to make the sacrifice of losing him. Her prayers were to be answered.

The second time when a little older, Justin was in danger of being hurled from atop of a cliff while on a mule that had panicked. Once more his mother, helpless in the face of what was happening, desperately pleaded for help. As a result, the mule miraculously halted at the edge of the cliff and Justin was saved for the second time.

He grew up nurtured by the love of his pious mother in a typical region of the Mezzogiorno (southern Italy), poor in material wealth, but rich in human and Christian resources. Like one large family, the inhabitants of the village, lived in the realization of each other’s condition, and Justin showed from that time on a particular concern for the poorest and for the suffering. He had a lively and playful character, but a remarkable inclination to reflection prevailed over the typical attitudes of children of his age and it was surely for this reason that he earned the nickname, “old man.”

In the spring of 1813, when Justin was twelve, John Baptist De Jacobis decided to relocate his family to Naples.

Was it because of political, financial, or family reasons? Or was it for the need of greater economic security or stability? Was it to give his children the possibility of receiving a good education with which to attain a profession after the example of the grandfathers and uncles?

We cannot exclude from this decision certain political happenings in which he was involved. In 1799 John Baptist De Jacobis had embraced the *Repubblica Partenopea*, and had fought in its territory against the soldiers of Cardinal Ruffo, who fought for the return to Naples of the Bourbon sovereigns. After the return of the Bourbon Ferdinand I to the throne of Naples (1814), notwithstanding his exoneration, John Baptist was always considered a “state offender,” even though he was never incarcerated.

As a result of this situation he found that he no longer had the possibility of employment in public administration, he who previously, by his 360 ducats of revenue, was one of the 304 property owners in the region. He could have become a candidate to the national parliament and to the highest state offices.

With the arrival of Joseph Bonaparte and Joachim Murat in Naples, he perhaps foresaw the possibility of a good outcome in that city.

Political events, however, did not move in the direction that he had hoped, starting a period of decline for the family that had prided itself on its prestigious past. John Baptist was not able to save himself from want but, in compensation, had the satisfaction of seeing his sons Nicholas and Donato Anthony become noted professionals, the first in letters, the second a civil lawyer, while Vincent, Justin and Philip became churchmen, one a Carthusian, the others both Vincentians.

In Naples, Justin continued his studies, and together with a literary and humanistic formation, he looked after his spiritual life by prayer and reception of the sacraments under the guidance of the Carmelite Father Mariano Cacace, to whom he was entrusted by his mother.

The Seminary

The wise Carmelite perceived that his spiritual son had a calling to consecrated life. When Justin made known his decision to consecrate himself to God, not being able to have him admitted to his own community which had been

dispersed because the government of Naples had suppressed religious institutes in 1809, he directed Justin towards the Vincentian Missionaries.

At age 18, Justin for the first time enters the house “dei Vergini” (so called because of its location on the piazza of the same name.), the Provincial House, and the site of the novitiate of the Vincentian missionaries. There he entered and stayed.

The words with which Cacace presented him to the director, Fr. Francis Xavier Pellicciari, are happily prophetic: “I am glad to offer a gift to your Congregation, and experience will prove it to you.”

On 17 October 1818, Justin is admitted to the novitiate, which would prepare him for future missionary life and for priestly ministry in service to the poor, according to the *Vincentian charism*. He observed everything with regularity and with benefit to himself. For his simplicity, his availability and above all for his humility, he was given a nickname in the seminary, “Brother You do it.” “*You do it*” was Justin’s typical answer to his companions when it came time to decide something. Maybe it was a game, being convinced that others could have done it better than he, and then not wanting in any way that his position might displease someone.

These attitudes and convictions are not to be misunderstood with disinterestedness, apathy or weakness, but to be understood in the light of that *positive indifference and interior freedom*, at the cost even of self-mortification, which constitute the essential points of St. Vincent de Paul’s spirituality into which De Jacobis was allowing himself to be formed with docility.

In the seminary he solidified a friendship with Vincent Spaccapietra, a friendship born when they both attended the public schools, and had started to share the same ideals, the same vocation. Vincent Spaccapietra entered the “dei Vergini” house a year after Justin. It is he who has given us some interesting views on how his friend lived out the novitiate. His conduct, Spaccapietra tells us, was impeccable. It was not possible to find any fault in him. Above all, he adopted humility as his favorite virtue. Justin manifested especially a deep veneration for the Virgin, and always had edifying stories calculated to arouse love and confidence in Our Lady.

“Regarding his studies, although his abilities were not mediocre, he enjoyed talking about his shortcomings.” Spaccapietra tells us this to make us understand that probably De Jacobis did not have a subtle, speculative mind. He was not the intellectual type, but without doubt had a great clarity of ideas, and the capacity to grasp quickly and to express the essentials with simplicity. These are qualities which, his life will show, will make him suitable for and flexible in

many and varied tasks which will be entrusted to him in the community and the Church.

His inadequacy, of which he loved to speak, the little confidence in his own ability, even led Justin to doubt that he would be suited for the priestly ministry.

Fortunately the convictions of those close to him and of his superiors were quite different, having had the opportunity to verify the contrary. They therefore denied his request to remain in the community as a simple coadjutor brother, and sent him to Oria (Brindisi).

He was admitted to sacred orders in October 1823, ordained a deacon on 13 March 1824, and with a dispensation for his age was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Brindisi on 12 June of the same year.

Apostolate in his own country

The activities to which Justin devoted himself at the outset of his ministry were naturally those characteristic of the Congregation, above all the preaching of missions to the people. But he was also an enlightened director of souls, an effective preacher of spiritual exercises to varied groups of people (religious, professional, clerical); he was attentive in the assistance the sick and the poor in keeping with the word and example of the Founder; moreover, he dedicated himself to the formation and animation of the *Companies of Charity*, women's groups or mixed organizations for the service and assistance of the needy.

De Jacobis' stay in Puglia lasted about 13 years; he lived in Oria for a few years, (1824-1829), he was then among the confreres who opened a mission house in Monopoli (1829-1833), and after a brief interlude in Naples for health reasons, we find him again in Puglia, at Lecce (1834-1836).

The simplicity which always characterized him, humility for which he had a predilection and exercised more than the others, meditation and prayer which always preceded all his actions, his great availability towards everyone without reserve, could not but result in much admiration; whoever had the occasion to hear him and know him was fascinated by his person. He was a *special man* because his mode of life was not easily found in other men, but was also special because people could see themselves in him when faced with very difficult situations.

One evening in the winter of 1831 in Monopoli while making his usual preparation before preaching to the faithful, a messenger came from Fasano to tell him that a penitent of his was gravely ill, and that his life was in danger, and

wished to see him. After the sermon, Justin mounted his horse, and accompanied by the messenger, took off for the house of the dying person. It was a good distance on that cold and dark night. Their lantern was barely adequate to penetrate the darkness. The journey was not without difficulty when suddenly the wind extinguished the lantern, stopping the travelers in their tracks.

There was no moon, no stars, not even a glimmer of light to mark the way. The guide could no longer orient himself and began to fear the worst, but Justin reassured him and invited him to pray to the Virgin. Their prayers were heard, and a halo of light surrounded the travelers, allowing them to go on. At Fasano he heard the sick man's confession, and assured him that he was not about to die. He, in fact, lived for 30 more years.

This was an extraordinary happening, and the witness did not hesitate to make it public, relating how the light that made the journey possible came from his honorable companion. Naturally Justin was asked to explain and, convinced that what had happened was God's doing and not his own, minimized the event saying that the light in question was, in all probability, generated by a nocturnal meteor.

Because of the admirable way in which he exercised his ministry so few years after his ordination, Justin was entrusted with important tasks: he was a delegate from the house in Oria to the Provincial Assembly in preparation for the General Assembly of 1829; superior of the house in Lecce, director of novices at St. Nicholas of Tolentine in Naples, and, also in Naples, superior of the "dei Vergini" house where he began his odyssey of service to the gospel, to the poor and to the Church.

Always opposed to being assigned a task, or of holding an office because of the humble esteem he had of himself, he lived these responsibilities in the spirit of obedience and service, never with arrogance, making his own the evangelical teaching: "He who wishes to be first will be last."

Naturally everything did not always go for the better: illnesses sometimes afflicted him; differing views, opinions, plans put him at odds with his confreres, even causing humiliations from his superiors. His attitude, gentle yet resolute, condescending but consistent, sometimes set him up "against the current," beyond the rigid outlines of a mentality needing to open itself up to the new, but fearful to do so for the general difficulty of finding balance and stability on the part of a Church, a religious life, and a society still marked by the storm of the French Revolution and by the Napoleonic dictatorship.

We are told that one day a young man presented himself at the St. Nicholas House desiring and curious to meet personally the director of novices

about whom he had heard so much. He wanted his advice about the possibility of entering the seminary. At the entrance, he found the one he wanted to see busy cleaning the church and never imagined that one to be the very person he was looking for. Mistaking him for the sacristan, he asked if he could see the director. Justin asked why he would want to speak with him. The young man explained why he came. The “presumed” sacristan assured him that the person he was speaking to was really no one special. Then with a most affectionate smile, Justin revealed his true identity.

He did not disdain doing work which by its very nature should have been done by others, and when this happened he did it very naturally.

This great availability nonetheless did not prevent him, when necessary, from being strict and from exercising his authority decisively. When he believed in an idea or program for the good of the community, he even ran the risk of being reprimanded by superiors, in spite of the fact that this might be for him a cause of great suffering.

In his country Justin worked in an historical time in which the social, political and economic atmosphere still experienced the effects of revolutions and agitations which beset southern Italy. It was thus not easy to put into practice the foundational principal of the Vincentian congregation: to bring the gospel to the people.

But the simple manner of preaching according to the Vincentian “little method,” without rhetoric, his availability, and the example of life that preceded and confirmed every teaching, earned him esteem, admiration and affection both from the poor people as well as from the “gentlemen.”

Among the upper class, the Marchioness Elena Dell’Antoglietta of Fragagnano, especially, was struck by Justin’s charism and became, besides his most faithful penitent, a valued collaborator and benefactor for many years. She helped in fact, to found the *Company of Charity* in Puglia and in the many works benefiting the poor. When she came to know of the difficult economic state of her confessors’ family, she strove with discretion in every possible way to help it.

For this Justin showed her his deep gratitude.

In the years 1836-1837 a cholera epidemic broke out in Naples. He was there, day and night without reserve to assist the victims even to endangering his own life. He forgot himself to the extent that he had no time to eat even a piece of bread. One morning he was found asleep, worn out by fatigue, near a victim whom he had assisted until that person’s death, giving no thought to the

contagion, which did not touch him in spite of his contact with so many of the afflicted.

The end of the cholera coincided with a procession organized by Justin in honor of the Immaculate Mother, which made its way through the narrow, heavily populated streets of the so-called *Spanish Quarter*. The disease was now defeated. The people saw in this “coincidence” an answer finally to so many prayers confidently raised up to heaven and the news of the *miracle* spread quickly from mouth to mouth. The prodigious statue of the Madonna is still housed in the Church of St. Nicholas of Tolentine in Naples.

After the experience of the cholera, Justin was deeply stricken by two great sorrows: the death of his father (after a brief and violent illness, perhaps the cholera, on 26 October 1837), and that of his mother (20 June 1838).

Across the Sea

In October 1838 Cardinal Philip Franzoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide, had the opportunity of personally meeting Justin while the latter was superior at the “dei Vergini” house. Franzoni related to him some favorable accounts that Fr. Joseph Sabeto had transmitted to him from Ethiopia, recommending that there be no delay in resuming the evangelization of that land.

Franzoni was taken by Justin’s personality, rich in humanity and virtue; what is more, he was supported by the favorable attitude that he showed concerning the possibility of having to – he himself – tackle the African undertaking. A docile son of obedience, the holy missionary posed but one condition: “Only if the Superior General of my Congregation gives his consent will Abyssinia be my new and dear fatherland.”

When he returned to Rome, the Cardinal started considering De Jacobis as the suitable person to build up the newborn mission of Abyssinia. He wrote to Paris entrusting to the Congregation of St. Vincent de Paul this new mission and to have the authorization of the Superior General to assign De Jacobis to Abyssinia, together with another confrere endowed with the requisite qualities.

Justin was enthused at the prospect. He indeed for a long time held dear the possibility of going to the foreign missions, but at age 38 could he still realize the dream? He hoped, furthermore that going to Africa would have definitively distanced him from the “threat” of being named a bishop. This was something that he suspected might happen, and absolutely did not want to face. no matter that he could have carried out important obligations with great competence, the humble *priest of the mission* remained convinced that he was unworthy of such consideration. How could he who did not even consider himself to be a *good priest*, imagine himself being a bishop?

Gripped by a painful interior conflict, Justin thought and prayed thus in 1838: *“At the time that I had dismissed every hope of being sent to the foreign missions, a burning apprehension, which took possession of my spirit, tormented me ... During my sufferings, during my poor acts of thanksgiving after the celebration of the divine mysteries, I often repeated this prayer: I will never consent, my God, to be consecrated, except only in the case of a new mission, which has great need of a bishop.”*

He could not imagine that Providence would take him at his word, wanting him to be a bishop in Ethiopia, in a land and within a history where the “episcopal purple” rather than being an honor, was to be a burden on his shoulders.

Preceded by the necessary preparations, having met the Superior General in Paris, and in Rome having received the instructions and indications to follow for reaching and settling down in Abyssinia, the Prefect Apostolic for Ethiopia, Justin De Jacobis, together with Fr. Luigi Montuori and several French confreres, on their way to the mission of the Orient, undertook the long journey towards the land that was to become his second fatherland.

They embarked at Civitavecchia. It was 24 May 1839, the Feast of Mary, Help of Christians.

(STEPHEN INDIA, C.M., Translator)

St Justin de Jacobis: Founder of the New Catholic Generation and Formator of its Native Clergy in the Catholic Church of Eritrea and Ethiopia

*by Abba Iyob Ghebresellasie, C.M.
Province of Eritrea*

Introduction

Biblical References to the Introduction of Christianity in the Two Countries

While historians and archeologists still search for hard evidence of early Christian settlements near the western shore of the Red Sea, it is not difficult to find biblical references to the arrival of Christianity in our area.

And behold an Ethiopian, eunuch, a minister of Candace, queen of Ethiopia, who was in charge of all her treasurers, had come to Jerusalem to worship.... (Acts 8:27).

According to ethnologists, the name Ethiopia is attributed to those people who have the same language and culture still living in the Horn of Africa. And although there is no agreement among historians, either about the location of the residence of Queen Candace, or on the boundaries of her territory, there are narratives by native historians that can serve, to some extent, as sources. On the basis of these biblical references and traditional accounts, we can say that the Christian faith was introduced in the coastal areas of Eritrea during the first centuries of Christianity. Origin, the Egyptian Church father, writes: "The Gospel is not said to have been preached to all the Ethiopians especially to those who lived beyond the river."¹

Christianity in the IV Century in Eritrea and in Various Border Regions of Ethiopia

There is no doubt that the Christian faith was introduced to the Axumite Kingdom through the Eritrean coastal areas near the actual seaport of Massawa, and most probably through the ancient harbor of Adulis. And from Adulis up to Axum, there are many ancient ruins in Eritrea such as Quohaito, Tokonda, Abba Meta, and Metera that offer historical evidence of early Christian presence.² Although archeologists began excavating some of these historical sights in the second half of the 20th century, their work was interrupted by the 30-year war for Eritrean independence.

Both Eusebius and Rufinus, historians of the early Church, confirm the arrival of Christianity in Eritrea/Ethiopia. St. Frumentius was consecrated bishop in the Fourth Century by Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, who "bade him return in the grace of God whence he had come." An ancient Ghe'ez Martirology offers more details about Frumentius' mission and ministry as bishop of Ethiopia.³ St. Frumentius was instrumental in the evangelization of the southern plateaus of Eritrea and the nearby northern regions of Ethiopia.

¹Sergew Hable-Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa.

²Daniele Giotto and Olinto Marinelli, *Risultati Scientifici*, Florence, 1912, p. 470.

³Hable-Sellassie, *op. cit.*

Later Missionaries Attempted to Restore the Catholic Faith in the Highlands of Eritrea and the Nearby Ethiopian Regions

C. Conti Rossini, the writer and historian explains how the Ethiopian Church, in its foundation, was a follower of Catholic orthodoxy, as was the Alexandrian Church upon which it depended. The Monophysite Heresy was accepted by the Church of Alexandria, and since Ethiopia received its bishops from Alexandria, the Ethiopian Church, contrary to its origins, also became Monophysite (probably unconsciously). Leaving aside the issue of how the Ethio-Eritrean Church became Monophysite, many Catholic missionaries attempted to regain its followers for the Church of Rome.

Emperor Zarajacob of Ethiopia, accepting the invitation of Pope Eugenius IV, sent Abbot Andrew of St. Antony Monastery in Egypt and a deacon named Peter, as delegates to participate in the Council of Florence in 1441.⁴

From 1555 to 1632, many Jesuit missionaries were sent to Ethiopia to restore the unity of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, these missionaries had little understanding of the culture and the ecclesiastical and liturgical customs of the Ethio-Eritrean Church, and were eventually driven out of the country altogether. However, during their presence in the area, they gained new members for the Catholic Church. These new Catholics were also persecuted, and many sought refuge in remote areas in order to keep their Catholic faith. Amazingly, they were able to resist for over two centuries, though they were without priests to assist them.

- From 1637 to 1642, Capuchin Friars attempted to enter Eritrea and Ethiopia. But they were arrested and killed by the civil authorities in the area where they entered the country.

- Other Franciscan missionaries tried to enter from 1700 to 1714. They were imprisoned however, and later stoned to death near Gondar.

- The Church of Rome never gave up. An Ethiopian, Ghiorghis Ghebreigziabher, was appointed bishop and given the name Tobia. He was a student of the Propaganda Fide in Rome.⁵ He was sent as Bishop of Adulis and arrived in Eritrea with his companion. Both worked hard to establish the Catholic Church once again. However, this time too, Abuna Tobia was forced to leave the country and flee to Cairo in 1797.

The Coming of St. Justin de Jacobis to both Eritrea and Ethiopia and his Success in Founding the Catholic Church

Justin de Jacobis, a Vincentian missionary with a great gift of holiness and understanding, learned from his founder St. Vincent de Paul, one basic conviction: to follow God's Providence. It was Divine Providence that taught Justin how to deal with the people entrusted to him in his new mission. He was quite aware of the Catholic missionaries who for centuries had done their best to establish the Catholic Church in both Eritrea and Ethiopia, but without success. Justin asked God to inspire him with insight about how to win over the hearts and minds of the Ethiopian people. And Divine Providence responded, giving Justin a remarkable perspective on his new mission field's culture and traditions. In many ways, Justin anticipated Vatican II's vision of culture and its importance by almost a hundred years. In St. Justin's time it was often difficult for foreign missionaries to accept and live the culture of their mission territory. Providence enabled St. Justin, the

⁴Salvatore Pane, *Vita del Beato Giustino De Jacobis*, Naples, 1949, p. 218.

⁵Tobia was born at Debre Mariam Camcam, in the region of Dembia. To him belongs the honor of being the first African bishop in modern times. As the titular Bishop of Adulis, Abune Tobia labored for eight years in Ethiopia. Prior to his episcopal consecration at the insistence of Pope Pius VI, Abune Tobia had taken a vow to retain the use of the Ethiopian rite.

new Apostolic Prefect, to embrace the traditions and culture of the people, and so announce to them the message of the Gospel.

By keeping his heart open to the people, Justin not only was able to win many of them over to him, but also was able to help them open their hearts to God's word. From now on the Catholic Church would become deeply rooted in the lands of Eritrea and Ethiopia, and would soon offer martyrs for the faith. This was due in large part to the farsighted vision of St. Justin and his holiness. He hoped and labored for a Catholic Church with an Ethio-Eritrean face. In this, he succeeded where others had failed. That is why we can affirm that St. Justin de Jacobis is the founder of the new Catholic generation. He, by assimilating all the positive value of his country of adoption, was able to build the structure of the Catholic Church on solid ground. This small community would undergo harassment and persecution. But it would resist and survive.

In his mission of evangelization, St. Justin traveled from place to place. When he decided to establish mission stations, he would entrust their administration to priests and seminarians, while he remained always on the move for new places and new people to evangelize. As soon as he arrived in a new place, Justin would rent one or two "hidmos" (small local residences) for himself and for the people traveling with him. Then he would invite the poor and the common folk to visit him, to talk with him, and to pray with him as well.

As a true man of God, Justin preached the Gospel message in such a simple way that people understood it, and liked him as well. His life was a living example to the people, and so he was able to change, slowly but surely, the unfair image that the people often had of the Catholic Church and of Catholics themselves.

During his twenty years of preaching the Gospel in Eritrea and Ethiopia, St. Justin covered thousands of kilometers visiting large and small villages. Wherever he went, he preached the Good News through words and deeds, and encouraged the small communities he founded to lead lives of integrity and fidelity to their beliefs. In this way, Justin's followers earned a good reputation as well as the respect of ordinary Orthodox believers. Because of the continuous persecutions by the civil and religious authorities, Justin did not gain many disciples. Otherwise he was well accepted everywhere because of his great respect for the people.

The First Establishment of the Catholic Community at Adwa

The years from 1769 to 1855 are known as the "Age of Princes" in the Ethiopian history. There was no central government authority in the northern part of the country. There were only various provincial and regional authorities. In this context, Adwa was an administrative and commercial center. Ubie was its regional prince whose residence was not far from the town of Adwa. By the end of 1839, Adwa had been chosen to be the residence of the newly appointed Apostolic Prefect, Justin de Jacobis. Fremona, on the outskirts of Adwa, had been a center of the Jesuit missionaries some two centuries before Justin's arrival.

De Jacobis gave his first sermon in January 1840. His first efforts aroused mixed feelings as well as admiration for him in the people and the Orthodox clergy of Adwa. It also opened the possibility of gathering together the first Catholic community around him. But, during Justin's absence from Adwa in 1841, Abuna Salama, the newly consecrated Orthodox bishop from Egypt, attempted to uproot this small Catholic community by excommunicating all of its members and its sympathizers. Some of these newly converted persons, afraid of the excommunication which automatically deprived them of the Orthodox sacraments and church burial, abandoned the Catholic faith and formally returned to the Orthodox Church. In spite of this setback however, the faithful of the newly created Catholic community continued to grow steadily. The steady growth of the

community was well known to the fanatical Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities. The prefect was denied access to any space for public worship and he had to celebrate the Holy Mass and confer the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Confession secretly in hidden places.

The Orthodox authorities considered Justin's presence to be a scandal and a sacrilege. He and the Catholic community were denounced to the Orthodox bishop, Abuna Salama. Fortunately, the local prince Ubie greatly respected Justin and so his Orthodox foes were unable to carry out their plans for expelling the Prefect and uprooting the small community he founded. Ubie granted a small territory to St. Justin which included a few nearby villages. This was in compensation for the service he rendered to the delegation which went to Egypt to request a new bishop for Ethiopia.

Adwa was also very near Addi Abun, the residence of the Orthodox bishop. The presence of the Catholic community so near the bishop became intolerable. The other Orthodox authorities also continued their opposition. They treated De Jacobis and his companions badly. And they threatened the newly converted families with excommunication and harassment.

There was no choice for the poor Prefect but to move out of Adwa. Convinced of God's providence, Justin searched for a suitable place to live peacefully and continue his ministry. In 1844, he traveled back to Eritrea and stayed for half a year in Zeazega. He then returned to Agame. Before moving his clergy out of Adwa, he founded a small Catholic community in nearby Enticio. Here, St. Justin was given a piece of land by a delegate of the German government named Mr. Shamir. This gentleman, who had formerly been a Protestant, was received into the Catholic Church by Justin, and married a Catholic woman from the local area. Because of this donation of land, the Prefect was able to build a small house and an oratory, and he appointed a priest to look after the tiny community as well as a "debtera" (a master of liturgical ceremonies) to teach catechism and liturgical music. De Jacobis and his confrere Biancheri decided to move on, but would return now and then to visit the community. In May of 1845 the majority of the priests and seminarians moved to Guala, where in the meantime, St. Justin had bought a piece of land and built Mary Immaculate Seminary.

The Presence of the Catholic Community at Adwa

In 1844 Ghebremikael (Blessed) officially declared his allegiance to the doctrine of the two natures in Christ. From now on, Ghebremikael would accompany Justin in many of his journeys, especially to the famous monastery of Gunda Gunde to the northeast of Guala. De Jacobis was given the name of Abba Yacob-Mariam, or Jacob of Mary, by his followers because of his great devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

The visit of the white Prefect and the highly respected monk Abba Ghebremikael deeply moved the monks of the monastery. Because of the good impression made by Justin and Ghebremikael, a number of the monks began to consider following them to Guala. Abba Teklehaimanot (the elder, to distinguish him from Teklehaimanot the younger who would write the first biography of De Jacobis) was one of the monks who followed them, joining them even on their journey to Eritrea. Teklehaimanot suggested that the Prefect ask permission to buy some land from the villagers of Guala, his hometown. De Jacobis was able to buy a small piece of land near the Orthodox church of St. Ghiorghis (St. George). In 1845, in less than a year, St. Justin built the seminary and transferred both the seminarians and some of his priests from Adwa to Guala. The Prefect also built a house near the seminary for the youth and the adults who came from nearby villages for catechetical instructs. Many children along with their families, were attracted by the Catholic way of life and by the exemplary behavior of the seminarians, and soon joined the Catholic community. Tahtai-Zeban, the parish priest of Maiberazio, to the northeast of Guala, along with his parishioners and those of a another village named Biera, joined the Catholic community of Guala.

St. Justin, in an attempt to resolve the shortage of Catholic priests, planned to send some of his seminarians to Egypt for further training and ordination to the priesthood. However, Guglielmo

Massaia, who would later become cardinal, had just arrived as Apostolic Prefect of the southern part of Ethiopia. He visited Guala in 1846 and the following year ordained new priests and received into the Catholic Church others who had been exercising their priesthood in the Orthodox Church. There were 15 altogether. This event gave tremendous momentum to De Jacobis' apostolic efforts. The new Catholic priests were assigned to different villages and the Catholic faith became more established and began to thrive.

The ministry of the Catholic communities was met by resistance and persecution on the part of some of the Orthodox. Abuna Salama used the threat of excommunication to try to stop Justin's ministry. Salama also sought the intervention of the civil authorities to continue the harassment of the Catholic communities. Soon the Catholics came to be viewed as outcasts and many had their properties confiscated and were expelled from their homes. Confronted with this persecution, some Catholics chose to flee rather than deny their faith. Others remained in their home villages, willing to accept the risks. Some also renounced their newfound Catholic faith and returned to the Orthodox Church. However the Catholic community as a whole remained faithful despite the persecutions, and would transmit its faith to future generations.

The Establishment of the Catholic Community at Alitena, among the Irob

Two years before the transfer of both the priests and the seminarians from Guala to Alitena, there was already a Catholic community established among the Irob Bukneito ethnic group centered around Alitena. Upon their conversion to the Catholic faith, some of the elders of the Irob Bukneito expressed, on behalf of their entire people, their determination to remain committed to Catholicism on the condition that De Jacobis promise to provide them with Catholic priests to meet their spiritual needs.

In 1848, just one year after the ordinations celebrated by the Apostolic Prefect Massaia in Guala, many of the Catholics in Guala were forced to flee to Alitena because of a persecution ordered by Abuna Salama. They were soon followed by the community of Mary Immaculate Seminary. Even though the seminary only existed in Alitena for a few years, the impact on the Catholic community there was remarkable. The community was strengthened by the presence of the seminary and would be able to remain faithful against all odds. However after only one year in Alitena, the seminary began to undergo both internal and external conflicts.

De Jacobis had to return hurriedly from Menkulu near the Red Sea, to address the situation. He went back to see Prince Ubie and sought his help to protect his ministry against Abuna Salama's continuous threats. The success of De Jacobis was short-lived. From Alitena, he appealed to Prince Ubie many times, but his pleas for justice went unheeded. The local authorities repeatedly ransacked the seminary forcing De Jacobis and the seminary community to flee for their own safety. Because of the persecution, in 1851 Justin was obliged to move the seminary once again, this time to Halay in the zone of Aret in the southeastern highlands of Eritrea. He left several priests behind in Alitena to care for the Catholic community.

The Catholic Community in the South-Eastern Highlands of Eritrea and Halay

Beginning in 1850, De Jacobis began providing spiritual assistance to the people of Aret, centered in Halay and the villages of Awhene and Maarda. Because the people welcomed him and his guidance, he assigned Abba Emnetu, one of his priests, to stay in Halay and build a residence there. In 1851, the majority of the priests and seminarians moved from Alitena to Halay. Convinced of the loyalty of the people of Halay, De Jacobis moved westward to the region of Seyah.

In 1849, Justin de Jacobis was consecrated bishop in Massawa by the Apostolic Vicar and future cardinal, G. Massaia. The evangelical simplicity of the ceremony impressed his followers.

Justin was thus able to carry out his ministry, eventually naming Biancheri as his bishop coadjutor and eventual successor. The three Catholic dioceses in Eritrea exist today because of the growth of the Church from the time of its evangelizer and founder, Justin de Jacobis.

De Jacobis, Formator of the Native Ethio-Eritrean Clergy

Many foreign missionaries did their best to transplant the Gospel message and form both Eritrean and Ethiopian Catholics. Some were even martyred because of their response to the Lord's call. Yet they failed to establish the Catholic Church within the cultural context of Ethiopia and Eritrea. De Jacobis was determined not to commit the same mistakes, and was inspired to focus his energies on the formation of native clergy. Because of this, Justin succeeded where others had failed. He is held in such high esteem that even today he is not referred to as "St. Justin," but rather as "our father Justin de Jacobis" by both clergy and laity. This affectionate title is the expression of a deep-felt love for the man who brought them to the Catholic faith.

At the time of Justin de Jacobis' episcopal consecration, the Catholic Church had committed itself to sending as many missionaries as possible throughout the world under the auspices of "Propaganda Fide." Pius IX, who named Justin bishop, did his best to support the missions by constituting hundreds of prefectures, vicariates and dioceses all over the world.

Unfortunately, many European missionaries did not see the need for establishing seminaries for indigenous clergy. Justin de Jacobis was one of the few who experienced and responded to this need. He wrote to his superiors:

It is more fruitful and successful to deal with the native priests than with the European missionaries who are not familiar with the local and social cultures of the native people.

Impressed by their intellectual capacity, and their knowledge of their social context, De Jacobis dedicated himself totally to the formation of the native seminarians. The students became convinced of the dedication, love, and availability of their formator. Because of this mutual understanding and respect, the seminarians remained loyal, overcoming all sorts of obstacles and persecution. De Jacobis was able to lay down a strong foundation for the Church by training native priests, an idea that would only be fully appreciated and supported some hundred years after his death. Many missionaries from abroad were convinced of the superiority of their own culture, and were not able to appreciate the culture of the people whom they were sent to evangelize. Despite their hard work, they failed to see the usefulness and practicality of forming local clergy. This attitude handicapped their success in evangelization.

In our case, the native clergy, well prepared by De Jacobis, became the backbone of the Catholic community. During the Second World War, when many foreign missionaries were forced to flee, a good number of Eritrean diocesan priests, at the request of their bishop, Kidanemariam Kassa, rushed to fill the vacuum left by the expulsion of the foreigners in central and southern Ethiopia.

St. Justin de Jacobis' Profound Respect for the Native Clergy

From the moment that De Jacobis set foot in this new country, he became aware of the great respect for the clergy in Ethio-Eritrean society. And he reinforced that respect in all his dealings with them as well. These sentiments are to be found in his first address directed to the Orthodox clergy:

... As you are priests, so am I. As you are confessors, so am I. As you are preachers of the Gospel, so too am I. Therefore if you permit me to celebrate the Mass, I will. If you permit me

to hear confessions, I will. If you let me preach the Gospel, I will. But if you do not want me to, I will not do it."⁶

Justin's main opponents all along had been the Orthodox clergy, yet he persistently continued to respect and love them. The doors of his residence were always open to them. He also refused to be engaged in futile theological discussions which would lead nowhere. On the contrary, he never permitted his confreres or his students to criticize them. When the Orthodox clergy permitted him, he was very happy to join them in their prayers and liturgical services. Justin even invited some of the Orthodox to teach his students liturgical music and prayers. Moreover, because of his deep respect and veneration for them, De Jacobis visited many of the monasteries in both countries in order to deepen his knowledge of their formation and their way of life. He also had a keen interest in their methods of exercising the apostolate. He was impressed with the way that the Orthodox Christians responded to the teaching and guidance of their clergy.

Justin's respect was reciprocated in many cases, and he was often welcomed into the liturgical and social gatherings of the Orthodox. He was thus better able to understand their reality. This contact with the clergy also allowed him to meet the people and gain their respect and admiration.

Native Priests, Formed by De Jacobis, Became Pillars of the Local Catholic Church

On the last day of his life, 31 July 1860, just three hours before his death, Justin de Jacobis gathered his disciples around him and told them:

... Following the example of Our Lord who said good-bye to Our Lady and to his apostles, I say good-bye to you.... Drive far from your house all calumny and bickering, love one another, remain firm in the faith and above all, practice charity. Be the light of your people (Ethiopia).

He then called the seminarians to his bedside and said:

*Since God has chosen you, be careful to follow the true path. I propose to you as your models the monks. They are good and they are the light which illuminates you. Follow their example.*⁷

Soon after the death of this extraordinary formator and father, there arose a serious disagreement among the missionaries and the native priests. The missionaries wanted to change the whole method used by De Jacobis. But the native priests took an uncompromising stand to remain faithful to the way of life taught to them by their spiritual father, though it would cause them great suffering and isolation. They appealed to the Propaganda Fide, but unfortunately their case went unheeded for quite a long time. They would reflect over and over on the last words of their beloved father and formator. The native clergy went through a very difficult experience in order to remain faithful to De Jacobis. Through their long struggle and bitter sufferings, they remained steadfast in their faith and in their devotion to their father and educator, Justin de Jacobis.

In this way his disciples, both in Eritrea and Ethiopia, committed themselves to be the light and the foundation of their local Church. Even today, despite being a minority, the Catholic Church is playing a major role in the areas of education, healthcare and human promotion. Certainly all this is due to the proper inculturation of the Gospel message. Though the Gospel had been introduced in the first evangelization, it took root and spread with the reintroduction of the Catholic faith by St. Justin de Jacobis: tireless Apostle of Abyssinia, today the countries of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

⁶ Abba Teklehaumnot, *The Life of Abuna Jacob*, p. 168.

⁷ Kevin Mahoney, *The Ebullient Phoenix*, Vol. I, pp. 213-215.

St. Justin de Jacobis and his dealing with the Coptic Christians of Ethiopia

*By Luigi Mezzadri, C.M.
Province of Rome*

The gravest sin for an historian is to try to understand a personage with categories foreign to his time and his culture.

Speaking of St. Justin de Jacobis (1800-1860), we do not wish to attribute to him a role in the ecumenical movement and dialogue. The ecumenical movement began after his death. It began in the womb of the Protestant Churches in the beginning of the 20th century, and only a little later did the Catholic Church take interest in it.

Having said this, we believe that St. Justin constitutes a precursor for an encounter, and for respect between Catholics and Copts.

To understand the saint, we have to pass again through the history of the relationship between Catholicism and Ethiopian Christianity and then consider his thinking and action toward these Christians who mark their existence well before the Council of Chalcedon.

Meetings and Misunderstandings

Ethiopia was the only Christian kingdom, even if it was Monophysite, in Africa. The Portuguese came in contact with this mythic nation of the “priest Gianni” in the 16th century.¹ The negus Lebna Dengel (or David: 1508-1540), after having inflicted some defeats on the Moslems, was overthrown by an able military chief, Ahmad ihn Ibrahim, called Gagn, “the Left Hand.” Helped by the Turks, he defeated the Ethiopians, and sacked their territory, causing incalculable damage to the artistic and cultural treasures.

¹ J. Ludolf, *Historia Aethiopica*, Frankfurt 1681 and *Commentarius ad suam Historiam Aethiopicam*, Frankfurt 1691; J.-B. COULBEAUX, *Historie politique et religieuse de l'Abyssinie*, 2 vol., Paris 1929; L. Lozza, *La confessione di Claudio re l'Etiopia (1540-1559)*, Palermo 1958; J. Doresse, *Histoire de l'Éthiopie*, Paris 1970 and *La vie quotidienne des Éthiopiens chrétiens (aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle)*, Paris 1972; Tewelde Beiene, *La politica cattolica di Seltan Sägäd I (1607-1632) e la missione della Compagnia di Gesù in Etiopia. Precedenti, evoluzione e problematiche, 1589-1632*, Roma 1983 (I use also the original of the thesis, with the abbreviation TB, and the page, since the publication is an extract of some chapters); P. Caraman, *The lost Empire. The Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, 1555-1634*, London 1985 (French trans., 1988).

The new emperor Claudius (1540-1559) then asked help from Goa. An expedition of 400 Portuguese was sent, commanded by Christopher da Gama, the son of Vasco. He was defeated and died; but his rival, “the Left Hand,” was mortally wounded by a flaming iron rod, and he, too, died.

Because the Christians of Ethiopia were Monophysites, the type of apostolate for them was different from that used in Moslem or Black Africa. There was no need to make a “first proclamation.” Because they were subjects of the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, the only possible strategy that made sense was to bring in a Latin Patriarch. With a substitution of person and the support of Portugal and of the negus, the design to unite the Church of Ethiopia to Rome would be accomplished.

This is what St. Ignatius of Loyola thought when, in agreement with João III of Portugal, he sent an expedition of Jesuits, led by João Nunes Barreto, accompanied by Andrés da Oviedo and Melchior Carneiro. The first would have become the Patriarch, and the other two coadjutor bishops.

St. Ignatius wrote to these missionaries that they were to make the negus understand that “there is no hope of salvation outside of the Catholic Church.”²

Their appearance at court was to be ostentatious and solemn so as to make an impression on the Ethiopians. Among other things, “the bulls and the briefs from far away were to be in evidence whenever possible.”³ As means of evangelization, St. Ignatius counseled schools and colleges; many were to be sent to Goa, Coimbra, and Rome, or Cyprus. Soon they were to found a university. But with the missionaries there were to go some “ingenious men” who would teach bridge building, land cultivation, fishing, the cure of the sick, so that the Ethiopians would learn “that every good thing, even the physical ones, come to them with the religion.”⁴ A delicate point was that of penitential discipline, which in Ethiopia was very rigorous, even if it did not produce great results in the way people lived. For this reason, “the bitter herbs which they use in their fasts and in their other bodily [penitential] exercises can apparently be moderated with sweetness and reduced according to a measure of discretion.” But above all, they were to make understood that charity mattered more than mortifications, and for this reason they were to found hospitals, and were to be attentive to the works of mercy.⁵

²C. Beccari, *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, 15 vol., Rome 1903-1917, I, 240.

³C. Beccari, *ibid.* I, 241.

⁴C. Beccari, *ibid.* I, 250.

⁵C. Beccari, *ibid.* I, 243, 249.

To prepare the path for the mission he sent two Jesuits as an advance team, Gonçalo Rodriguez and Brother Fulgencio Freire.⁶ Fr. Rodriguez, aware of the sentiments of some of the personages present, instead of limiting himself to the exploring function, thought it would be right to begin a polemic confrontation. He composed a little tract with a rude, short-tempered tone that the negus did not appreciate, since it attacked some errors of the Ethiopians that they, for their part, had never defended. At a certain point the Jesuit suggested to the negus to submit to the Pope.⁷ When he returned to Goa, he claimed that the invitations made by the negus were only for a purpose: he did not want union with Rome, but the military assistance of the Portuguese. He brought a tract with him, called the *Confession of Claudius*, in defense of the doctrine of the Ethiopian Church. In the first part it explained their Trinitarian doctrine, then went on to show that the Ethiopian Church had always been faithful to the apostolic tradition, and, finally, it explained certain rituals, such as the Saturday observance, the reasons for maintaining circumcision, and the reasons why Ethiopians did not eat the meat of pigs.⁸

The Mission with Oviedo left at the same time, and made its home base at Fremona, near Axum. Oviedo planned to convince the emperor by showing him the need for unity of faith and a return to unity with Rome and the shallowness of the arguments based on fidelity to the handed-down traditions.⁹ Oviedo wrote a work entitled *The Primacy of the Roman Church*. The negus read it attentively, and reacted harshly, declaring that anyone who would dare to adhere to the Catholic Church would be subject to the death penalty. Oviedo was offended, and solemnly declared, on February 2, 1559, that the Ethiopians were “refractory and obstinate against the Church,” because they had no desire to return to union with Rome. He accused them of repeating Baptism, of observing Saturday as the Sabbath and of continuing to require circumcision, of not eating the meat of pigs, of declaring a man who entered the Church after having had relations with his lawful wife a sinner, of insisting on the unity of nature in Christ, and of celebrating the feast of Dioscurus.¹⁰ It is a very bizarre document because it mixes doctrinal elements with others of a different kind, things already explained (among other places) in the *Confessions of Claudius*.

After the failure of this mission (in the interim the Jesuits worked only among the Portuguese), the sons of St. Ignatius tried again, sending in 1589 two Spaniards, Antonio de Monserrate and Pedro Paez, disguised as Armenian merchants. The first time they tried to enter the country they were captured and

⁶Tewelde Beiene, *op. cit.*, 77-83.

⁷Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 82.

⁸The negus made his explanations using reasons of custom and tradition.

⁹Tewelde Beiene, *op.cit.*, 93.

¹⁰Tewelde Beiene, *ibid*, 95s.

carried off into slavery to Yemen; once freed, they attempted the trip again, and were received by the negus Za-Dengel (1597-1607).

Paez in the first place started to study Gh'eez. He understood that the problem of the separation between Rome and the Ethiopian Church was not doctrinal, but disciplinary in nature. The Ethiopians were proud of their own traditions and did not wish to abandon them. Prison had taught him to respect the rhythm of life in the Orient; his serious study had led him to appreciate the theology of Abyssinia, distant from the complexity of Western theology and scholastic conceptualism. He also valued the piety of the Ethiopians, their Eucharistic and Marian devotion. At court he found refined people, the Liqs, and the Defteras.

The negus was aware that his power was not secure. Surrounding him were knotted hidden agendas, power and influence plays. For this reason he wished an alliance with Portugal, that he knew was possible only with religious submission. For this reason he wrote to the Pope and to the King of Portugal (but in reality the two crowns of Spain and Portugal were united in the person of the King of Spain) to ask their help against their common enemies, the Turks. He had come to see that he needed an alliance with the Catholic-Portuguese part of the world against his enemies. For this reason he favored discussions in every way, openly taking the side of the Jesuits. Paez, for his part, was seductive and convincing. He had an open personality, he could speak, and he had a grasp of Coptic literature. Before long his arguments were shown to be winning, but not convincing. He was clearly superior to his interlocutors at the level of dialectic, but not at the psychological. The negus wanted to be present for Catholic celebrations that were admired for their pomp, their serenity, and their beauty. In a secret meeting the negus admitted that he had been very struck by the demonstration of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff. He said he was ready to submit, and requested, as a concrete sign of reconciliation, the sending of a Catholic Patriarch and the hand of the daughter of Philip III for his son.

The question all this makes arise is: was he sincere, or were his affirmations interested? Certainly it is difficult to say that after three weeks of debate the arguments that were used were so persuasive that they brought about such a complete change of position.¹¹

The Great Crisis

The negus was overtaken by events. He was defeated and killed in battle by some of the ras, not for religious motives, as Portuguese sources believe, but

¹¹Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 26-28

for political ones.¹² Yaqob was recalled to the throne (1605-1607), but he was overthrown by Susenyos (Setan Sägäd: 1607-1632). He was 33 years old, an excellent soldier, but he had to struggle strenuously to subdue the country.

At once he showed himself favorable to the Jesuits. Right after his coronation at Axum he gave the priests 30 ounces of gold. At court the first conversions took place, a sign of a change of climate. The brother of the King, Se'elä Krestos became, according to Almeida, a second St. Paul, in destroying the errors of Judaism and of the heresies of Eutyches and Dioscurus.¹³ He organized religious colloquies, but instead of acting as a referee, he showed himself favorable to the Jesuits. At the end, the emperor imposed silence on the adversaries.

Little by little he began a turn toward intransigence. He began to act as if he were possessed by a mania for omnipotence. While he justified himself, declaring himself free to imitate his illustrious ancestor Solomon in maintaining a well-furnished harem, he sought to crush his foreign (Falasacia, Galla) and domestic enemies. Abuna Simeon reacted with an excommunication, but for the moment it had no success. Reluctant monks were whipped. In 1615 the negus published a Christological edict that did not set down the limit of the two natures, something very unpopular with the Monophysites. In this he affirmed that Christ was truly God and truly man; human nature in him was not dissolved, but was united with the divine nature in one sole person.¹⁴ This was well put together, and thus acceptable. But the way in which it was imposed was open to criticism. The Monophysites feared that it might be the first step in a latinization and a more rigid Catholicizing. The dissident ras on their part found convenient the gathering of any occasion of discord to stir people up. Their working principle: the worse it is, the better for us.

A series of insurrections, wars, and palace intrigues followed, and these forced the negus into extended battles. At his side he had capable Catholic generals, of whom the first among all was his brother Se'elä Krestos.

The Jesuits in the meantime had given themselves to translations, to the running of colleges, which in 1620 were 3, with 80 students, to the evangelization of pagan areas like Agaw, which had gotten a promise of protection from the emperor in return for their accepting the Jesuits. In their correspondence two lines of thought began to face each other: the problem of the Catholic patriarchate and that of military support. The negus asked for 1500 Spanish soldiers, with whom he would be able to defeat his foes.

¹²Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 32.

¹³Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 65.

¹⁴Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 85.

The growing difficulties, instead of moderating the zeal of the ruler, made his love of self and his activism even more evident. He prohibited the observance of the Sabbath, and then, while the protest over the rebellion of the populations of the Damot grew, he proclaimed his adherence to Catholicism. This happened solemnly on November 2, 1621. In a background of great pomp the imperial treasurer Mälke'a Krestos recalled the Christological errors and the sad finish of the enemies of Orthodoxy, and he proclaimed valid for the Kingdom the condemnation of Dioscurus at Chalcedon. The only true doctrine was that of the two natures of Christ, not a doctrine brought in from outside, but one taught from the beginning in Ethiopia. The conclusion was: "this is the faith of the emperor, and this is our faith."¹⁵

Meanwhile, with the death of Paez in 1622, the mission remained short of missionaries, since there were four priests and a brother. The Jesuits made an effort, and sent a notable group of missionaries, and presented to Philip IV a list of candidates for the post of Patriarch. Alfonso Mendez (1597-1639) was chosen, a good theologian from Evora, who, however, knew nothing of Ethiopia. He was consecrated, with his coadjutor, Diego Seco, March 12, 1623. A second coadjutor had also been chosen, Juan da Rocha. Rarely had people less qualified been chosen for roles so delicate. Mendez was to arrive in Goa incognito, because the spies of the Turks were watching and could always smell good prey. Instead, he let himself take the hand of the mania of ostentation and he arrived with pontifical honors. Then he started questioning the priests about economic matters.

Finally he arrived in Ethiopia (1625), where, with the new personnel, an accentuated latinization was taking place. A Jesuit was nominated superior of all the monasteries and churches of the empire, something never heard of before. They thought that the Ethiopian Church did not validly administer the sacraments. They then started to purge the Ethiopian Missal and to mitigate the fast that the Ethiopians kept with such precision. Because they had communicated some doubts about the validity of the sacraments, they chose the "surer" solution: they rebaptized and they reordained.

Mendez, as opposed to Paez, who had acted prudently, instead of studying the situation and learning the language and the usages of the country, began to act immediately without tact, more like an autocrat than a pastor. Rather than seek, he imposed. He believed himself clothed with an almost absolute authority. Not even the Pope in Rome was so decisive and peremptory.

February 11, 1626, the solemn profession of faith of the negus was held. The date of Easter was imposed according to Roman calculation; a similar oath

¹⁵Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 147.

was imposed on all the provinces; the adversaries of the faith according to Chalcedon were liable to the law of lese majesty; all priests were suspended until they were approved by Mendez, anyone who did unite himself to the Roman Church and hid defaulters was liable to capital punishment; and the Wednesday fast was substituted by the Marian fast of Saturday. Barneto showed his true colors by an even more menacing gesture. He entered into the mother church of Ethiopia in which they believe the Ark of the Covenant is kept,¹⁶ he destroyed the Tabernacle, after the monks had removed the Tablets, and had a new church built under a different title. In the place of the *Sancta Sanctorum*, a Roman altar was erected.¹⁷

Mendez continued on in his inflexibility. He did not wish to allow those who wished to return, even partially, to the Ethiopian rite. He had a famous abbot, an enemy to the catholic restoration, disentombed; he ordered a witch to be whipped; he permitted the missionaries to continue with their reforming assaults; and he did not act tactfully with a divorced princess.

The provinces were boiling. The emperor, exasperated, turned to the Patriarch for support. He asked that he might concede the restoration of the Coptic liturgy, of the Wednesday fast, the practice of circumcision, and the return of the date of Easter. Mendez granted some requests, but refused brusquely to permit the return to the rite of circumcision and the Easter celebration according to Coptic chronology.

On April 23, 1632, under the pressure of the hordes of rebellious country people, the emperor published a decree that seemed to Mendez an usurpation of his patriarchal prerogatives. The Patriarch ordered the negus to revoke the decree. He did, but by now events had overtaken his will. On June 24, 1632, he was forced to grant religious liberty. He did not abdicate, as many historians hold, but he was reduced to figurehead status. It was the first step in the suppression of Catholicism.

Once the negus died, declaring in full voice “I die in the holy faith of Rome,”¹⁸ Mendez and the missionaries were expelled, and the more visible Catholics either forced into exile or condemned to death. Monophysitism was imposed again, and Ethiopia closed itself for two centuries to outside influx.

A Capuchin mission was founded in Cairo, thanks to Fr. Joseph de Tremblay. Frs. Agatangelo from Vendôme and Cassiano from Nantes got as far as Tebaide. Also, the Franciscans and, from 1698, the Jesuits, set foot in Egypt. From there they tried to arrive in Ethiopia. The problem for newcomers was,

¹⁶From it the monks had removed and hidden the Tablets of the Law

¹⁷Tewelde Beiene, *op. cit.*, 283.

¹⁸Tewelde Beiene, *ibid.*, 377.

above all, in arriving. By now the doors of Ethiopia were closed, and the Copts felt a profound aversion to the “Franks.”

The Drama of Unity in St. Justin

When St. Justin¹⁹ arrived in Ethiopia (1839), he brought nothing new. If we examine his *Diario*²⁰ we clearly see that his thought process was not different from that of his contemporaries. He saw a Church that neglected the sacraments, needed of reform, and professed doctrinal positions that he judged heretical.

In a letter he wrote on June 4, 1841, he addressed himself to “the head of the heretical Copts.”²¹ A little while later his *Diario* contains an imaginary conversation between a traveler, who is Justin himself, and the Abuna Salama:

"Listen, Son" — he began to tell me while he squeezed my right hand between his two warm and trembling hands — "the Christians of this, my country, have now become like a bunch of grapes cut from the vine. For 40 years this has made me cry rivers of tears, day and night, in the sight of God, my Lord."

In fact, this word alone had been enough to open in his eyes what was like two fountains of tears. The expression which he used to describe the state of Christianity in Abyssinia, taking one of the most terrible images which Jesus Christ used as he spoke of sects and heresies, and pronounced by that man who was so moved by the evils in his country, conquered the great difficulty that I have to shed tears, for it made my cry like a baby.

It took a lot for both of us to return to the calm necessary to pick up the thread of our conversation. "Today is not a fast day" — the old man returned to his theme — "the time to dine has passed. Let us bless God all together for the providence, which he sends us, and then we will continue our conversation."

Salama: The holy David was certainly correct in the greater liveliness of his prayer, to cry out: 'Save me, O Lord'; because he was a saint, and yet he fell into sin. Old Eutyches, the hermit of

¹⁹ The biographies dedicated to the saint are numerous: that of Arata (1939), Baetman (1939), Castagnola (1939), D'Agostin (1910), De Dominicis (1899), Demimuid (1905), Devin (1866), Guerra (1975), Herrera (1946), Larigaldie (1910), Lubeck (1922), Pane (1949), Salotti (1940), Spirito (1941) Troisi (1928-1935). Still valid is the biography of E. Lucatelli-L. Betta, *L'Abuna Yaqob Mariam (S. Giustino de Jacobis)*, Rome 1975.

²⁰ Giustino De Jacobis, *Scritti. I Diario*, Rome 2000.

²¹ Giustino De Jacobis, *ibid.*, 162-164.

Constantinople, who combated the blasphemies of Nestorius like an apostle, fell into the abyss of heresy.

Traveler: Ah! What human frailty. But, my father, it is said that in that condemnation of Eutyches' decided perfidy and vile jealousy went unchecked against the good Archimandrite. (...)

Salama: My son, call to mind Bishop Eusebius of Dorilea. It was the first time that Nestorius dared to proffer in the great Cathedral of Constantinople his blasphemies when this Eusebius, still a layman and a simple lawyer, stood up: "Patriarch" — he said intrepidly — "traitor of the deposit of faith, what a heresy you offer from such a seat of truth!" In an instant, the eyes of all those Catholics turned to him to see who he was, and to admire the newly made defender of the faith: all Constantinople knew of him from then on, and appreciated him. From that moment all the Catholics of Constantinople recognized him, who applauded his reproach as the most vigorous enemy of Nestorian impiety. The Archimandrite Eutyches, who, in that time and at his advanced age, shone forth as one of the first champions of truth against the errors of Nestorius, loved Eusebius, and became of one heart and one mind with him.

Traveler: Truly?

Salama: This is the truth attested to by all the truthful historians of that time. (...)

Traveler: My father. For what was Eutyches condemned? Was he aware of his error?

Salama: How blessed we would be if he were aware of his error. We Abyssinians would not be separated from the Common Father of the Faithful, from the Successor of St. Peter, from the Roman Pontiff. We would not be like sheep without a shepherd left to the wolves. Instead of confessing his error, he remained obstinate in his sin, and since he knew that the Roman Pontiff is the Head of the Church, he wrote him a letter.²²

In another passage he wrote these clear words:

In Rome there is the true faith. In Rome there is the faith of St. Peter. The faith of St. Peter can never be lacking, as Jesus Christ says. The faith of Rome is the teacher of all. Tend my sheep, as

²²Giustino De Jacobis, *ibid.*, 165-190.

Jesus Christ says. He who holds to the faith of Rome holds the faith of Peter, of Jesus Christ. He who leaves the faith of Rome leaves the faith of Peter, and of Jesus Christ. I hold to the faith of Rome ... in Alexandria there are two Patriarchs, one separated from Rome, the other in union with Rome. If the Patriarch separated from Rome sends here the Abuna, what happened to Abuna Cirillo, who was chased out of Gondar, will happen to him. If an Abuna comes from the one who is in union with Rome, all the questions end. Jesus Christ has made the teacher of faith the Roman Pontiff. Is it true? Therefore, when we have a question we go to the Teacher made by Jesus Christ, and he lays down for us the true faith.

Do you wish to see if the Patriarch of Alexandria is a heretic? Read this book (The Dialogue on Abyssinian Faith in Amharic), and then think. The Patriarch of Alexandria says: "The faith of St. Peter has been lacking." Jesus Christ says: "Your faith, O Peter, will never be lacking!" Who speaks well? Jesus Christ! Therefore, the Patriarch speaks against Jesus Christ; therefore he is heretical. All the Abuni whom he has sent to you since he was separated from Rome were heretical; the faith that they have taught you is heretical. Do you wish to see it? Here there are three faiths, and all three cannot be true, because there is only one true faith. Therefore, in Abyssinia you do not know which one is the true faith. Therefore, your faith is lacking. If you wish to know it, go to the teacher made by Jesus Christ to teach the faith, and he will teach it to you. Where is the teacher of the faith, in Alexandria? No. In Alexandria is the successor of St. Mark. Now, Jesus Christ did not make St. Mark teacher of the whole Church. Where is this teacher, then? In Rome, in Rome is the successor of St. Peter, and the successor of St. Peter is the teacher of the Faith. So, if you like, then ask the Patriarch who is in Alexandria and who holds to the faith of St. Peter for an Abuna. He will come for nothing. In fact he will come to bring you money.²³

The ecclesiological thought of Justin did not change. Actually, it was this, his fidelity to the One Holy that permitted him to profess his faith, even if not to the point of shedding his blood.

From a practical point of view, he was full of attention and charity. He gave himself to guide the delegation of about 50 persons for the choice of an

²³Giustino De Jacobis, *ibid.*, 191-912.

Abuna,²⁴ which the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt had just made. The trip allowed Justin to take the delegation as far as Rome and Jerusalem, which for some, like the future Blessed Ghebre Michael, was a way to know better the Catholic Church. However, this positive result was cancelled out by the choice made of the new Abuna, in the person of the corrupt Fr. Andraos, better known as Abuna Salama (1821-1867).

Naturally, in this picture of the situation one must not forget that Justin did not find difficulties only outside the Church. His own Superior General did not think much of him. His confrere Giuseppe Sapeto left the priesthood. His confrere and successor Msgr. Lorenzo Biancheri was a “harsh and mean” man, who, moreover, showed himself opposed to the establishment of native clergy.

St. Justin was thus a man alone. But his was not the solitude of the wicked, but of the saints. He did not look for approval. Even in dialogue with the Ethiopian Church he spoke the truth. He spoke his faith.

If therefore it is difficult to consider him among those who prepared the way for the ecumenical movement, his true greatness was in his faith founded on the rock through which he lived and died. That faith prepared the way for a dialogue in the sense that he proclaimed with courage the truths in which he believed. This is also a way to open up the path to a meeting with our Coptic brothers.

His contribution to the reconciliation of the churches was different. Above all, he assumed fully local customs, he respected the mentality, and shared the life of the people he was evangelizing. Also, his lifestyle soaked in prayer, his austere but affable conduct and his respect for all assured for him much affection among the Coptic clergy. He did not commit the error of the Jesuits of the XVI-XVII century: he did not abolish ancient customs, he did not criticize rituals or tear down churches and altars. He was not a fierce latinizer. Those who came over to Catholicism were not forced to leave their own rite. From the beginning he worked to form a native clergy, a chore criticized, for example, by Biancheri. But in this way he worked for the future. As convinced as he was in his positions, he did not indulge in polemics. Convinced that he was right, he did not impose himself with intransigence, but with love. This was the winning weapon of Justin, and of all ecumenism.

(Robert Stone, C.M., translator)

²⁴As is known, at that time in Ethiopia there was no Patriarch. This was conceded only in recent times.

Justin De Jacobis: the Art of Dialogue

*by Professor Yaqob Beyené**

Justin De Jacobis, the missionary, did not head off to an African country to preach the Gospel to the pagans, but went into a Christian country to unite the Christians of the African country with the Christians of Rome. I would like, therefore, first of all to say a few introductory words on Ethiopia, this African country of the Christian-Orthodox religion.

Ethiopia is the country formerly known in the West by the name Abyssinia, the name also used by Justin in his diary. Then, later on, precisely because of the influence of Christianity, it became known under the name Ethiopia.¹ It is an African country, but we are dealing with a country with a history completely different from that of the other countries of Africa. This is because, not only did it never experience the yoke of colonialism, but also, and above all, because it is the continuation of the well-known Kingdom of Aksum, a kingdom which, in the period of its greatest splendour (c. 325), had accepted the new religion, Christianity, which has had a decisive influence on its historical-cultural development. Ethiopia is a country in which Christianity has been, for centuries, the strongest reason for its national unity, the country in which Christianity suckled, and saw to the conservation and transmission of, everything which characterises and distinguishes its inhabitants, who are of the Christian-Orthodox faith, from other Africans.

Ethiopia is a country whose Christian religion, identified with national feeling against the threats of invasion by people of a different religion, has strongly contributed to maintaining the independence of the country itself, in which Christianity was the official religion up until 1974.²

At present Ethiopia is a country where Christianity is taken to the point of blending with and identifying itself with national feeling against any external aggressor whatsoever. To sum up, Ethiopia is the country which Christianity transformed into an island, originally in the sea of paganism and now in that of Islam, a Christian island which has sought contacts with Christian countries and has succeeded in creating permanent bonds with the Mediterranean culture and civilization.³

In order to convey some idea of the huge difficulties which Justin De Jacobis had to face in his missionary activity, I feel it necessary to sketch out briefly a picture of the political and cultural situation in Ethiopia as it was in his time.

*Born in Ethiopia, is ordinary professor of Amharic Language and Literature in the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples, and has written several books on Ethiopian cultural themes and theology.

¹The Ethiopians adopted the name Ethiopia for their country because they wanted to claim for themselves, for reasons of national pride, the numerous references to Ethiopia in the Bible.

²This is the year in which Christianity lost its special favourable position as "State religion" because of the activity of the revolutionary military who seized power.

³In order to grasp this all that is needed is to reflect on the pilgrimage which Ethiopian Christians used to make to Palestine, and the establishment of Ethiopian communities along the Mediterranean coastline from Jerusalem to Lebanon, to Cyprus, to Rome, which kept up, through all the centuries, cultural contacts with the West and the Near East.

In 1270 Yekunno Amlak overthrew the Zagwe dynasty and established the so-called Salomonide dynasty. At the same time he moved the Ethiopian capital from Lasta, on the border of southern Tigray, to Sewa territory further south. But here his successors found themselves in a situation which forced them into war with the southern Moslem states, a war which the Christians won, but which lasted, although with interruptions, approximately from 1333 till 1577. The final campaign, which was the most bitter one and is known as the “Gragni War” (the “Left-Handed or Dirty Tricks,” War), was won by the Christians of Ethiopia but with the deciding influence of Portuguese soldiers.

The Portuguese and the Jesuit missionaries, missionaries who came to Ethiopia to collect the payment due because of the help which the Portuguese soldiers had given, were expelled (1632). This payment was the transfer of the Ethiopian people from the Christian-Orthodox faith to the Catholic faith. After this expulsion Ethiopia turned in on itself, beginning an isolation which would last for centuries and which carried the burden of hostility, by now showing itself generally against everything European, but especially against Catholics, who had tried to replace its long cultural tradition with the Latin one.

When the long war between Christians and Moslems was over the Ethiopian State found it had to confront the Oromo invaders, and move its capital to Gondar, in the province of Dambya. Then, after a whole series of events, it arrived, in the second half of the 18th century, at a period known as *zamana masafent* (the era of the princes), in which the *ras*, the great feudal lords of the different Ethiopian regions, affirmed more and more openly their independence from the Salomonide sovereigns, who, becoming more and more powerless, were by now mere puppet emperors.

That was the country’s political situation when Justin De Jacobis arrived in Ethiopia.

Moreover, when Justin arrived not only was the political situation difficult, but the ecclesiastical one also was. The situation in the Church was defined by theological disputes about the unction of Christ. This question was discussed by theologians, and often used to provoke bloody encounters which, in Ethiopia, for centuries did not make any clear distinction between social and religious problems, nor between political and theological conflicts. To clarify that situation we must keep in mind that up till 1974 the spiritual and temporal power in Ethiopia, that is Church and State, were merged and so penetrated each other that, as a result, there was only one single moral entity.

The Ethiopian schools of theology were divided into three distinct traditions:

- a. The Karra school, which was followed by almost all the monasteries of present-day northern Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- b. The Yasaga-Leg school, followed by most of the monasteries of the Sewa region.
- c. The Qebat school, followed by most of the monasteries of the Goggiam region.

Given that there were these three schools of theology which, with the passage of time, became real and distinct politico-religious parties, the Emperor was forced, by the circumstances at any given moment, to proclaim the Christology taught by one of them as the official religion of his kingdom, to the clear disadvantage of the other two. And it must be noted that, not infrequently, following the proclamation of the official doctrine of the Ethiopian State there came severe punishment, including the death penalty, against the principal exponents of the other schools of theology.

Justin De Jacobis arrived in Ethiopia in 1839 and decided to take up residence in Adwa, a small city famous for its obvious hostility towards Europeans, whether Catholic or Protestant. His choice was probably not just because of ease of communications with Massawa and his wish to preserve “the first seeds of Catholic truth,” as Justin himself wrote in his diary, but was also a rational choice.⁴

Adwa is, in fact, situated about 15 kilometers from Aksum, the holy city of all Ethiopians, the cradle of Ethiopian civilization, the city to which Christianity had come in the 4th century, the seat of the mother church of all the ecclesiastical provinces of the country, a church in which, up until the end of the 19th century, all the Emperors of Ethiopia were crowned and received the sanction of the national Church. As well as this, Adwa is close to Framona, the area where the Jesuits had established their residence in the 17th century and which, after they had been expelled, became Addi-Abun and therefore the residence of the Metropolitan of Ethiopia. Besides, one has to bear in mind that Adwa is located in the geographical region in which the well-known Nine Saints, called “Roman” because they came into Ethiopia from the Eastern Roman Empire, had preached the Gospel, reformed customs, spread ascetic practices, and founded monasteries.⁵

We do not know the real reason why Adwa was selected by Justin as his first residence, but we cannot, however, exclude the fact that the saint had preferred it either because of the historical reasons briefly summarised above or because it was a place which allowed him to have easy contact with the people who were the real custodians and channels of traditional Ethiopian culture; namely, the monks who lived in the many monasteries in the surrounding countryside.

It is a well known fact that Ethiopia has always been very hostile towards missionaries, so it is quite legitimate to ask ourselves this question: Why was it that Justin De Jacobis, an ordinary priest, had such success as to earn the title of “founder” of the Ethiopian Catholic Church of the Alexandrian Rite, while both the missionaries who were his predecessors and those who were his contemporaries failed totally? My personal opinion is that there is, in fact, no difficulty in answering that question. It is a certain fact, known to us, that those others failed spectacularly – and continue on failing, even today – because they have tried, and are still trying, to make the Ethiopian Christians convert to Catholicism by:

- a. not entering into dialogue, but getting involved in useless and sterile discussions, without taking into account that Ethiopian theological dialectic is not based on rational reasoning but on continually quoting from Scripture, opposing the opponent’s quotations, in support of one’s own thesis, a form of dialectic totally different from the Western form;
- b. replacing Christianity of the Oriental tradition, which is the Ethiopian form, with Western Christianity, which is, of course, the Christianity of the missions;
- c. imposing the Latin Rite in place of the Ethiopian one, which is an appropriate rite for the local culture;
- d. forbidding respect for local usages and customs, by imposing Western ones.

⁴As regards the choice of Adwa, Justin says in his diary that it was chosen “because of communications with Massaua, and because of not wanting to lose the first seeds of the Catholic truth sown by Fr Sapeto.” G. De Jacobis, *Scritti I. Diario*, Frascati 2000, p. 31. NB: From now on this will be cited as “Diary.”

⁵Diary, pp. 406-407.

Justin De Jacobis, on the other hand, succeeded in achieving marvelous results because, being a man of simplicity, he understood well that:

- a. it was not possible to bring about unity among Christians by means of theological debate, but only by initiating religious dialogue which was frank and open, and based, first of all, on respect for the other;
- b. he was going to have to respect Christianity of the Oriental tradition, such as the Ethiopian, as it was;
- c. he was going to have to use the Ethiopian Rite;
- d. he was going to have to follow usages and customs of the country, apart from those which, in his opinion, were clearly contrary to Gospel teaching.

Now let us have a more detailed look at Justin's art of dialogue.

Justin De Jacobis and the Theological Discussions

Justin De Jacobis, in his first talk or, as the Ethiopians would say, his *manfasawi Cewewet* (spiritual dialogue), which he gave on 26 January 1840 in the Amharic language to some clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, did not say "I am here before you so that we can discuss the theological problems which divide your Church from that of Rome." No, what he did say was "The mouth is the door to the heart. Speaking is the heart's key. When I open my mouth I unlock the heart's door. When I speak to you I hand you the key to [my] heart. Come in and see that the Holy Spirit has planted in my heart [...] a great love for the Ethiopian Christians."⁶ We see, now, that Justin speaks of his love for the Ethiopian Christians, love which the Holy Spirit has caused "to live in him" as the Amharic text has it, but he avoids the usual theological discussions. It is as if he has taken into account that Catholics involved in theological dialectic had been labelled, by the Ethiopian experts of the 17th century, as "dissimulators,"⁷ and also that an important Ethiopian theologian of the first half of the 15th century, Giyorgis of Sagla, at the end of discussions with a Venetian, had declared that "the malice of the wiles (*min*)" of the sons of Leo is greater than the amount of sand on the banks of the River Ghion (the Blue Nile)."⁸

When Tigrina-speaking Ethiopians want to say that someone is not sincere they say *lebbu ayyeheben*, which means "he does not give his heart." When Justin said to the educated Ethiopians "When I speak to you I hand to you the key to [my] heart," they certainly understood that our saint intended to say that he had not made use of what they themselves accuse Catholic missionaries of using, namely "dissimulation and malice," but that he was sincere with them. As well as that, Justin, in my opinion, was not the sort of man who, in

⁶It should be noted that the talk was written in Amharic, as is indicated in the diary itself. The Italian and Amharic versions are substantially the same, but there are some differences; for example, the Amharic text does not say "the door," but "the mouth"; also it does not say "planted" but "has caused to live, to inhabit." I have, however, preferred to cite the Italian text rather than the Amharic, because I think it indicates better what Justin wanted to say. For the Amharic text see *Gadla Abuna Yaqob* (unpublished manuscript), p. 162.

⁷E. Cerulli: "Mazgaba haymanot" and "Maseheta Lebuna," in *Scritti teologici etiopici dei secoli XVI-XVII*, II, Città del Vaticano 1960; ts. p. 11, tr. p. 77; ts. p. 156, tr. p. 182.

⁸Yakob Beyene, Giyorgis of Sagla, "Il Libro del Mistero (Masehafa Mesetir)" in *CSCO, Scriptores Aethiopici*, TT. 89-90, parte prima, Lovanii 1990, ts. p. 413, tr. p. 258.

order to avoid admitting that he is wrong, resorts to sophism and malice. We know for a fact that when he made a mistake he used to admit his error publicly and ask forgiveness.⁹

There is a saying in the Tigrina language: *Lebbi waddi sab ketfallet, benatka gemmer*, which means “to know the heart of a nation, begin with your own”. Justin well understood his own heart.

But let us get back to his first talk. After he had said, among other things, that in this country he no longer had anyone except God alone and his “dear Abyssinian Christian,” and that now those who were there to listen to his talk were his parents and friends, he went on to say: “I am a priest like yourselves; I am a confessor like yourselves”. It is to be noted that Justin, unlike his predecessors and some of his influential contemporaries, asserted that he considered them priests equal in dignity with himself, and that for him their priesthood was valid.

And then Justin, after saying that he was “a Christian from Rome who loved the Abyssinian Christians,” rounded off his talk by asking whether in the four months he had spent in Ethiopia he had ever done anything which might have caused scandal,¹⁰ and by promising to be their friend and servant.¹¹

He gave a second talk to the same group who had been there for his first. He spoke at length about the unity of Christians, about St. Peter and St. Mark, stressing that the Pope was the successor of St. Peter and that the Patriarch of Alexandria was the successor of St. Mark. He then went on: “I have come [...] to tell you that the Christians of Rome wish to join the Christians of Abyssinia, they want to love them, they want to be their brothers.”¹² It is to be noted that Justin does not speak of “conversion,” but rather of “union,” and that the wording “the Christians of Rome wish to join the Christians of Abyssinia,” spoken by a Catholic monk, by one of the sons of Leo, precisely of that Pope Leo whom Justin’s listeners had always called regum (accursed), would certainly have made a deep impression in the hearts of those who were listening to him.

Justin and Ethiopian Christianity

Justin believed firmly in the unity of Christians in faith, and used to invite Ethiopian priests to preach, along with him, one sole faith, one sole love and one sole Church.¹³ I have never heard anyone say, nor have I read, that Justin ever defined Ethiopian Christianity by using expressions such as “Christianity in name only, in appearance only, without significance; Christianity from mere habit, devoid of results stemming from either faith or conviction; Christianity which, if deprived of the outward observance of certain practices, would have nothing left,” and such like. Now if Justin had that sort of opinion of Ethiopian Christianity, was it likely that he would have said, precisely to the clergy of that Church, that “the Christians of Rome wish to join the Christians of Abyssinia”? Is it likely that he would

⁹Takla-Haymanot (*abba*, di Adwa), *Gadla Abuna Yaqob*, ts. Ge’ez. II parte, pp. 29-30. This work, written by Justin’s most favoured disciple, *abba* Takla-Haymanot from Adwa, is still unpublished.

¹⁰Justin wrote in his diary about the missionaries and scandals: “Missionaries must take care to be on their guard against thinking that the Abyssinians can be attracted, like savage tribes, by spectacle and frivolities. On the contrary, they expect to see seriousness, sacred learning and an exemplary lifestyle in anyone who puts himself forward as a minister of religion.” See p. 486.

¹¹Diary, pp. 81-82.

¹²Diary, p. 84.

¹³Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, Amharic ts., p. 177. This huge work is still unpublished.

have invited them to preach, along with himself, “one sole faith, one sole love and one sole Church”? I think not. The above-mentioned negative judgement of Ethiopian Christianity was given in writing, not by an ordinary Catholic priest like Justin, but by an eminent Catholic prelate, Cardinal Guglielmo Massaia¹⁴ who, during Justin’s time, was developing missionary activity in southern Ethiopia.¹⁵

Justin and the Ethiopian Rite

A little book entitled *L’Ordinario e Quattro Anafore della Messa Etiopica* [The Ordinary and Four Anaphoras of the Ethiopian Mass], published in Rome in 1969, contains on page 5 of the Preface, the following assertion: “The various oriental rites, among which is the Ethiopian, although they differ from each other and from the Latin in non-essential matters, have several parts in common which indicate the same liturgical origin: these are the offertory rites, the liturgy of the word, with the proclamation of the Creed at the centre, the *Pater noster*, the Preface dialogue and the *Sanctus*, culminating in the consecration, etc. The diversity of the non-essential elements is linked to the first evangelization of each group of people which assimilated Christianity according to its own culture, as appears clear from the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia in the middle of the 4th century, etc.” And further on, on pages 7 and 8, the following appears: “The Ethiopian liturgy, which came to birth in times of insurmountable difficulties because of the continuous centuries-old wars in defence of the faith, respected the strong characteristics and the deeply-felt religious convictions of its people. It has remained unchanged for centuries, both in its structure and in its language, and has never been revised, even in the post-conciliar liturgical renewal. Because of this, by studying it we can discover the most authentic traditions of Christian antiquity from the first centuries.” I fully agree with these words written in 1969 by *abba* Adhanom Se’elu, at that time vice-rector of the Pontifical Ethiopian College.

As has been already said, when Justin arrived in Adwa in 1839 he began going to Ethiopian Orthodox churches to pray, to be present at the functions which were being celebrated there, including the Eucharistic liturgy. This provoked curiosity, interest and sympathy among the Orthodox clergy. In this way he brought about friendly chats about the faith, and not the discussions which were so dear to educated Ethiopians.¹⁶ From these dialogues and from his frequent presence at religious functions, Justin understood immediately that he did not have to teach the Ethiopians new dogmas, new morality, new liturgy, but to promote union between the Ethiopian Christians of the Orthodox faith and the Christians of Rome of the Catholic faith. With this aim in mind he engaged in dialogue with educated people who could follow his line of argument, and he spoke about Christian faith by starting from the Ethiopian books of Sacred Scripture, which he knew well.¹⁷ In that way, with the help of his new friends, he came to the conclusion that in the prayers of the Ethiopian

¹⁴G. Massaia, *I miei trentacinque anni di missione nell’alta Etiopia*, I, Milano 1885, p. 60.

¹⁵And this was far from the cultural centres of Ethiopian Christianity; he was a missionary in pagan Ethiopia and Moslem Ethiopia, not in Christian Ethiopia.

¹⁶I would say that Justin understood the innate dialectical capacity of the Ethiopian. In fact he wrote in his diary: “The Abyssinian talent, like that of all orientals, is naturally dialectical, right down to the smallest herdsmen.” See p. 558.

¹⁷For an Ethiopian, a rational lecture which is not based on texts of scripture is philosophical, not theological. That is why Ethiopian theologians assert that anyone who engages in dialogue and discusses religion without bringing in support from Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers, merely engages in *maballat* talk, “like a widow, a religious woman, a nun.” See I. Guidi, “Annales Johannes I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa,” in *CSCO, Script. Aeth.*, T.V., Paris 1905, ts. p. 82.

there was nothing displeasing to the Lord¹⁸. He therefore decided to allow his new disciples to continue their own devotions, even after they had accepted the Catholic faith. He left the priests free to celebrate Mass, making use of their liturgical books as they were, without any changes, without asking – something very important – that they be ordained a second time in the Latin Rite.¹⁹ Cardinal Guglielmo Massaia, who did not agree with Justin's attitude towards questions of rite, but who did not dare to criticise him openly, wrote the following: "The people of Guala [i.e., Guwala], declared themselves Catholic along with their clergy attached to St John's church, continue to participate at the celebrations of their priests, believing them to be validly ordained. And we were obliged to put up with this abuse for a while and leave them a bit longer in their good faith."²⁰

Massaia had been instructed to conduct ordinations in the Latin Rite on condition that the priests would remain in the Ethiopian Rite. And in 1847, when he was in Guwala itself, he ordained more than ten priests secretly, at Justin's request, in a small chapel.²¹ That is how the Catholic clergy of the Ethiopian Rite originated, brought about by our St. Justin De Jacobis' art of dialogue.

Missionaries, both those who have already developed their activity in Ethiopia and those who today are developing it, may be divided into followers of Justin and followers of Massaia, or those in favour of the Ethiopian Rite and those against it. It is sad to see that, as a result of this division, the Catholics of the one Catholic Church of Ethiopia are divided into those of the Ethiopian Rite and those of the Latin Rite. And this is most embarrassing. But even more embarrassing is the fact that some European Catholic bishops of the Latin Rite, members of the Episcopal Conference of Ethiopia, were not ashamed to present to that Conference, in February 1986, a project for establishing a "liturgy adapted to the Ethiopian people," merging the two existing liturgies, Latin and Ethiopian.²² Since those who proposed the establishment of this hybrid rite did not know the Ethiopian liturgical language, it is hard to understand how they had come to make a judgement on a rite which they did not know.

Justin and Ethiopian usages and customs

As indicated above, Justin wanted to do all he could to avoid causing any scandal to Christian Ethiopia. He therefore made the decision to respect the usages and customs of the country, apart from those which were in obvious contradiction with Gospel teaching. It seems useful to me, therefore, to indicate briefly some of these, but only as samples, in order to understand more clearly the significance of Justin's decision.

1. Dietary prohibitions

As the tradition about the civil and religious history of Ethiopia is linked to the historical content of Sacred Scripture, so the old dietary prohibitions of Christian Ethiopia are no different from those laid down in the Old Testament, especially those in chapter 11 of

¹⁸For his teacher of liturgy Justin had a *dabtara* named Walda-Sellase. See pages 827, 843-844.

¹⁹In Karan in Eritrea in 1890, and in Asmara in 1913, Ethiopian Rite missals were published for Ethiopian Catholics, which did not respect the true tradition of the Ethiopian liturgy. Since these missals had been modified to adapt them to classical western theology, they aroused difficult and contentious debate.

²⁰G. Massaia, *op. cit.*, I, p. 68, and also *Lettere e scritti minori*, vol. V, Roma 1977, p. 386, where the Ethiopian Rite is labelled "informe aborto" [shapeless abortion].

²¹Diary, p. 795.

²²Habtemichael-Kidane, "L'Ufficio divino della Chiesa etiopica," in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 257, Roma 1998, p. 38, nt. 8.

Leviticus.²³ We are talking about very severe restrictions which are observed very zealously by Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Christians, and which, in their general lines, correspond to those observed by Jews. They are very faithfully observed, and not just in order to avoid violating Jewish laws. There are two reasons for this, closely linked to one another. The first is that Ethiopians are very proud of their own traditions and would never dare violate any of the dietary prohibitions handed down for centuries from one generation to the next, and which are deeply rooted in the heart and mind of each Ethiopian and Eritrean Christian. And if someone, overcoming his own psychological blockage – helped on of course by Western culture – actually eats what is forbidden by tradition, he would be gradually excluded from the community life of his village, and that would mean his total destruction as a member of the society in which he lives.

The second reason, and I would say the main one, stems from the traditional doctrinal position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. And its opinion is that nothing can be added to or taken from what has been laid down in Sacred Scripture and the first three ecumenical councils. And so it holds that none of the Pentateuchal laws have been abrogated by the New Testament. In affirming this it declares that Jesus Christ is the one who gave both the Law to Moses and the keys to St. Peter, and who said “I did not come to abolish the Law and the prophets but to put them into practice,”²⁴ and who said “I have not brought another law which contradicts the old one.”²⁵ It is possible, therefore, that Justin was either alerted by his friends and disciples, who were educated Ethiopians, to the fact that Ethiopians of the traditional culture could not possibly be Christians and not observe the laws of God laid down in both the New and the Old Testaments, just as they are, without any revision or *aggiornamento*.²⁶

2. *Meat slaughtered by Moslems*

Ethiopian history is characterised by constant confrontation between Christians and Moslems, with forced conversions by both parties and destruction of churches and mosques.²⁷ For Christians, one of the dietary prohibitions present in Ethiopia concerns meat slaughtered by Moslems, and for Moslems meat slaughtered by Christians. Such a prohibition, rigidly observed today by both parties, is clear evidence of the difficult problems in human relations confronting believers of both religions in this part of Africa. For anyone violating such prohibitions the consequences are very grave because, for a Christian, eating meat slaughtered by Moslems is the equivalent of accepting Islam, and vice versa. I do not know what happens to a Moslem who became a Christian by violating this prohibition if he repents and returns to his original faith; but for a Christian who became a Moslem by eating meat slaughtered by Moslems, the Ethiopian Church, with re-baptism being out of the question, has recourse to the

²³It is to be noted that the attitude of the Orthodox Christians of Ethiopia corresponds exactly with that of the Christians of the earliest period. Nevertheless, on the Ethiopian usages and customs of biblical origin see E. Ullendorf *Ethiopia and the Bible*, London 1968, and *The Two Zions. Reminiscences of Jerusalem and Ethiopia*, London 1988.

²⁴Mt 5:17-18, Lk 16:17.

²⁵Mt 5:17.

²⁶For this reason the Ethiopian Orthodox Church holds that it is necessary to observe all the Mosaic teaching, apart from the few matters which were abrogated by the Apostles on the basis of the authority conferred on them by Jesus Christ in person. For the Ethiopian Orthodox Church the abrogated Jewish matters are, for example, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, of the Trumpets, of the Sheaves, sentence of death by stoning, the Levitical priesthood, etc. See Yaqob Beyene, Ghiorghis di Sagla, *Il Libro del Mistero. cit.*, TT. 97-98, Lovanii 1993, ts. p.107, tr. p. 65.

²⁷For the history of conflict between Christians and Moslems you are referred to: Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*, Oxford 1972; J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London 1976; J. Cuoq, *L'Islam en Ethiopie des origines au XVI siècle*, Paris 1981; P. Marrassini, *Lo scettro e la croce*, I.U.O., Napoli 1993.

rite of reconciliation, with readings, prayers, sprinkling and anointing, in exactly the same manner as for renegades who return from Islam to Christianity.²⁸ Justin himself explains why it is absolutely forbidden for Christians to eat meat slaughtered by Moslems, and for Moslems to eat meat slaughtered by Christians. In fact he wrote in his diary: “The Christian would never inflict the mortal blow to, for example, a cow or sheep or any other animal whose flesh they intended to eat, without first invoking the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Briefly, the Abyssinian Christian never kills an animal without making profession of belief in the Trinity of divine Persons in God. In the same way the Moslem, for his part, never kills without saying: ‘There is no God but God, and Mahomet is his prophet.’ So, the killing of an animal in order to eat its meat is considered here to be an act of religion, a profession of faith, a sort of sacrifice, in which others are not allowed to participate unless they are of the same belief.”²⁹

It is to be noted that in Christian Ethiopia a person who eats meat without being concerned as to whether it was slaughtered by Moslems or Christians is considered to be a person of no faith at all. And in actual fact the Protestants and some of Justin’s companions who used to eat any sort of meat without checking by whom it was slaughtered were considered to be men of no faith. With regard to this matter Justin himself has passed on to us in writing what Ethiopian priests and monks of Tara-Emni, in Saraya, said to him: “[...] a new generation of white men who had appeared among us, which is neither Christian nor Moslem, nor even pagan; people who if they were asked what sort of religion they belonged to, answer you: ‘God’s religion,’ yet meanwhile they eat indifferently meat of animals slaughtered either by Christians or Moslems.”³⁰

Justin, then, obviously understood that a religion taught by someone who is considered to be a person without any religious faith would not be welcomed in Ethiopia by either Orthodox Christians or Moslems. In fact when he learnt that the inhabitants of Akkala Guzay, in the south eastern part of present day Eritrea, were scandalized because Fr Biancheri used to eat meat, indifferent to whether it was slaughtered by Christians or Moslems, he was very depressed and felt obliged to write to Rome for advice on how to handle this serious problem. As a result a letter arrived in which missionaries were forbidden to eat meat slaughtered by Moslems. As a result of this [Lorenzo] Biancheri [CM], who did not agree with Justin not only on the question of meat but also on the attitude to adopt in relations with the Orthodox clergy, asked, and received, permission to separate himself from Justin and to go into Moslem territories.³¹

3. *Justin De Jacobis and Fasting*

It is well known that Ethiopians have a lively and strongly-rooted faith. There is plenty of evidence for this in the many religious practices such as frequent, lengthy and rigorous fasts which are so exactly observed, and which are by no means easy to observe.³² It is necessary to emphasise that the Ethiopian fast does not mean just avoiding food from animals, such as dairy products, eggs and meat, but also involves not eating anything before three

²⁸The rite in question is that contained in the well known *Mashaffa-Qedar* “The Book of Purifications,” drawn up precisely for this eventuality.

²⁹Diary, p. 483. See also p. 371.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts. Amarico, pp. 159-160, 744-745.

³²There are 250 fast days in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, of which 180 are obligatory, the others being voluntary. See *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church*, Addis Ababa 1970, pp. 63-65. The 250 fast days, however, are observed only by the clergy and older people.

o'clock in the afternoon. Because of this, Mass is never celebrated before that time on fast days.³³

Justin, as is known, did not have good health. In spite of that, in order to avoid scandal,³⁴ he observed all the fast days, including those of the Latin Rite Church.³⁵ Because of this, seeing the problems of continuing his missionary activity if he observed all the fasts, his request for permission to observe only the Ethiopian fast days was granted by Rome.³⁶

4. Divorce

We have already stated that Justin observed all the Ethiopian usages and customs, apart from those contrary to Gospel teaching. Divorce, certainly, is one of those which Justin always opposed.

Among the Amharic and Tigrina speaking Orthodox Christian Ethiopians divorce has existed from time immemorial, because in Christian Ethiopia and Eritrea there exist two sorts of marriage, civil and religious. The civil marriage is celebrated during the wedding banquet before all the guests, with witnesses and guarantors, in the presence of the spiritual father of the family which is being established. This is a real and definite contract by agreement between two families, an agreement which can be rendered null only by a new marriage. This type of marriage can be dissolved.

The religious marriage, on the other hand, is indissoluble, and is contracted, as a rule, in church, and the union is consecrated by the two parties receiving Eucharistic communion. The marriage bond consecrated in this way is the most rigid known in the Orthodox Christian religion in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and cannot be dissolved as easily as the other. In fact it calls for a more moderate lifestyle on the part of the married couple. For this reason, religious marriage is mainly chosen by lay people after the couple have lived together for a long time in the normal civil marriage.

For Justin, marriage, obviously, is one and indissoluble, and he never desisted from upholding this in all circumstances, whether in private or in public. And in the *gadele*, the biography of our saint written in Amharic, from which we have already quoted many times, we read of the following incident which caused uproar. When the Catholics of the area around Adigrat, in present-day north eastern Eritrea, were becoming very numerous, Justin did not have the manpower to cover the problem of religious education. He decided to recruit someone well known for his wide religious learning, and to entrust to him the teaching of religion. He heard that in Tara-Emni, in Saraya, there was a famous teacher called Mabraq Walda Sellase, and he had him invited to Guwala, in Agama, a few kilometers east of Adigrat, where Justin had built the first Ethiopian Catholic seminary of the Ethiopian Rite, and he took him on at a clearly stated annual salary. Mabraq Walda Sellase, while he was living in Guwala was in a second marriage with a woman there, and he became a Catholic. When Justin discovered that the teacher had already been married to an Amharic woman when he

³³Diary, pp. 560-561. N.B. in the Diary, on page 44, we find: "On Christmas Eve [...] all Abyssinians eat meat; on the following day, a fast day for them, it would be gravely scandalous to eat fat." This is definitely a *lapsus*. In actual fact, Christmas Eve is a fast day for Ethiopians; on the other hand, Christmas Day, even when it falls on a Wednesday or Friday, is never a fast day.

³⁴In Ethiopia a monk who did not observe the fast would be considered not merely not a monk but not even a good Christian.

³⁵Fasting not only on Wednesday, but also on Friday and Saturday.

³⁶Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts amarico, p. 159; ts Ge'ez, II parte, pp. 54-55.

was living in Dambeya, in Begameder, told him that, according to the Gospel, marriage was indissoluble and that, to live in the Christian manner he was obliged to leave the second woman. So the teacher accepted Justin's advice; he left the second woman, and lived by himself, guaranteeing, though, the money necessary for the upbringing of the children. This caused amazement and perplexity to everyone.³⁷

It is well known that Justin conquered the hearts of the Ethiopians, who willingly proclaimed him a saint before his beatification in Rome. This was not because of his theological dialectic, which he correctly avoided, but because of his art of dialogue, based on unconditional love for his neighbour, because of his not lining himself up with the *ras* and the big feudal lords, but with the poor, the marginalised and the sick, because of his deep humility, and his living among the Ethiopians like an Ethiopian monk. To sum up, Justin conquered the hearts of the Ethiopians by his authentically Christian behaviour.

I would like to end this article by quoting some comments made by some of those who opposed the saint, not because of his behaviour but because of his Catholic faith, a faith which threatened to replace the Orthodox faith which was the state religion.

1. Emperor Teodoro II, who wanted to unify Ethiopia under one crown and one faith, the Orthodox faith, said about Justin: "If I had had *Abuna Yaqob* with me I would have easily have achieved success."³⁸ And after Justin had been expelled from Gondar, at that time the Ethiopian capital, this same Teodoro II (1855-1868), when he sent Abuna Salama in chains up onto a mountain where he was to remain a prisoner, said to him: "It is you, the Egyptian, who have caused me to be in opposition to my friend Abuna Yaqob."³⁹
2. Abuna Salama III, a friend of the Protestants and definitely an enemy of Justin, said: "*Yaqob, sadeq naw hatiatun ayscescegem*" (Jacobis is a good man, he does not conceal his sins").⁴⁰
3. Orthodox people who had first hand acquaintance with him, but who did not become Catholics, when speaking about Justin, said: "*Haymanotu Kefu nat engi megbarus malkam nat*" (his faith is wrong, but his life is good).⁴¹
4. Ahmad Ara, the leader of the Moslems who escorted the body of St. Justin De Jacobis for four days from Aligade, through Addi-Kayeh and Massaua, towards Hebo, in Akkala Guzay, going against the Islamic tradition of not carrying a Christian body, and who ordered both the resident Asawerti and the nomads, who were Moslems, and the Orthodox Christian travellers, to carry the bier as far as Hebo, said: "*Yom tanasta dabra sedeq wameskayomu lanadayan walaghefuan*" (Today the mountain of truth has collapsed, the refuge of the poor and the marginalised).⁴²

When I was a young philosophy student the late Professor Cornelio Fabbro told us: "If the missionaries had followed the methods of the communists the whole world would be Catholic today." And I also say that if the missionaries who spread their activity had followed the method, that is the art of dialogue, of St. Justin De Jacobis, all Ethiopia would have already become Catholic.

(THOMAS DAVITT, C.M., translator)

³⁷Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts. amarico, pp. 443-445.

³⁸Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts. Ge'ez, II parte, p. 49.

³⁹Yaqob Beyene, Fesseha Ghiorghis, *Storia d'Etiopia*, I.U.O., Napoli 1987, ts. P. 87, tr. p. 213.

⁴⁰Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts. amarico, p.720.

⁴¹Takla-Haymanot, (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts. amarico, p. 161.

⁴²Takla-Haymanot (*abba*), *op. cit.*, ts. Ge'ez, II parte, p. 87.

Devotion to St. Justin de Jacobis in Eritrea¹ and Ethiopia²

By *Iyob Ghebresellasie, C.M.*
Province of Eritrea

In speaking about devotion to St. Justin I should say in advance that this refers in a special way to the Catholics in Eritrea and in some areas of Ethiopia. As is well known, St. Justin's apostolate was mainly in the country which at one time was known as Abyssinia, but which today is two countries, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

1. Christianity before St. Justin's evangelization

The first Christian seed was planted along the Eritrean coast in the first century,³ and in time, by crossing the Eritrean plateau, it spread into northern Ethiopia. From the beginning of the fourth century until the 18th, before St. Justin's arrival on the evangelizing scene, dozens and dozens of monasteries were established by various local and foreign saints.⁴

The first evangelizers, known as Roman Saints, who spread Christianity in a decisive manner, were missionaries coming from the Roman Empire.⁵ Unfortunately the gospel preached by these men was a cause of misunderstanding between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. The Catholics, relying on the teaching of St. Frumentius, the first bishop sent by St. Athanasius around 340, insisted that the first evangelizers had been Catholics. They said, and rightly, that St. Athanasius could not ordain and send a bishop who had not followed the faith professed by himself.

On the other hand, the Orthodox, forgetting the long historical period of evangelization, which anyway had not stayed alive in people's memory, and being in

¹Eritrea is a recent nation in the Horn of Africa, on the shore of the Red Sea. It has an area of 127,750 sq. km. The population is calculated as 3,500,000 who live in Eritrea, with about a million scattered all over the world. It achieved its independence from Ethiopia after a long war of liberation in May 1991, later confirmed by a referendum in April 1993 with 99.8% in favour. The population is 50% Christian, the majority of whom are Orthodox Copts, and 50% Moslem. Catholics are about 20% and Protestants 5%. Devotion to St. Justin is not confined to Catholics, but is also found among the Orthodox and Moslems.

²When we speak of devotion to St. Justin this refers specially to the north of the country, and extends to the Showa Region in central Ethiopia which in his time was under the jurisdiction of King Sahlesellasie. The south was evangelized by Cardinal Massaia, who was appointed Apostolic Vicar in 1836. After his beatification in 1939 and canonization in 1975 the Vincentians of the Ethiopian Province, along with other Catholic groups of men and women working together, widely propagated devotion to St. Justin among the native clergy. This devotion is especially noted in Tigre among the Irob people.

³Acts 8:26-39; *The Church History of Eusebius*, reprinted 1986, Michigan, p. 105.

⁴Giuseppe Sapeto, *Viaggio e Missione Cattolica dell'Abissinia*, (Fra i Mensà, i Bogos e gli Habab), Roma 1857, p. 62; C. C. Rossini, *Etiopia e gente di Etiopia*, Firenze 1937, p. 170.

⁵Salvatore Pane, *Vita del Beato Giustino de Jacobis*, Napoli 1949, p. 226; Joachim M. Aymro W., *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church*, Addis-Ababa 1970, p.4.

possession today of all the monasteries of the Orthodox Church, want to show that the first evangelizers of Abyssinia had been of the Orthodox faith.

Naturally all these evangelizing saints were, and still are, honoured by the people for their virtues and their zeal in spreading and defending the Christian faith. Overcoming difficulties in the local traditions and persecution by pagans and animists, they succeeded in planting Christianity firmly. And, thanks to this missionary zeal, the Eritrean plateau and northern Ethiopia came to be known as the "Christian island" in the Horn of Africa.⁶

However, isolation on the one hand and the Moslem invasion on the other caused deep wounds in Church life and pastoral ministry in the area. Precisely because of this the Christian people, who were proud of their Christianity, became closed in on themselves and weakened to a very large extent.

Then the Egyptian Church, forging the so-called "Canons of the Council of Nicea," forbade for many centuries the appointment and ordination of an Eritrean or Ethiopian bishop.⁷ The Egyptian bishop, not knowing either the language or culture of the people whom he was sent to lead, was limited to the administration of the sacraments and passing sentences of excommunication in matters of faith and morals.⁸ The people were always terrified of being excommunicated. Gradually they came to lose knowledge of the basics of Christian teaching, holding on only to an interior faith which they could not profess with theological accuracy. This interior strength which could not be put into words was, nonetheless, jealously guarded and fanatically defended!

For example, when in 1780 the abuna [bishop] was appointed by the Coptic Patriarch of Egypt, before he took possession of his pastoral duties in Eritrea and Ethiopia, he sent a delegation to the civil authorities requesting the exiling of the first Abyssinian Catholic bishop, Abuna Tobia.⁹

A similar thing happened in 1841-42. Justin de Jacobis was a member of the delegation which sought the appointment of a new abuna. Abuna Salama was appointed and, on many occasions, he threatened Justin himself, who was obliged to abandon his pastoral

⁶Lino da Mesero, *Etiopia Cristiana*, Milano 1964, p. 33.

⁷The Moslems did not forget the military success of the Abyssinians in Yemen and, fearing that the Catholic bishops would incite opposition to the Moslems, forbade any further contacts between the two empires. The Coptic Patriarchs were the only ones from then on who could send bishops into Abyssinia, and the first one was sent by the Coptic Patriarch Benjamin at the time of Amru's victory over Egypt. This patriarch, in order to distance the Ethiopians even further from love of the Catholic religion, decreed canons for the Ethiopian Church. And in order to give legitimacy to these canons he falsely attributed them to the Council of Nicea. The thrust of these pseudo-canons was that the Ethiopians could not have a bishop taken from among themselves. They were allowed to accept only Egyptian bishops sent from Alexandria (Giuseppe Sapeto, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72).

⁸Abba Ayala Teklehaimanoy, *The Ethiopian Church*, Addis-Ababa 1982, p.32.

⁹Tobia, Ghiorgis Ghebreigziabhier was born in Debre Mariam Camcam in the Region of Dembia (Ethiopia). After studying theology at Propaganda Fide in Rome he was consecrated on 20 June 1788 as Bishop of Adulis (a port city of ancient Ethiopia, now in Eritrea, on the Red Sea). He worked tirelessly to establish the Catholic community in his own country. But in the end he had to leave Ethiopia and take refuge in Egypt. Kevin O'Mahoney, *The Ebullient Phoenix*, Addis-Ababa, Book III, p. 1

area. In spite of all this though, the Eritrean plateau and northern Ethiopia always remained a "strong rock" against all the expeditions from the Red Sea shore. If this "Christian Island" remained strongly closed in on itself, this did not mean that it totally rejected contacts with the outside world. Its isolation was founded on its firm conviction of the integrity of its faith and its rite. Faith in the Trinity and devotion to the Mother of God were two fixed points in its religion. Because of this conviction the people always made it clear to European missionaries, Catholic or Protestant, that these two points were basic.¹⁰

It is against this background that Justin de Jacobis's arrival in Abyssinia in 1839 must be seen. Catholics were still banned by the royal administration and the Orthodox Church was in a seriously weakened position, when Providence arranged for the appearance in the area of a herald of the gospel who was capable of understanding the mentality and cultural baggage of these people.

2. Justin's arrival in Adua and his first sermon

St. Justin arrived in Adua, in the centre of northern Ethiopia, and at once began to study the language and culture of the area which he was to re-evangelize. Three months after his arrival in Adua, helped by his teacher "Debtera Matieos," he gave his first sermon in the local language, a sermon which became engraved in the hearts of the first community which had gathered around him. Among other things, he said: "... the door of the heart is the mouth, speech is the key of the heart ... When I speak to you I give you the key to my heart."¹¹ In uttering these words St. Justin succeeded in opening the hearts of his listeners who were puzzled by being convinced by the words of a "Ferengì," which was their name for a white missionary.

His first biographer, Abba Teklehaimanot the younger, says: "One day when he had exchanged a few words with an Ethiopian who had stopped to look at him while he was reading, received the following mocking answer: 'Hey, Ferengì (in the pejorative sense)! Friendship with a known devil is preferable to that with an unknown angel.'"¹² This sentence, even if said in a pejorative way, reveals all the conviction of the Orthodox with regard to their religious belief. And St. Justin had no difficulty in understanding this! Meanwhile he prayed to the Lord for light with regard to how he could penetrate the hearts of those who seemed to be unconvertible. However, the word of God, the most efficacious of all words, uttered by the mouth of a just man, in a short time softened the hearts of the seemingly unconvertible.

The combination of God's grace and the merits of the apostle's labours, together with hope in the future, soon led to growth in a stump which had been thought dry and lifeless. His teacher, the "Debtera," who was an expert in matters liturgical, dogmatic and moral, at the end of a meeting with Justin was so touched by the words and devotion of Justin that he let

¹⁰Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia*, Oxford 1972, p. 39.

¹¹*Diario de S. Giustino*, Frascati (RM) 1975, p. 79.

¹²E. Lucatelli e L. Betta, L.; *L'Abuna Yacob-Mariam*, Roma 1975, p. 72.

slip some words held dear by the Ethiopian Christians: "This priest who has spoken deserves to be our father!"¹³

These words of the Debtera may seem very strange, but they may be compared with what Jesus said to his disciples: "This is impossible for men, but everything is possible for God."¹⁴ Speaking in a human way, it was very difficult, not to say impossible, to convince a Pharisee encased in his doctrinal conviction. But that is not true for Divine Providence. By changing the attitude of this singing teacher (Debtera) the Lord was preparing his vineyard to produce its fruit through the pastoral activity of the Apostolic Prefect.

3. God's blessing strengthens devotion to St. Justin

It was not an easy task to deal directly with doctrinal matters, to enter into dialogue on the sacraments, and to express these themes from the basis of Catholic doctrine. He had, however, to deal with these matters. But the Apostolic Prefect chose to devote himself, during his first year of residence, to studying the language and culture, but even more so, with particular emphasis, to prayer. He spent his time celebrating Mass unobtrusively in his house, but praying inside the compound of the Orthodox when the people had finished their celebrations.

Mass celebrated in concealment in his house could not go unheard by the Father, who wished in that way to renew the hearts of St. Justin's future disciples. In the same way, the prayers said in the compound of the Orthodox Church were heard by Jesus who often, as the gospels tell us, used to go to Solomon's Porch.

In the beginning St. Justin had changed his small residence into a place of welcome, because he aimed at helping the sick, feeding the poor and visiting the aged and infirm. All those whom he visited, persons of different culture and social standing, were enormously impressed by the humility and charity of the Apostolic Prefect. These typically Vincentian ministries were very convincing proofs of his fatherly goodness to everyone who came into contact with him.¹⁵ All those who were healed and helped could not just stay surprised and amazed at his charity and goodness, but went around talking about it, and little by little they also began to ask themselves questions and to open their minds, and even more so, their hearts. In doing this they were taking hold of the key to the Prefect's heart. After this, various people came to him of their own accord and stayed on with him, sharing his daily life. In that way a small Catholic community took shape around the Prefect. He himself was at pains not to damage his friendship with educated Orthodox persons because of this community which had gathered around him.

The Apostolic Prefect did everything he could to avoid doctrinal and dogmatic discussions. Instead, he preferred to welcome around him the more learned persons of the

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁴Mt 19:26.

¹⁵Abba Teklehaimanot, *La Vita di Giustino de Jacobis*, Adua, p. 161.

Orthodox Church, and to get them to teach the "Fidel Hawariat," which is the ABC, and the Ziema, liturgical chant, as well as the "Kene," which is liturgical hymn writing and composition.¹⁶ But it was he himself who gave the catechetical instructions. Various important learned people of the Orthodox Church, who were against his residence among them, had the opportunity to monitor the content of his catechetical instruction, as well as his personal moral behaviour. They could not find any fault with him. His teaching was in full conformity with their doctrinal and liturgical traditions.

A second thing, which these learned Orthodox people noticed, was the Prefect's fatherly goodness towards everyone, and his charity which led to action. This drew various persons to become part of his little community which was in the process of growing up around him. So, when the right moment arrived, and with due prudence, he explained Catholic doctrine to his listeners, drawing on Church History. And then, when he had finished explaining everything, he ended up by saying: "My children, follow what seems to you to be the truth."

Several educated men, priests and deacons, having observed Justin's goodness of soul, decided to leave their own Church and give themselves over to being his disciples.

Meanwhile his furious opponents, seeing the growth of his community, became alarmed and began to persecute him. The Prefect, when he saw the danger, decided to move some of his community to Enticidò, a small village 20 km. east of Adua¹⁷. The Catholic community in this small village began to grow, under the guidance of a convert priest and a singing teacher. The Prefect stayed on for another five years in Adua. At the end of that time he put some priests and deacons in charge of the community there and he left in May 1845, with the majority of the community, for Gualà, on the outskirts of Addigrat. On the arrival of the Apostolic Prefect in Gualà the people of several villages of the SASIH, led by their priests, came to him and said they were willing to accept the Catholic faith. As well as this, a good number of monks, who had been impressed by Justin's spirituality during his many visits to their monasteries, decided to follow him without any problems.

The Prefect stayed two years in Gualà and God's blessing drew many members into his flock, in spite of the numerous difficulties caused by the civil and religious authorities. But there was always the problem of a lack of priests to minister to Justin's ever growing community. He prayed a lot to the Lord to send workers into his harvest, and at the same time continued to foster vocations within his community. The Lord was not slow in answering him. He knew in fact that a new Apostolic Vicar for Southern Ethiopia would soon be arriving. This was Bishop, later Cardinal, Guglielmo Massaia, who had been ordained bishop in Rome on 24 May 1846. He arrived in Gualà, together with four of his fellow missionaries, at the end of that year and stayed there for about two years. Within that period, on two occasions, he ordained 15 of Justin's candidates. These ordinations made a profound impression in the hearts of his small community and increased the great veneration and respect in which he was held.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 334.

Let us listen to how they expressed their veneration for this man of God, whom Providence had given to them.

4. The Earliest Opinions

During his first year in Adua Justin had the practice of giving out Miraculous Medals to all whom he met, telling them how Mary was the Mother of God and Mother of all who believed in Jesus Christ. He engaged in much charitable ministry in the name of Mary. His questioners were never satisfied with just what the Prefect told them about Mary, paying great attention also to observing how he venerated her and prayed to her. Because of this, they called him Abba Yakob Zemariam, which means Mary's Justin.

Further testimony is given by those who were under his guidance for many years, and who followed him right up to his deathbed. Here is how they wrote to him from Gondar on 27 July 1848:

*Greetings to our Father Justin, from his children who through divine mercy were dragged out of the darkness of schism and apostasy. May the love of Mary, Mother of Jesus, increase in you and us! Amen. We are very much consoled by the letter which you wrote to us. But, alas, we join in your present anguish, knowing how much more severe is spiritual suffering than physical suffering. Such suffering is worse than chains on the body if that were compared to the anguish and worry which bind the heart.*¹⁸

This letter was written during the severe and drawn out imprisonment in which his children were then. Sharing all their suffering he wrote a message full of hope and affection, in that way showing them all the greatness and depth of his fatherly love.

Fr. Poussou, Assistant General, on his way back from a visitation in China towards the end of 1851, stayed for a while in Halai, one of Justin's houses on the Eritrean plateau. He expressed his admiration for Justin in these words:

*It seems that Msgr. de Jacobis in particular is destined to accomplish great good in this country, and it is my conviction that if God plans to take pity on the people of Abyssinia, it is Msgr. de Jacobis who is to be the instrument of mercy.*¹⁹

And Msgr. Massaia retained this memory of the impression which our saint's spiritual life made on him:

After 35 years I would be able, to a large extent, to go back over the sermons which I listened to in those days, so great was the impression which he made on me, and also on others ... To see this man, serious and pleasant at the same time, frugal in the matter of food, simple, modest and unobtrusive in his way of dressing, courteous and

¹⁸Salvatore Pane, *op. cit.*, p. 790.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 709.

*charitable in behaviour, always ready to say a comforting word, never separated from his disciples whom he treated with the gentle authority of a father and the affectionate familiarity of a brother, always with them in whatever they were doing, at work, at meals, at prayer; to watch him as he celebrated Mass like someone in ecstasy, to see him present at prayer in common, recollected and angel-like, in a word, to see him living a life which combined the isolation of a hermit and the zeal of an apostle, all this was, for us, a living sermon.*²⁰

These comments show a real harmony between father and sons, between master and disciples. Many of his disciples did not have the enthusiasm for writing which would have shown their deep veneration towards Justin. If they had had this we would have the joy of seeing in their own words their very tender regard for him. On the other hand, it would be enough just to hear the single word "Father" to enable us to understand the deep devotion and veneration which they cultivated towards Justin.

Abba Teklehaimanot the younger, who was his first biographer, in talking about Justin's virtues and total dedication, lets us see simply that everyone became convinced, for the remainder of their lives, of the spiritual stature and dedication of this man in the service of the Word and of his neighbour!

5. Respect for and devotion towards Justin in the Church

Immediately after the death of St. Justin almost all his disciples, convinced of his reputation for holiness, waited impatiently for the opening of the process for his canonization. In spite of the fact that an interval was needed between the death of the saint and the introduction of the cause of his beatification, these people began at once to tell of all the wonders which were happening one after the other. In this way, leaving the ecclesiastical process to make its own way forward, they for their part fostered devotion in their own hearts and minds. This tradition was passed on from one generation to the next right up to our own day. Before the arrival of the new wave of missionaries, both men and women, in Eritrea and Ethiopia, the diocesan priests and seminarians were enthusiastic in making known the reputation of this man in every corner of the country.

After his beatification several religious communities were established in Eritrea, and also in Ethiopia. And many of them, before embarking on their ministry, had the custom of making a pilgrimage to his tomb in Hebo to ask his intercession for the success of their undertaking. Even today his grave is one of the few pilgrimage destinations in all Eritrea, and it will still be so tomorrow, at least to a large extent, in northern Ethiopia. The Vincentian Fathers and the Daughters of Charity have been there, beside his tomb, to welcome pilgrims since 1947-48. Diocesan priests usually have their annual retreats and pastoral meetings there in Hebo, in the presence of the saint. On the other hand, the place also lends itself to silence and recollection.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 585-586.

6. The people's devotion and respect

We are told that at the time of the death of the Apostolic Prefect, which took place in the Alighede valley at the side of the River Haddas as you go towards Halai, a squabble broke out about where he was to be buried. Everyone wanted him for themselves.

Fr. Delmonte, the vicar of the dying Prefect, backed up by the French consul in Massawa, decreed that the body be brought immediately to Muncullu, one of Justin's residences. The priests and monks who were beside the dying man, shattered by the death of their Father, decided to take the body to Hebo rather than to Muncullu as Fr. Delmonte wanted. They immediately sent a delegation to the people of Hebo to get them to come and bring back the body and prepare a place for its burial. Neither the people of Halai nor those of Hebo needed to be told twice, and they arrived, men and women, to get the body of their Father and shepherd. They arrived at the spot where the body was laid out, and after a period of long and sorrowful weeping, began to discuss where to bring him, and how to do so. The people of Hebo, backed up by the priests and monks who were there, distrusted the people of Halai and were successful in getting the body brought to Hebo for burial, and it was interred there a few metres in front of the village chapel. It was Friday, 3 August 1860. And that is how the saint's own wish was fulfilled, because during his life he had expressed the wish to be buried in Hebo.

The Vincentian missionaries, who were well aware of the virtues and holy life of Justin, made several efforts to have his remains brought back to Italy. But the Hebo villagers showed very decided opposition to this, and said:

Abuna Jacob is our Father. At present his place is among his children. Here he gave birth to our faith. We love him and he loves us. And the proof of his love is his final wish. He asked to be kept among us and no one may go against the wish of a dying man. He is ours and we are his, and we will hold on to him.

Msgr. Biancheri replied to them:

Yes, a father should rest among his children, but a mother has the right to the body of her own son, and the Congregation is the Mother of Abuna Jacob. We are his brothers. Is it right, then, for you to go against a mother's wishes?

But the villagers held on stubbornly to their point of view and did not allow the saint's remains to be taken away by the missionaries. And Msgr. Biancheri, noting the unwavering resolution of the people of Hebo, had to give in, and then came the selection of those who were to keep vigil, day and night, over the remains of their father.

In 1871 Emperor John IV of Ethiopia, furious about the presence of Vincentian missionaries, ordered all Catholic churches and missionaries' houses in his empire to be burnt down. The Hebo villagers, when they heard that all neighbouring churches had been torched by the soldiers, secretly exhumed their Father's remains and brought the precious burden to a safer place, and deposited it among the caves on the so-called "ZELIM EMNI," one of the

mountains overlooking Hebo. When the storm died down they brought the remains back to the chapel where they are jealously guarded right up to today.

Conclusion

On top of what we have already said about the respect for and devotion to St. Justin, we may end up by reporting on two things which the Eritreans and Ethiopians do: They wash themselves over a period of two weeks in water which has been blessed beside St. Justin's tomb, and they take a pinch of earth from the place in which he was first interred. By doing these two things his clients are convinced that they will be healed of whatever form of illness from which they may be suffering. This may seem absurd — but this is what lovers of St. Justin do and they feel miraculously healed. That is why at the moment his tomb in Hebo is still a place of pilgrimage. And also, in times of disaster and war that is why it is to this tomb that many people come, trusting in his intercession. It is also where they come in times of drought to ask for rain through his intercession.

Many of them, because of their lack of historical knowledge combined with strong love and devotion, think and believe that St. Justin was an Abyssinian, in other words one of themselves. Their devotion and admiration for, and their love of, this man are so strong that they say: "He could not be a Ferengì," which means a foreigner.

It remains to be said: "Yes, God sent Jesus Christ to save the human race. But this same God likewise sent, in Jesus Christ, St. Justin to save the Abyssinian people. St. Justin made himself Abyssinian in everything in order to win the Abyssinians for God. That is what they think and firmly believe. May St. Justin again today obtain for this people, who have so loved peace, reconciliation as well."

(THOMAS DAVITT, C.M., translator)

Edited And Unedited Writings of St. Justin De Jacobis

*by Giuseppe Guerra, CM
Province of Naples*

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], Valse 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.

Bibliography of Saint Giustino de Jacobis
Biography and Studies

By Luigi Nuovo, C.M.
Province of Turino

AA.VV., *Atti del Convegno di studio (3-4 Ottobre 1987) nel 12° anniversario della canonizzazione di S. Giustino De Jacobis*, Napoli, Tipografia Calsele, 1989.

ALAZAR Abraha, *Saint Justin De Jacobis. His Missionary Methodology in Eritrea and Ethiopia*, Nairobi, Paulines 1995.

ANONIMO, *Il Venerabile Giustino De Jacobis della Congregazione della Missione, primo vicario apostolico dell'Abissinia*. Napoli, A. e S. Festa Editori, 1905.

ARATA Salvatore, *Abuna Jacob Apostolo dell'Abissinia (Mons. Giustino De Jacobis) 1800-1860*, Roma 1934

ARATA Salvatore, *Vita del Beato Giustino De Jacobis della Congregazione della Missione di S. Vincenzo de'Paoli*, Roma 1939

BAETEMAN J., *Le bienheureux Justin De Jacobis, lazariste, apotre de l'Abyssinie*, Bellevue 1939 (Trad. ital., Roma-Chieri 1940).

(BELOTTI Pietro), *Beato Giustino De Jacobis*, Torino, L.I.C.E.- R. Berruti & C., 1939

BETTA Luigi, *Il primo apostolo della Medaglia miracolosa in Abissinia*, in *Annali della Missione* 57 (1950) 183-191.

BETTA Luigi, *Fondazione della Missione lazzarista in Abissinia 41838*), in *Annali della Missione* 62 (1955) 296-307;

BETTA Luigi, *La luminosa figura del Beato Giustino De Jacobis Apostolo dell'Abissinia*, in *Annali della Missione* 62 (1960) 203-210.

BETTA Luigi, *Il Beato Giustino De Jacobis, viaggio dall'Italia all'Etiopia (1839)*, in *Annali della Missione* 67 (1960) 288-313.

BETTA Luigi, *Il Beato Giustino De Jacobis, il primo anno di apostolato (1840)*, in *Annali della Missione* 67 (1960) 350-373.

BETTA Luigi, *Il Beato Giustino De Jacobis, una deputazione abissina in Egitto, in Italia e in Terra Santa (1841-1842)*, in *Annali della Missione* 68 (1961) 154-306.

BETTA Luigi, *Spigolando tra gli scritti di Giustino De Jacobis*, in *Annali della Missione* 82 (1975) 26-46.

BETTA Luigi, *Linee della pastorale missionaria dell'Abuna Yaqob*, in *Annali della Missione* 82 (1975) 294-303.

BETTA Luigi, *Il primo Giustino De Jacobis (1800-1839)*, Edizioni Vincenziane, Roma 1983.

BETTA Luigi, *Date principali della vita di Giustino De Jacobis*, in *Annali della Missione* 82 (1975), 89-95.

CAMPANALE Angelo, *Il Venerabile Mons. Giustino De Jacobis*, Casale Monferrato, Propaganda Mariana, 1929.

CASSINARI Ernesto, *Il Beato Gebre-Michael prete abissino della Congregazione della Missione (1791-1855)*, Roma, Casa della Missione 1926.

CASTAGNOLA Luigi, *L'apostolo dell'Etiopia: il Beato Giustino De Jacobis*, Torino 1939.

CELESTINO da Desio, *Vita di Abuna Jacob ossia il Venerabile Giustino De Jacobis*, Asmara, Tipografia Francescana 1922.

CIVATI V., Un grande missionario dell'Abissinia. Il Ven. Giustino De Jacobis, Milano 1929.

CLARKE William, The Ecumenical Implications of the Ministry of Justine De Jacobis in Ethiopia 1839-1860, in Colloque 11 (1985), 360-381; 464-484.

CROUZET J., Monseigneur De Jacobis. Notes de sa sépulture. Keren 1890.

D'AGOSTINO Andrea, Storia della vita del Venerabile Giustino De Jacobis, Apostolo dell'Abissinia, Napoli, Tip. Priore 1910.

DE DOMINICIS B., Elogio del Servo di Dio Monsignor Giustino De Jacobis, Vescovo titolare di Nilopoli, Vicario apostolico dell'Abissinia, detto in San fede a dì 1° novembre 1899 da B.d. D., prete della Missione, Napoli, D'Auria 1899.

DEMIMUID M., Vie du Vénérable Justin De Jacobis de la Congregation de la Mission (dite des Lazaristes). Premier Vicaire apostolique de l'Abyssinie, Paris, P. Téqui 1906.

DEVIN Auguste, L'Abyssinie et son Apotre, ou vie de Mgr. Justin De Jacobis Eveque de Nilopolis et Vicaire Apostolique de l'Abyssinie, Paris 1866.

DI SAN MARCO Rosa, La storia del venerabile Giustino de Jacobis della Congregazione della Missione, Primo Vicario Apostolico dell'Abissinia, Napoli 1922, 2° Ed. Roma 1939.

GUERRA Giuseppe, Giustino De Jacobis. Dal meridione d'Italia all'Etiopia, Napoli 1975.

HERRERA J., Hacia las terras del Negus o El Beato Justino De jacobis de la Congragacion de la Mision de San vicente de Paul, (=Almas Heroicas, 1), Madrid 1946.

KOROLEVSKIJ C., Le Vénérable Justin de Jacobis et la reprise des relations entre Rome et l'Ethiopie au milieu du XIX siècle (1839-1860),

avec plusieurs documents inédits, in Roma e l'Oriente 9 (1919) vol. 18, pp. 23-36; 10 (1920) vol. 19 pp. 35-52, 110-127.

LARIGALDIE Gabriel., Héraut du Christ. Le Vénérable Justin de Jacobis pretre de la Mission, premier Vicaire apostolique de l'Abyssinie (1800-1860) d'après des documents inédits, Paris 1910.

LUBECK K., Bischof Justinus de Jacobis, der Apostel Abessiniens, Aachen 1922.

LUCATELLO Enrico, Ventidue anni in Etiopia, La missione di Mons. Giustino De Jacobis, Roma 1935, 2° Ed. 1939.

LUCATELLO Enrico-BETTA Luigi, L'Abuna Yaqob Mariam, Roma, Edizioni Postulazione Generale Congregazione della Missione 1975.

MAURO Da Leonessa (a cura di), Lettere di Abba Tecle-Haimanot di 'Adwa, Roma, Tip. Pio X 1939 (l'opera é stata tradotta da Abba Gebre Di Halai).

MAZZARELLO Maria Luisa-NEGHESTI Micael, Giustino de Jacobis, Inculturarsi per comunicare, Roma, LAS, 1997.

PANE Salvatore, Il Beato Giustino De Jacobis, Palermo 1939

PANE Salvatore, Vita del Beato Giustino De Jacobis, Napoli 1949.

RICHARDSON James W., Circolare del 25 gennaio 1975 in Annali della Missione 82 (1975), pp.2-25.

SALOTTI Carlo, Il Beato Giustino De Jacobis, Apostolo dell'Abissinia (1800-1860), in I grandi Missionari, serie II, Roma 1940, pp.203-229.

SIRITO F. L'Apostolo dell'Etiopia, Roma 1941

TECLA-HAIMANOT, Abouna Yacob, Paris, Procure des Lazaristes 1914.

TROISI, Angelo, La gemma dei Preti della Missione della Provincia di Napoli, in Il Ven. Giustino De Jacobis e la Scuola Apostolica della Congregazione della Missione, bollettino bimestrale, Napoli Via Vergini 51, 1928 pp. 3-8; 21-28; 46-50; 66-73; 92-99; 118-124; 142-149; 1929 pp. 2-7; 21-22; 36-38; 52-54; 67-71; 83-89; 102-107; 115-121; 135-141; 151-154; 170-174; 182-184; 1930 pp. 2-10; 25-31; 44-52; 65-69; 83-92; 105-110; 123-130; 140-148; 160-163; 181-186; 198-204; 214-222; 1931 pp. 2-7; 21-28; 42-50. 60-70; 80-87; 98-105; 118-124; 136-141; 157-167; 179-183; 196-202; 1932 pp. 2-7; 22-27; 42-48; 86-91; 108-119; 130-137; 148-154; 167-172; 187-196; 218-226; 237-244.

TROISI, Angelo, La Missione abissina esposta secondo la corrispondenza del suo ven. Fondatore, in Il ven. Giustino De Jacobis e la Scuola Apostolica della Congregazione della Missione, Napoli, 1933 pp. 2-14; 31-33; 55-57; 72-73; 96-100; 119-123; 161-163; 182-187; 202-205; 222-226; 242-246; 1934 pp. 19-20; 35-37; 52-56; 81-84; 124-125; 1935 pp. 17; 50-56; 82-83; 99-100.

YAQOB Beyene, Abba Gabra Mika'el il martire cattolico etiopico, in Vincentiana 32 (1988) 437-550.

Vincentian Priesthood as missionary

— An essay written for the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent's ordination —

*By Robert P. Maloney, C.M.
Superior General*

Jesus is *the* priest of the New Testament. There is no other priesthood than his. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," Jesus tells us, "no one comes to the Father except through me."¹ It is he who is the enfleshed Word of God, revealing the Father to us in his person. It is he who offers sacrifice "once for all,"² as the author of Hebrews puts it. It is he who pastures the flock. "I am the shepherd."³ "I am the vine."⁴ "I am the gate."⁵ "I am the light."⁶ "I am the true bread come down from heaven. The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever."⁷ All ministerial⁸ priesthood is a sharing in that of Jesus.

Having said this, I have already stated the most basic thing about priesthood. As a service to the Kingdom, and to the Church as sign of the Kingdom, its source and pattern is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

This article attempts to situate St. Vincent's vision of priesthood within a theological framework and to draw a few implications from the model of priesthood he chose.

Variety of models

Because priesthood, like all mysteries, is rich, it reveals itself in a wide variety of ways. Vatican II analyzes priesthood under three traditional headings: teaching, sanctifying, and ruling.⁹ In a commentary on the council, written 25 years after its closing, Avery Dulles discusses five models of priesthood:¹⁰ cleric, pastor, presider,

¹Jn 14:6.

²Heb 9:12, 26; 10:12, 14.

³Jn 10:11.

⁴Jn 15:6.

⁵Jn 10:9.

⁶Jn 8:12.

⁷Jn 6:51.

⁸As is evident from the occasion chosen (the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent's ordination), this article focuses on ministerial priesthood. One could also write at great length on the priesthood of all the baptized — especially in light of Vatican II and its aftermath — but that is a topic for another day.

⁹*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 1, 4-6; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 28.

¹⁰Avery Dulles, "Models for Ministerial Priesthood," *America* 20 (#18; October 11, 1990) 284-289.

herald, and servant. Then, recognizing that these models all refer to functions of priests and sensing the insufficiency of a functional approach, he sketches a summary model, which he calls "representational," since he judges that the priest in each of his functions represents Christ as head of the body.¹¹

In a talk given in 1995, Rembert Weakland also describes the priest's role under five categories:¹² teacher/preacher, presider, healer, enabler, leader. Similarly, Walter Burghardt, reflecting on his rich experience among priests, speaks of jurisdictional, cultic, pastoral, prophetic, and monastic models.¹³

These different analyses make one thing very clear: priesthood involves a variety of functions, even if no one of these adequately describes it. There are different emphases and models in living it. How priests embody these functions concretely will vary from age to age, from culture to culture, and often from person to person.

Priestly roles in the new testament

Raymond Brown, in his brief but influential book *Priest and Bishop*,¹⁴ analyzes four principal roles that funnel into Christian ministerial priesthood, describing each of them in these terms:

1. *Disciple*

Jesus calls the twelve to be with him more intimately: "You are my friends."¹⁵ This sets up a pattern for the Church's seeing priests as particularly obliged to faithful discipleship. If Christians are called to be a light to the world, the minister is called to be a light to the community.

While it is clear in the New Testament that all Christians are called to be disciples, it is also clear that Jesus gives a distinct leadership role to some and makes special demands of them.

2. *Apostle*

But the priest is called not just to *be with* Jesus, he is also *sent out* to others in Jesus' name.

¹¹As Vatican II puts it, the priest acts "in persona Christi capitis" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2).

¹²Rembert Weakland, "A Renewed Priesthood in a Renewed Church," *America* 25 (#19; October 26, 1995) 327-334.

¹³Walter Burghardt, "On Turning Eighty: Autobiography in Search of Meaning," *Woodstock Report* (#41; March 1995) 2-11.

¹⁴Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop* (New York: Paulist, 1970).

¹⁵Jn 15:14.

The apostle is a missionary figure, someone who moves on. The keynote of his ministry is service. This service is rendered first to Jesus, by being his ambassador, and then to others. The New Testament describes a variety of services which the apostle shares with others:

- * preaching
- * teaching
- * counseling
- * praying
- * consoling
- * correcting
- * visiting
- * befriending
- * suffering
- * collecting money
- * doing ordinary work

3. *Elder-Bishop*

The elder-bishop is a residential figure. He is responsible for the daily, ongoing care of a local church. He has the task of organizing, stabilizing, managing the household well. Administration is one of his chief responsibilities. He is to administer as a shepherd who cares deeply for his flock.

Most of the authority structures of Christian priesthood develop around this image, but they are supplemented consistently by the disciple and servant images.

4. *One who presides at the Eucharist*

The New Testament witnesses to a rich variety of interpretations of the Eucharist and gradual development in regard to its practice. By the end of the first century, as is evident in the *Didache*, the Eucharist had come to be seen as a sacrifice. As this happened, the ministry of presiding at the Eucharist was recognized as an exercise of priesthood. The elder-bishop was seen as the usual presider, the focus of unity in the community.

By the time of Ignatius of Antioch (who died around 110), the four roles that Brown describes have blended, and the full concept of Christian ministerial priesthood emerges. Priesthood takes varied forms as one or another of the roles is emphasized,

but all four have this in common _ bearing witness to Jesus: "Become imitators of me as I am of Christ."¹⁶

A contemporary theological perspective¹⁷

Perhaps the most influential contemporary analysis of ministerial priesthood is found in the writings of Karl Rahner.¹⁸ Rahner's view might be synthesized as follows:

The primary role of the priest is to proclaim the effective word that forms and sustains the Christian community. He shares in the mission of Christ, who is sent by the Father to proclaim God's kingdom. The priest is, therefore, a servant of the kingdom and of the Church as a sign of that kingdom. A culminating moment in his ministry is the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, where the priest efficaciously proclaims, "This is my body.... This is my blood," and the Lord himself is really present in sacramental form to nourish and strengthen his people. Rahner summarizes: "This efficacious word has been entrusted to the priest. To him has been given the word of God. That makes him a priest."¹⁹

As a leader in the Christian community, the priest is also called to prophetic witness, to live the word he preaches, to "imitate what he handles," so that he might proclaim the gospel not only by his word but by his life. In this sense, Christian priesthood combines the roles of Old Testament prophet and priest.

¹⁶1 Cor 11:1.

¹⁷Among many other works, the reader might wish to consult: Raymond Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970); Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Donald B. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000); Jean Galot, *Theology of the Priesthood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984); Nathan Mitchell, *Mission and Ministry: History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1982); Henry J. M. Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); Henry J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); John W. O'Malley, S.J., "One Priesthood: Two Traditions," in *A Concert of Charisms*, Edited by Paul K. Hennessy (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 9-24; Thomas O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); Kenneth B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of the Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988); William D. Perri, *A Radical Challenge for Priesthood Today: From Trial to Transformation* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996); David N. Power, O.M.I., *Ministers of Christ and His Church: A Theology of the Priesthood* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969); "Theologies of Religious Life and Priesthood," in *A Concert of Charisms*, Edited by Paul K. Hennessy (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) 61-103; Karl Rahner, *Servants of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Discipleship and Priesthood*; Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry*. Trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

¹⁸Cf. Karl Rahner, *Servants of the Lord* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); "Understanding the Priestly Office," in *Theological Investigations XXII* (New York: Crossword, 1991) 208-213..

¹⁹Karl Rahner, "Priest and Poet," in *Theological Investigations*, III translated by Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (New York: Helicon, 1967) 303.

The priest's role in building up the community involves a variety of functions, traditionally described as *teaching* ("prophet," dedicated to the word), *ruling* ("king," "shepherd of the flock," dedicated to pastoral leadership), and *sanctifying* ("priest," dedicated to the sacraments and other forms of prayer).

As is evident, in Rahner's approach, proclamation of God's community-forming word is at the heart of priestly identity. The traditional priestly functions flow from this identity. This is clearest perhaps in the case of preaching and teaching ("prophet"). But sacramental ministry too ("priest") is an aspect of the priest's role as proclaimer, when he brings God's effective word to bear on crucial moments in the lives of believers. Likewise, pastoral leadership ("king") involves discerning what God's word is saying in the concrete circumstances of the life of the community and then applying it through decisions.

Priesthood for St. Vincent²⁰

St. Vincent was very much influenced by the thought patterns and the vocabulary of his contemporaries and teachers. Bérulle, to whom Vincent owed so much but from whom he eventually distanced himself, focused much of his spirituality on the priesthood.²¹ In Vincent's conferences and letters, we find many of the same phrases and emphases that we discover in the writings of Bérulle, Olier, and John Eudes. They speak above all of the centrality of Christ and the need for the priest to empty himself and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."²² They encourage priests to have "religion toward God."²³ They are very conscious of the "exalted" role of the priest and the need for the priest to be holy.²⁴

²⁰The reader might wish to consult: D'Agnel, *Saint Vincent de Paul, guide du prêtre*, 1928; J. Delarue, *L'Idéal missionnaire du prêtre d'après saint Vincent de Paul*, 1946; L. Mezzadri, "La espiritualidad sacerdotal," *Anales* (1983) 627; L. Mezzadri, "Jésus-Christ, figure du prêtre missionnaire dans l'oeuvre de Monsieur Vincent," *Vincentiana* (1986) 323; E. Motte, *San Vicente de Paúl y el Sacerdocio*, 1915; L. Nuovo, "Sacerdocio," *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Vicenciana* (Salamanca: CEME, 1995) 550-552; J. B. Rouanet, *San Vicente de Paúl, sacerdote instrumento de Jesucristo*, 1960; C. Sens, "Comme prêtre missionnaire," *Au temps de St. Vincent de Paul... et aujourd'hui...*, 1981; R. Facéline, "Vocation and Mission of the Priest According to St. Vincent de Paul" in *Vincentiana* (2000) 218-227.

²¹René Deville, *L'École française de spiritualité* (Paris: Desclée, 1987) 112. Cf. Michel Dupuy, *Bérulle et le sacerdoce. Étude historique et doctrinale. Textes inédits* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1969).

²²Rom 13:14.

²³Cf. J.-J. Olier, *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiens*, (Edition Amiot, 1954) 7-9. The term is difficult to translate. It means, basically, having a covenant relationship with God in an ecclesial context.

²⁴Bérulle, with considerable exaggeration, describes the loss of holiness among priests in this way: "The first priests were indeed both saints and doctors of the Church. God preserved within this same order authority, holiness and doctrine, uniting these three perfections in the priestly order.... However, time, which corrupts all things, brought about laxity in most of the clergy. These three qualities: authority, holiness and doctrine, which the Spirit had joined together, were separated by the human

Vincent joined these and other leaders of the time in the reform of the clergy, becoming one of its principal proponents. As was often the case with him, his view of priesthood, while influenced by his teachers, was independent of theirs, especially as he envisioned priesthood in the Congregation he founded.

For Vincent, in his mature years, Jesus the priest is most of all the missionary of the Father, the Evangelizer of the Poor. He knew that there had been great scholar priests like Sts. Jerome, Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas, that there had been outstanding residential priests like Ambrose, Basil, and Chrysostom, that there had been influential monk priests like Benedict and reforming curial priests like Bellarmine, that there had been zealous street priests like Philip Neri, and that in his own time there were wonderful teacher priests, especially among the Jesuits. All this entered into his thought patterns, but he chose to focus on another model: the priest as missionary.²⁵

Yet St. Vincent wrote relatively little about priesthood. Nor did he speak about it in a systematic, theological way. His perspective is largely practical, as was his bent. While in part he shares the vision of those who most influenced him, particularly Bérulle, his view gradually grows distinct from theirs. We can summarize his teaching under four headings.

1. *He was very critical of priesthood as he actually found it in early 17th century France.*

A large number of the priests Vincent met were ignorant. Their lives were undisciplined and corrupt. Many bishops were self-interested and had little care for their flock. As a priest told him in 1642, "the most scandalous are the most powerful, and flesh and blood have, as it were, supplanted the gospel and the spirit of Jesus Christ."²⁶ Vincent believed that priests and bishops were the principal cause of the evils within the Church.²⁷ He cites John Chrysostom as saying that few priests will be saved.²⁸

Of course, Vincent was conscious that he himself had not been exempt from the temptation to embrace priesthood as a comfortable career. He was ordained at 19 with precisely that objective in mind. But he underwent a remarkable conversion in which a

spirit and the spirit of the world. Authority has remained in prelates, holiness in religious, and doctrine in the schools." Cf. "A Letter on the Priesthood," cited in *Bérulle and the French School, Selected Writings* edited with an introduction by William M. Thompson (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 184.

²⁵Cf., SV XII, 262: "All aim at loving Him, but they love Him in different ways: Carthusians by solitude; Capucians by poverty; others again by singing his praises. But we, my brothers, if we have this love, are bound to show it by leading the people to love God and their neighbor...."

²⁶SV II, 282.

²⁷SV XI, 308-309.

²⁸SV VII, 463.

series of events purified his view of priesthood. I will not recount those events here since they are well known to the reader and others have done so both frequently and well.²⁹

He came to see priesthood as an exalted vocation of which he was unworthy. He wrote in 1656: “This state is the most sublime on earth, the very one Our Lord willed to assume and follow. As for myself, if I had known what it was when I had the temerity to enter it — as I have come to know since then — I would have preferred to till the soil than to commit myself to such a formidable state in life — to be sure, priests today have great reason to fear God’s judgments, since, in addition to their own sins, He will make them accountable for those of the people because they have not tried to satisfy God’s just anger for them, as they are bound to do. What is worse, He will impute to those priests the cause of the chastisements He sends them.... Let us go further and say that all the disorders that have afflicted the Savior’s holy Spouse stem from the evil lives of priests....”³⁰

In his conference of December 6, 1658, Vincent cries out: “There is nothing greater than a priest, to whom God gives all power over his natural and mystical body, the power to forgive sins, etc. Oh, God, what power! Oh, what dignity!”³¹

2. *The priest, by his character, participates in the priesthood of Jesus.*³² *He is an instrument.*

In a conference on the formation of the clergy, Vincent states that the character of priests is a participation in the priesthood of the Son of God. It is a character that is completely divine and incomparable.³³

In repeating this point often, St. Vincent stands in the main stream of the entire Christian tradition. Jesus is *the* priest. All other priests share in Jesus’ priesthood. They are his instruments.³⁴ This theological principle gave St. Vincent an awe for the dignity of priesthood.³⁵ It led him to say a hundred times (he himself states!)³⁶ that if he were not already a priest, he would never have become one.

²⁹As Dodin, Román, Mezzadri, and many others point out, one cannot fully understand Vincent’s view of priesthood (and many other things in his life) without understanding the series of events that led to his conversion. Cf., André Dodin, *Saint Vincent de Paul et la charité* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960) 11-25; also, Luigi Mezzadri, “Jesus-Christ, figure du Prêtre-Missionnaire, dans l’œuvre de Monsieur Vincent,” in *Vincentiana* N° 3-4 (May-August) 1986, 326-330; José María Román, “The Priestly Journey of St. Vincent de Paul. The Beginnings: 1600- 1612” in *Vincentiana* N° 3 (May-June) 2000, 207-217.

³⁰SV V, 568.

³¹SV XII, 85.

³²SV XI, 7, 344.

³³SV XI, 7.

³⁴SV XII, 80.

³⁵SV VII, 463; XI, 93.

³⁶SV VII, 463.

In language very reminiscent of Bérulle and Olier, Vincent writes to a priest of the Mission:

Oh! how fortunate you are to be the instrument of Our Lord in forming good priests and to be an instrument such as you, who enlighten and fire them up at the same time! In this you do the work of the Holy Spirit, who alone enlightens and inflames hearts — or rather, this Holy and Sanctifying Spirit works through you, for he resides and operates in you. He does so, not only that you may live of his divine life, but also to establish his same life and manner of working in these men, called to the most lofty ministry on earth, through which they must exercise the two great virtues of Jesus Christ, namely, reverence toward his Father³⁷ and charity toward mankind.³⁸

Of course, since the priest's life and mission are so intrinsically tied up with that of Jesus, then "putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" means, in the concrete, acquiring Jesus' virtues, particularly the five missionary virtues to which Vincent calls members of his Congregation. It also means standing before the Father faithfully in prayer and listening to his word. Vincent tells William Desdames on January 30, 1660, that he will find in Christ all virtues and "if you let him do it, he will exercise them in you and for you."³⁹

3. *His dominant model of priesthood is missionary.*⁴⁰

Quite independently from the teaching of Bérulle, his former master, Vincent makes a definite choice of his model of priesthood: the priest is for him predominantly a missionary: "God sent out priests as he sent his Son for the salvation of souls."⁴¹ It is clear that Vincent focuses on the "apostle" or missionary model which Raymond Brown describes as being so prominent in the New Testament:

*My brothers, he who says missionary says apostle. We must therefore act like the apostles, since we are sent, like them, to instruct the people. We must proceed with gentleness, and in simplicity, if we wish to be missionaries and imitate the apostles and Jesus Christ.*⁴²

³⁷In the French, *la religion vers son Père et la charité vers les hommes*. This terminology is very characteristic of the "École Française." Cf. Olier, *Pietas*, n. 4 (Editions Amiot, 1954) 165, where almost exactly the same words are used.

³⁸SV VI, 393.

³⁹SV VIII, 231.

⁴⁰SV XI, 67.

⁴¹SV VIII, 33.

⁴²SV XI, 267.

Luigi Mezzadri puts the matter very succinctly: “Between the pseudo-Dyonisian concept of priest as ‘man of cult’ and the Augustinian concept of priest as ‘man for the mission’ Vincent instinctively chooses the second.”⁴³

Vincent returns to this theme again and again:

*This is how truly apostolic souls speak and act. Entirely consecrated to God, they desire that His Son Our Lord be known and served likewise by all the nations on earth, for whom He Himself came into the world; like Him, they wish also to work and die for them. That is how far the zeal of Missionaries should extend; for, even though they cannot go everywhere, nor do the good they wish, they still do well to desire this and to offer themselves to God to serve Him as instruments for the conversion of souls....*⁴⁴

4. *The missionary priest is for the poor.*

The whole life of the missionary priest must be dedicated to the poor. St. Vincent states this very eloquently:

*That priests give themselves zealously to caring for the poor — is not that the office of Our Lord and of a number of the great saints, who not only recommended the poor to others but who consoled, comforted and healed them themselves. Are not the poor the afflicted members of Our Lord? Are they not our brothers? And if priests abandon them who do you imagine will assist them? So, if there are some among you who think that they are members of the Congregation to evangelize the poor and not to aid them, to remedy their spiritual needs and not their temporal ones, I respond that we must assist them in all ways.*⁴⁵

Vincent recommends a practical, concrete, pastoral charity and a willingness to seek out the poorest of the poor wherever they might be:

*To make God know to the poor, to announce Jesus Christ to them, to tell them that the Kingdom of God is near and that it is for the poor, oh! how great that is.*⁴⁶

He insists:

⁴³Luigi Mezzadri, *op. cit.*, 348; cf. also, “La conversione di S. Vincenzo de’ Paoli. Realtà storica e proiezione attuale,” in *Annali della Missione* 84 (1977) 176-182.

⁴⁴SV VII, 333.

⁴⁵SV XII, 87; cf. XI, 202, 391; XII, 84.

⁴⁶SV XII, 80.

One could ask the Son of God: 'Why did you come?' It was in order to evangelize the poor. That was your Father's order.... It may be said that by coming to evangelize the poor we do not mean to come merely for their salvation but also for accomplishing those things predicted and prefigured by the prophets, to make the gospel concretely effective.⁴⁷

Some Implications

Let me offer, on this occasion of the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent's ordination, just a few implications of his choosing a missionary model for priesthood. On other occasions I have written at considerable length about other implications.⁴⁸

1. During this post-Vatican II period, many observers have noted the phenomenon which is sometimes called "parochial assimilation." Especially in countries where there is a shortage of diocesan clergy, many bishops have asked religious and members of Societies of Apostolic Life to take over parishes. From their point of view, such requests are quite understandable, since bishops need resident priests to take care of the people in their dioceses; their dominant model of priesthood is necessarily a resident one (the third model presented above in the schema of Raymond Brown). But, from the point of view of a missionary congregation, parochial assimilation can bring with it immobility and the domestication of a charism that demands that a priest go wherever in the world the needs of the poor summon him. Elsewhere I have written at length about St. Vincent's attitude toward parishes.⁴⁹ Here, let me simply state that the Congregation, and all its provinces, must make every effort to remain quite mobile, even in the face of bishops' requests to take over parishes.

2. When St. Vincent emphasized the awesomeness of the state of priesthood, because it is a share in the ministry of Christ, he regarded this as the grounds for humility, since the priest will always be unworthy to participate in the "office of the Son of God."⁵⁰ He did not make the mistake of confusing ordination to this "awesome" state with promotion to a prestigious social status. Priests are ultimately servants. Our lifestyle as missionaries should demonstrate this. Though it is surely important that we celebrate joyfully on the occasion of ordinations, there is a tendency in some countries, as the rectors of seminaries often attest, toward triumphalism and lavish celebrations at ordinations. I am happy that in the Congregation this is not usually the case, though unfortunately sometimes it does happen. Ordinations should clearly signify and celebrate a call to mission and itinerant ministry, not to status (other than the status of being a servant).

⁴⁷SV XII, 84.

⁴⁸Cf. Robert P. Maloney, "On Being A Missionary Today" in *He Hears the Cry of the Poor* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995) 118-125.

⁴⁹Cf. Robert P. Maloney, "On Vincentian Involvement in Parishes," in *Vincentiana* N° 2 (March-April) 1997, 105-116.

⁵⁰SV XII, 80.

3. While diocesan priests and bishops necessarily focus on the local Church, missionaries must develop and constantly nourish a universal sense of the Kingdom and the Church. St. Vincent was admirable in this regard. In an era when most people lived and died within five miles of their birthplace, he sent missionaries to Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. Today, when the Vincentian Family has spread to more than 135 countries, it is all the more imperative for missionaries to have a global world-view.

4. Missionaries have a distinctive form of relationship with local bishops. St. Vincent's life illustrates this strikingly. He was both obedient and independent. He repeatedly emphasized that when we give missions in a diocese we should do so at the call of and in obedience to the local ordinary. But at the same time he resisted the attempts of bishops to domesticate the Congregation. In fact, he labored for years to make sure that we were exempt from their authority so that we might preserve our mobile, missionary nature (he made analogous efforts, with similar success, in regard to the Daughters of Charity). There is a long tradition of tension in the Church between exempt groups⁵¹ and local ordinaries.⁵² It is very important that religious superiors be able to negotiate this tension with balance. On the one hand, the bishop is in charge when we are engaged in an apostolic mission in his diocese. On the other hand, our own superiors are in charge in choosing what dioceses we go to, how long and under what conditions we will stay, and when we will withdraw. Dialogue is, of course, crucial in such matters, but our own superiors must be firm in promoting and protecting the charism of the Congregation.

5. After a rather dubious start as a priest, Vincent became a great reformer, speaking often to priests and about priests. In his conferences to the members of the Congregation, Vincent preaches a recurrent theme as he sends missionaries out: that they be holy. If we share in the missionary vocation of Jesus, then we must "pattern ourselves, as far as possible, on the virtues which the great Master himself graciously taught us in what he said and did."⁵³

6. Let me suggest, as a conclusion to this article, *ten* characteristics of the missionary priest today. There are surely many others.

- a. He is a mobile evangelizer, on fire to spread the good news.
- b. He has an international perspective, a global world-view.
- c. He is in vital interaction with the culture of the country where he serves.
- d. He learns the language of his people.
- e. He is deeply rooted in the scriptures.

⁵¹Cf., Canon 591.

⁵²In the fifth century, John Cassian wrote: "A monk ought by all means to fly from women and bishops"! He added that this was an "old maxim of the Fathers." His concern, of course, was that bishops would interfere in the lives of the monks or try to use them for their own goals. Cf. *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium vitiorum remediis* 11.18 (ed. J.-C. Guy, SC 109.444; tr. E. C. S. Gibson, NPNF, 2nd series, 11.279).

⁵³*Common Rules* I, 1.

- f. He is creative in confronting the needs of the poor.
- g. He is well informed about the social teaching of the Church.
- h. He is engaged in ongoing formation.
- i. He is a man of God, deeply rooted in Christ.
- j. He lives out the five missionary virtues: simplicity, humility, gentleness, self- denial, and zeal.

To be a *missionary* — that is the calling of Vincentian priests — to breathe deeply of the missionary spirit that St. Vincent inspired in the Congregation, to let it fill our minds and hearts, and then to go. "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15).

GENERAL INDEX– YEAR 2000

I. Holy See

Secretariat of State: on the Third Centenary of the C.M. in China	1
Letter of John Paul II for the fourth centenary of the priestly ordination of the great apostle of charity.	433
Nominations, Decret and Letter	431

II. General Curia

1. Superior General

Lent 2000	3
On the Web Page (January 25, 2000)	97
Meeting of the heads of the Vincentian Family (March 7, 2000)	99
Our apostolic mission in the Islamic world (March 30, 2000)	102
First General Assembly of the Vincentian Marian Youth Association (September 27, 2000)	257
New vice-province of Sts. Cyril and Methodius (October 15, 2000)	265
Appeal for volunteers (October 15, 2000)	267
Advent 2000	274
Appointments and Confirmations by the Superior General	105, 437

2. Vincentian Family

Jubilee 2000 declaration on behalf of the Poor	7
First General Assembly of the Vincentian Marian Youth Association: Final Document (Rome, August 8-12, 2000)	260

3. Statistics

1999 Statistics of the Congregation of the Mission	278
--	-----

III. Feature

1. Evangelizing Europe

Jesus Christ, alive in His Church, a Source of Hope for Europe. “Reflections about the Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops” (<i>J. Landousies</i>)	13
Vincentians in Europe 2000. A time of Crisis. (<i>K. Rafferty</i>)	23
At the dawn of the Third Millennium. Some challenges for the Congregation of the Mission in Europe. (<i>C. Sens</i>)	41
The European Provinces of the C.M. and the Mission “Ad Gentes” (<i>J.I. Fernández Mendoza</i>)	51
Le Berceau of Saint Vincent de Paul (<i>J.-P. Renouard</i>)	57
The Collegio Alberoni. Yesterday and Today. (<i>A. Vernaschi</i>)	65
The Salamanca Vincentian Studies Weeks (<i>J.M. Sánchez Mallo</i>)	75
Vincentian Mission and the Parish of the Travelling People in Ireland (<i>F. Murphy</i>)	85

2. The Challenge of Formation

On the Formation of Formators. (A study document used in the General Council to implement some of the recommendations of the General Assembly of 1998) (<i>R.P. Maloney</i>)	107
Being a Vincentian. Being a Formator (<i>R.P. Maloney</i>)	115
The Structure of Vincentian Studies and Animation. (<i>S.I.E.V.</i>)	128
International Secretariat of Vincentian Studies (<i>S.I.E.V.</i>): Statutes (October 22, 1999)	139
Information Sheet on the work and decisions of <i>SIEV</i> . N° 4 – October 1999 (<i>R. Lovera</i>)	142
International Formation Center: St. Vincent de Paul (<i>CIF</i>) (May 24, 1999)	144
Role and Tasks of Advisors to AIC Groups and Associations. March 1999 (<i>M. Costa and A. Rovetta</i>)	148

3. Saint Vincent Priest

The Clergy in the France of St. Vincent (<i>L. Mezzadri</i>)	193
The Priestly Journey of St. Vincent de Paul. The Beginnings: 1600-1612 (<i>J.M. Román</i>)	207
The Mission and Vocation of the Priest According to St. Vincent de Paul. (<i>R. Facélina</i>)	218
San Vincent de Paul, Formator of Priests (<i>S. Wypych</i>)	229
St. Vincent, Priest of Charity at the Service of the Poor. Caring for Spiritual and Temporal Needs. (<i>Á. Quevedo</i>)	239

4. Saint Justin de Jacobis

The “First” Justin de Jacobis (<i>B. Falco</i>)	???
Saint Justin De Jacobis, Founder of the New Catholic Generation and Formator of its Clergy in the Catholic Church of Eritrea and Ethiopia (<i>G. Iyob</i>)	???
St. Justin De Jacobis and his dealing with the Coptic Christians of Ethiopia (<i>L. Mezzadri</i>)	???
Justin de Jacobis : the Art of Dialogue (<i>Prof. Y. Beyene</i>)	???
Edited and Unedited Writings of St. Justin De Jacobis (<i>G. Guerra</i>)	???
Devotion to St. Justin De Jacobis in Eritrea and Ethiopia (<i>G. Iyob</i>)	???
Bibliography of St. Justin de Jacobis. Biographies and Studies (<i>L. Nuovo</i>)	???

IV. Studies

On uniting Action and Contemplation. A key to Understanding Vincent de Paul. (<i>R.P. Maloney</i>)	171
Models of “Being Holy”. A View toward the Past, the Present, and the Future. (<i>R.P. Maloney</i>)	250
Vincentian Priesthood as missionary. An essay written for the 400th anniversary of St. Vincent’s ordination. (<i>R.P. Maloney</i>)	???

V. Special Issue of Vincentiana

The New Constitutions: 20 Years of Existence	
Sixteen years ago...(R. McCullen)	285
The Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. Historical Notes (C. Braga)	291
Identity of the Congregation According to Articles 1-9 of the Constitutions of 1980. (A. Elduayen)	309
The apostolic Works of the Congregation of the Mission (Constitutions 10- 18; Statutes 1-12) (L. Palú)	320
As friends Who Love One Another Deeply. Reflections on Community living Yesterday and Today (R.P. Maloney)	335
Constitutions: Fount of the Missionary's Spiritual Life. A rereading 20 years later of Articles 28-50 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. (E. Antonello)	355
The Constitutions: Unity in the Diversity of the Congregation of the Mission. (J. Ignacio Fernández de Mendoza)	368
The Government of the Congregation according to the New Constitutions (Y. Danjou)	380
The New Constitutions. Tradition and Renewal. (C. Braga)	391
Read and Pray the Constitutions. (M. Pérez Flores)	403
Fidelity to the Constitutions. (H. O'Donnell)	414

VI. Bibliography

1. Vincentian Bibliography	
Robert Maloney. Go! On the Missionary Spirituality of St. Vincent de Paul	425
Luigi Mezzadri-Francesca Onnis. Storia della Congregazione della Missione, II/1. La Congregazione della Missione nel sec. XVIII: Francia, Italia e Missioni (1697-1788).	425
Wiesław Wenz. Prawno-teologiczne elementy charyzmatu Zgromadzenia Misji Wincentyńskiej do powstania pierwszych "Reguł Wspólnych" (1617-1655). (<i>Juridical-Theological Aspects of the Charism of the Congregation of the Mission up to the first Common Rules</i>)	426
Giustino De Jacobis, Scritti: 1. Diario.	426
Collection. Le Missioni Popolari della Congregazione della Missione nei secoli XVII-XVIII. II – Documenti.	427
Collection. La Familia Vicenciana ante el Tercer Milenio. Caminos de futuro	427
Carlo Riccardi. Spiritualità Vincenziana. Contributo allo studio del Vin- cenzianesimo.	428
Giovanni Burdese. Dall'essere nella carità al vivere la carità. Principi di spiritualità e linee metodologiche per la Famiglia Vincenziana.	428
Jean-Pierre Renouard. Prier 15 jours avec Saint Vincent de Paul.	428
José Evangelista Souza. Província Brasileira da Congregação da Missão: 180 anos dos Lazaristas no Brasil.	429
José Barceló Morey. Hombres y apóstoles en la costa norte hondureña.	429
2. General Bibliography	430