

### **LEGACY**

Justin is the founder of the new Catholic generation in Ethiopia and Eritrea as he succeeded in establishing the Catholic Church there once again. Despite the small community he established it would resist and survive harassment and persecution. To this day the Church in Ethiopia has full approval from Rome to use the Coptic rite. By ordaining Ethiopian priests, in the event of expulsion of foreign missionaries, the people did not suffer the loss.

### **PERSECUTION**

While he did not overcome the enmity of the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, nor the Metropolitan Salama, head of the Ethiopian Church, he did found missions, a school, and a seminary at Guala.

The arrival of a Western Bishop and growth of the mission led to an outbreak of persecution at the instigation of the Salama who issued instructions to “...kill Abba Jacobis and all his people....” Justin barely escaped martyrdom on a number of occasions.

In due course, Justin was arrested in an attempt to make him “disappear”. But after several months of imprisonment at Gondor, his guards released him. He was again captured and imprisoned for extending hospitality to a French political mission. This time he was forced to endure long marches, rapid changes of climate, and a fatal fever. Again he was released and attempted to return to his people on horseback. However, death overtook him.

### **ABYSSINIA**

Known today as Ethiopia, a landlocked country (after the independence of Eritrea in 1993) situated in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia has been Christian since the 4<sup>th</sup> century but had slipped into schism with Rome, and heresy. There had been several attempts to establish the Catholic Church there but had failed. By 1890 Italy had established the territory of Eritrea, and the Italians fought the British for Ethiopia and occupied the country from 1936-1941. The British helped the Ethiopians to full liberation in January 1941.

### **DEATH**

Justin died on July 31st 1860, of a fever on the roadside near Halai after being released from prison.

*“Remember, Father, ...that we live in Jesus Christ by the death of Jesus Christ, and that we ought to die in Jesus Christ by the life of Jesus Christ, and that our life ought to be hidden in Jesus Christ and full of Jesus Christ, and that in order to die like Jesus Christ it is necessary to live like Jesus Christ.”*

(St Vincent, Vol I, p 295)



Justin de Jacobis was born on 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1800, in the small village of San Fele south of Naples, Italy. His family was considered to be wealthy, however, this changed through mismanagement by Justin’s father. As a result his parents moved to Naples where he began his education.

### **VOCATION**

Towards the end of his secondary education he became interested in the priesthood and was advised to join the Vincentians despite having no prior contact with them. Justin applied to the Vincentians and joined them at the age of 18, and was ordained on 12 June, 1824.

### **EARLY MINISTRY**

Justin’s first ministry was to give missions to the country people, and to help in the training of the clergy. He was then assigned to the parish of Monopoli. He is remembered for his austerity with food and clothing; he led a hard life which prepared him for the mission in Ethiopia where he would be surrounded by the poor.

During the cholera epidemic of 1836 in Naples Justin was noted for his heroism in helping the victims even at the risk of his own life. This too would be good preparation for Ethiopia where he would become cook, doctor, nurse, and grave-digger.

### **OVERSEAS MISSIONARY**

Justin always had a desire to devote himself to some foreign mission in Africa, preferably Algiers or Tunisia. Cardinal Franzani on a visit to Naples in 1838 offered the mission of Ethiopia to Justin. He accepted on the condition that he had the approval of his own Superior General in Paris.

Justin sailed off to Ethiopia and arrived on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 1839. He proceeded to Adawa, Tigre, where he worked tirelessly to re-unite the Abyssinian Church with Rome. The Holy See appointed Justin Prefect Apostolic of Abyssinia and all neighbouring territories.

From the beginning Justin and his companions, Luigi Montuori and Giuseppe Sapeto, adopted the Ethiopian style of dress and ate their food. They also began

to learn the three languages: Amharic, Tigrina, and Ghe'ez.

They also decided not, for the present time, let themselves be seen celebrating Mass or praying the breviary. In theory Catholic priests were liable to immediate execution if discovered.

They followed the Ethiopian liturgical calendar for seasons and feast days. Justin visited the sick. If people, laity and clergy, entered his house he would discuss religious matters with them. He gradually began to give catechism classes to the children. With time Justin became aware that Rome's idea of Ethiopia quickly converting to Catholicism was far from the truth.

The next difficulty was to find a bishop. An Italian Capuchin bishop, Guglielmo Massaia, was on his way to take up a new mission far from Justin's mission. Rome asked Massaia to stop in Massawa to ordain candidates that Justin had prepared. Massaia suggested to Rome that Justin be made bishop. Justin was hesitant, and reluctantly accepted. He was ordained Bishop in secret in Massawa in January 1849.

*"I had been consecrated in Rome...in contrast Bishop de Jacobis was consecrated at night, as one catches a thief, in a shed, with the assistance of only 2 priests.... In place of music, we were listening to the yelling of the mob outside, and the threats of death... the whole ceremony was continually accompanied with tears of a tender consolation.... God had chosen this moment... When the ceremony was completed, he took up once again his poverty stricken garments and his way of life of the pilgrim-apostle; so he lived, and so he died, in a desert under a little mimosa."* (Bishop Massaia)

Although he remained a priest of the Latin rite, he was also given faculties to celebrate Mass and administer Sacraments according to the Ethiopic rite to enhance his ministry.

### **JUSTIN AND INCULTURATION**

Any clergy who did convert to Catholicism were encouraged to stay within the Ethiopian Coptic Rite. Justin was alone in this insistence. It would take 100 years, until Vatican Council II, for the Church to see and accept that Justin was correct in his understanding of the missionary apostolate. Vatican Council II and Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* support this method of missiology.

Western foreigners had gained a reputation for being heretical and arrogant. At the time of Justin's arrival Catholic missionaries had not been allowed in for over 200 years. But Justin's attitude of courtesy as an expression of his truly Christian love for each individual he encountered, helped him in the long run, slow work he had accepted.

He adopted the whole culture of the country, including the language, and amid persecution, prison and hardship laboured indefatigable zeal that led to success in improving relations with the local churches.

*"How can missionaries go throughout the world announcing the Gospel if they know only their own language?"* (St Vincent, Vol. XII, pp 26-27)

In Justin's time it was difficult for foreign missionaries to accept and live the culture of their mission territory.

Many foreign missionaries tried to transplant the Gospel message. Yet they failed to establish the Catholic Church within the cultural context of Abyssinia. They were convinced of the superiority of their own culture, and were not able to appreciate the culture of the people.

Justin, however, was determined not to make the same mistakes, and so focused his energies on the formation of the indigenous clergy. This was Justin's success in establishing a seminary for them.

*"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."* (Justin de Jacobis)

Justin's main opponents were the Orthodox clergy. However, through his deep respect for them he was often invited to attend their liturgical and social gatherings. This enabled him to have a deeper understanding of their reality.

### **INCULTURATION**

Inculturation is a term used in Christian missiology which refers to the adaptation of how the Gospel is presented for the specific cultures being evangelised. The Gospel needs to be expressed in terms familiar to people so that Christianity does not come across as being foreign and irrelevant to their lives.

The missionaries do not bring Christ. The encounter is between the Good News and the people. To make the Gospel flesh and blood of a people can only be the task of the people themselves, and the "foreigner" has to be cautious, careful, and respectful.

*"The incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the Church."*

(Encyclical: *Slavorum Apostoli*, 1985, John Paul II)

*"The intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures."* (Encyclical: *Redemptoris Missio*, 1990, John Paul II)

St Paul is the first to attempt inculturation as we read in the following:

*"So Paul stood before the whole council of the Areopagus and made this speech. 'Men of Athens, I have seen for myself how extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters, because, as I strolled round looking at your sacred monuments, I noticed among other things an altar inscribed: To An Unknown God. In fact the unknown God you revere is the one I proclaim to you.'" (Acts 17:22-23)*