

WORLD DOMINION

The World Dominion Movement advocates Informed Continuous Co-ordinated Evangelism to reach everyone at home and abroad. Its basis is belief in the Deity and Atoning Death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the World's Only Saviour, and in the Final Authority of Holy Scripture.

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Crisis in Ethiopia

JOSEPH J. COOKSEY

ETHIOPIA has come to an hour when she needs her friends, especially her Christian friends. This is perhaps still more true of her reforming and progressive Emperor, Hailie Selassie, who, with a relatively small group of helpers, is striving, within a time limit, to overcome a heavy mass of national obstruction. The lessons of history regarding borderlands, where so much of the world's mischief is hatched, especially those between the territories of strong and weak nations, have apparently not been laid to heart, and it is highly improbable that Ethiopia will escape the consequences.

Treaties made in the time of Menelik have in theory fixed her frontiers, but for the most part these have only been demarcated on the map. What might have been done is shown by the recent three years' work of a mixed British and Ethiopian Commission which has fixed the boundaries between Ethiopia and British Somaliland, leaving only the question of grazing lands still to be settled.

Twenty-six years have passed since the Treaty of 1908 was signed with Italy, which promised joint demarcation of the frontiers of the two territories, but nothing has been done. The steady campaign which has been carried on in certain French, Italian and Swiss newspapers for the past eighteen months, apparently designed to prepare international opinion for a Franco-Italian understanding, giving to Italy a special position in Ethiopia, has made a deep impression in the latter country. Her Government suggested to the Italians that a joint Commission should be set up to delimit the boundaries, but the attack on the Italian consulate at Gondar, and the affair at Walwal Wells on 5th December have prevented any action being taken.

Since these unfortunate occurrences the Pact of Rome has been signed by France and Italy, materially strengthening the position of Italy in East Africa. The ceding by

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France of a strip of coast facing the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, together with the recognition of Italian sovereignty over the adjacent island of Doumerah, gives Italy the command of the narrow waterway, and provides a valuable basis for developing her prestige in the Yemen and profitably expanding her growing trade throughout southwest Arabia. Of more immediate interest to Ethiopia is the acquisition by Italy of a considerable number of shares in the Djibuti-Addis Ababa Railway. This line, about five hundred miles in length, is the only one in the country. It connects the busy French port of Djibuti, which annually clears well over two million tons of shipping, with the capital of Ethiopia, conveying eighty per cent. of its total imports and exports. Even this part interest in the railway will enhance the prestige of Italy at Addis Ababa, and marks a definite advance in the Italianization of East Africa.

This event has been signalized by Signor Mussolini's appointment of General de Bono, a former Minister for the Colonies, as High Commissioner for the united territories of Eritrea and Somaliland, henceforth to be known as Italian East Africa. Signor Mussolini has taken over the office of Minister for the Colonies and will keep in direct and close contact with the High Commissioner, who, immediately upon his appointment, left for Asmara on 10th January. The mission is described in the Italian Press as a delicate one. His task of establishing friendly relations with the Emperor, and, by peaceful collaboration, settling the dispute between the two countries, while obtaining for Italy what she wants, is obviously a delicate one. It might have been equally delicate for the Council of the League of Nations to make an award based upon Article Eleven of the Covenant.

Recent advices from Addis Ababa, interpreting current Ethiopian opinion, express the belief that the High Commissioner will, as soon as convenient, press for the ratification of the Treaty of 1908 which gave to Italy a right of way through Ethiopian territory from Eritrea to Somaliland. Neither Italian Somaliland nor Eritrea are of

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much value in themselves, but the incorporation, by an informal process of use and wont, of the intervening rich and undeveloped slice of territory would make all the difference to Italy. Only thus can an Italian East Africa become an economic and administrative reality and justify the appointment of the High Commissioner. The payment of such a price for peace brings the Emperor face to face with the most serious crisis of his life, and may stir into determined opposition the forces of reaction in Church and State who disapprove of his reforming zeal.

There are no longer the same reasons for placing Ethiopia under European tutelage as was the case a few years ago. Sincere and steady efforts have been made for reform. In 1923, when Ethiopia was admitted to the League of Nations, a decree was issued punishing slave-trading by death, and in the following year a gradual and general emancipation was assured by the enactment that the children of slaves are born free, and that slaves become free on the death of their masters. This legislation is being genuinely enforced and every effort made to absorb into the community these freed men and to provide them with remunerative work.

Thus the number of *barya*, who are true slaves, is undoubtedly diminishing. The *gabare*, or domestic slaves, occupy a position somewhat analogous to that of feudal retainers. They are liable to render tribute to their chief by giving up a portion of their produce or by personal service. They cannot be legally sold by their master, neither may their families be broken up. Nevertheless, the system is fundamentally unjust and, in the hands of an unkind master, may become oppressive and cruel. On the other hand, the possession of *gabare* involves a responsibility on the part of the chief, both for maintenance and protection, which under modern conditions are onerous. Difficult economic conditions and the evolution of a higher social conscience are lessening the number of *gabare*. The day is rapidly passing when the king daily fed two thousand or more retainers, and the retainers of a rich man numbered from one hundred to a thousand. If, however, evils still worse than domestic serfdom are to be

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avoided, emancipation and absorption by the labour market must go hand in hand. Neither the Emperor, by a wave of his sceptre, nor his Government, by a stroke of the pen, can end a system as old as Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Nor can a strong case be made out against the Ethiopian Government for its failure adequately to guard its extensive frontiers and prevent unfortunate incursions into the contiguous territories of friendly Powers. The powerful provincial *rases* have jealously maintained their semi-independent authority and have not favoured a central government strong enough to impose its will. The British authorities of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan have been the chief sufferers and have annually spent large sums in controlling the frontiers and repelling the frequent raids for slaves and cattle by Ethiopian tribesmen.

Early in January, French Somaliland had such an experience which cost it the lives of a French administrator and a number of Somali levies. Recently, however, there has been a marked general improvement. Since the deposition of Ras Hailu, the ruler of Gojjam, in 1932, following upon his revolt, the north has been entirely pacified, and the recent death of Abu Jiffa, ruler of the rich province of Jimma, enabled the Government to take under its direct control the last of the semi-independent southern provinces. That this was possible without disturbance may in part be due to the modern military training of the army by a Belgian military mission since the Emperor's coronation in 1930.

Evidence of progress is obvious, and it is easy to appreciate the zeal and courage of the ruler and the group of progressive men around him. But it is less easy to appreciate the far harder task they are attempting in seeking to raise the moral and spiritual life of the nation by a revival of evangelical religion within the Ethiopian Church. In a real sense the Church and the nation are synonymous, for nearly one quarter of the adult male population are in the service of the Church and its landed wealth is very considerable. To respect its great historic past, to pay due regard to its present power and prestige as

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the guardian of the faith of the people, and, at the same time, to infuse into it new and vital ideas and carefully to lead it to seek a reviving visitation of the Divine Spirit, is a task requiring rare Christian gifts.

It is fortunate, and probably not accidental, that His Beatitude Abuna Kyrillos is the present head of the Ethiopian Church. Our correspondent recently visited him at the capital and thus writes of his visit, ' I was glad to see that the Abuna and his deacon, Marcus, are very eager to guide the religious life of the country along evangelical lines. Daily they are instructing the young deacons in the Bible and lesson-books similar to our own. Recognizing the needs and longings of his flock, his Beatitude has started preaching services in the popular Amharic tongue, and is now building a cruciform church for these gatherings, as the usual round or octagonal buildings with closed interior, are unsuitable for the purpose, nor hitherto have services for preaching been held by the clergy. I asked Deacon Marcus, who is busy training young men for evangelistic work in the country, what might be done to further Christian progress, and he promptly answered me, "Prayer and work." These endeavours to lift the Church to a higher level are hindered by superstition arising from the lack of spiritual guidance in former centuries, but under the present enlightened ruler the Gospel will increasingly clear away erroneous conceptions. The kind of men who, with the Emperor, are working for reform is well shown by the account which our informant gives of M. Heroui, the Ethiopian Foreign Minister, who has been conducting negotiations with the League.

' His Excellency has been the right hand of the Emperor through many years of devoted service. He has now founded a printing press which he has named *Goch Zebah* (the Dawn). This title he has also given to a recent book he has written, dealing with religious matters from a biblical point of view and lifting up Christ as the source of spiritual dawn. The teaching is similar to that found in a devotional work of his entitled, *Wodadjie Lebie* (The Friend of My Heart). It is remarkable that H.E. Belathengetha Heroui,

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who is a very busy man, holding the most important position in the Government, is writing religious books which do not accord with the conception of Christianity held by the reactionary priests. The Emperor, too, has recently ordered that the *Pilgrim's Progress* be re-edited and printed at the Imperial Press, the same which formerly printed his New Testament in the popular Amharic tongue.

'There is no doubt that a forward movement of the Church would be supported by those near the Emperor, by the many Government officials who have been educated in mission schools and by indirect missionary influence.'

The Scriptures are being increasingly read. Officials and merchants are using the editions published by the British and Foreign Bible Society and that printed by the Emperor. In some cases the books are worn out by constant use. Some of the monks of the Ethiopian Church are reported as being spiritually stirred. One of these our correspondent met at Jenda on the occasion of a church festival at which a great crowd had gathered. He thus describes the scene: 'Numbers of priests were singing the litanies and dancing in front of the *tabot* (the table of Holy Communion). The ceremonies ended, I saw a man, very poorly clad, climb into one of the trees. He commenced to address the people in a stirring appeal to repentance, acceptance of the Saviour, and the honouring of the Bible as the Word of God. At the close of about half-an-hour's address he descended to the ground, and, passing in front of the well-dressed priests, he exclaimed, "Do not trust in your fine robes, if Christ be not dwelling in your hearts, then you are lost."'

This monk is highly intelligent and well instructed in the Ethiopian Church language and theology. Later, in an interview, he said he had not had any contact with missionaries, and that the reason for his life of an ascetic and preacher at church festivals is to show his people that he is crucified to the world, and that the Living Christ is his all in all.

What has been set forth may serve to give a glimpse into the religious situation in Ethiopia; a situation less obvious

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than the well-ventilated dispute with Italy which is the topic of the day. No sound conclusions can be drawn regarding this latter dispute which do not give full weight to the factor of religion, for major conflicts in Ethiopia have been fought for religious reasons. For seven or eight centuries, when all the world around them seemed hopelessly submerged beneath the flood of Islam, they successfully maintained the Christian faith despite isolation and conflict. The Church of St. Augustine in North Africa was completely destroyed and the Church of Athanasius in Egypt was mortally maimed, but the Church in Ethiopia survived.

Directly bearing upon the present development of Italian ambitions is the episode of the turning to Rome of the Emperor David in 1604. This monarch under the influence of the Portuguese missionaries professed the Roman Catholic faith and made formal submission to the Pope. Whereupon the nation rose in rebellion, the Emperor was slain, allegiance was re-affirmed to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, and thirty years later the Jesuit missionaries were expelled. The decision taken by the Church of Ethiopia, together with the parent Coptic Church in Egypt on the Monophysite controversy at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., made any submission to the Church of Rome a national betrayal.

More recently, in 1916, the Emperor Lij Eyassue accepted Islam and renounced his Christian faith. The response of the nation was as quick and spontaneous as in 1604. After a sharp struggle with the Moslem army, the Emperor was deposed and Waizeru Zaudita, daughter of Menelik, was raised to the throne with Ras Tafari (now Emperor Hailie Selassie) as Regent.

These are days of religious tolerance in Ethiopia and three Roman Catholic missions are permitted to work. An entirely different situation might arise were the Roman Catholic Church, as the result of a partial Italian protectorate over the country, to become dominant. The existence of the Coptic Church would be at stake and that would certainly mean trouble. The Italianization of

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East Africa hitherto has meant an unchallenged supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church in Eritrea and Somaliland, and the Italian East Africa to be constructed by General de Bono, the High Commissioner, may legitimately be expected to produce the same result. Competent and trustworthy opinion in Ethiopia inclines to the view that should such a situation arise, conflict may be expected, and that a movement toward Islam as an alternative to absorption by the Church of Rome is within the bounds of probability.

The World Dominion Movement has taken a practical interest in the spiritual welfare of the people of Ethiopia,* and by its survey of the country in 1927 it very notably contributed to missionary effort on their behalf. It is, therefore, concerned with the march of events, and especially with the religious repercussions which may be looked for.

Protestant missionary societies in Great Britain and America have before them the sad spectacle of the destruction of the valuable work of the Swedish mission in Italian Eritrea by the authorities who have denied re-entry to missionaries on furlough, and have barred the incoming of missionary recruits. That the Protestant missions in Ethiopia would receive more considerate treatment than in other territories under Italian rule is hardly to be expected.

Early in November, listeners all over the world, who had tuned in to Moscow for their daily supply of Marxism, were shocked to hear the voice of Paul Robeson singing to them the Negro hymn, 'Steal away to Jesus.' When it became known in responsible Soviet circles there was a great to-do. Class enemies had succeeded in worming their way into the source of one of the most effective streams of Red propaganda! Six prominent wireless officials were dismissed, and the Chairman of the All-Soviet Broadcasting Committee published an apology to the Soviet public.

Mr. Leonard Gammon, writing to *Echoes of Service*, from Luma-Cassar, tells of the stimulus received through 'the visit of the noted Portuguese preacher and writer, Mr. Eduardo Moreira.' The 'Open Letter,' which follows will be read with interest. From all sides we are hearing of the unique work done by Mr. Moreira, and we are thankful for the foresight shown by Mr. Kenneth Grubb and the Rev. Alexander McLeish and others of the World Dominion Movement in securing his help.

* *Light and Darkness in East Africa.* Price 3/10, post paid.