



*Journal of  
Religion & Society*  
Supplement Series

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The Kripke Center

Supplement 16 (2018)

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## Religion and Globalization

Edited by Ronald A. Simkins and Zachary B. Smith

### 1. Go Set Africa on Fire?

#### Lessons in Evangelization and Globalization from Early Jesuit Missions in Ethiopia

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#### Abstract

Despite their central importance for Ignatius of Loyola and the early generations of the Society of Jesus, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuit missions in Ethiopia are largely unknown in comparison to Jesuit encounters in China, Japan, India, Canada, and South America. This article offers a brief historical overview of these Jesuit Ethiopian missions between 1555 and 1640. The author also highlights six resonances between this early modern story of cross-cultural encounter and twenty-first-century mission and globalization. These include the imagination of a global Islamic menace; the dangers to Christian mission posed by political power and elitist paternalism; the need to envision catholicity as unity in diversity rather than unity in uniformity; the resurgence of religious and cultural traditionalism in the face of cosmopolitan globalization; and the importance to mission of long-term presence.

Keywords: Jesuit, Ethiopia, Pedro Páez, globalization, mission

## Introduction

My interest in the history of the Jesuits in Ethiopia stems in part from personal factors. In 2013, I helped lead a group of 16 Creighton University undergraduate students to Tanzania. One of the Jesuit scholastics who assisted us was an Ethiopian native. He grew up within a tiny Catholic enclave in a sea of Orthodox Christians and Muslims, and he shared eloquently about the roots of his vocation and the positive influence of Jesuit priests and professors. At Creighton University, I encountered an African Jesuit professor who had spent years teaching in Ethiopia. When I asked this professor about his experiences in Ethiopia, he shook his head. “It was tough! Those people are *very* traditional!” As we will see, this African Jesuit’s modern miscomprehension is not wholly unlike that of his European Jesuit forebears 400 years ago.

In addition to the personal connections, I found myself attracted by genuine intellectual curiosity. Namely, outside of the realm of area specialists, who knows anything about Jesuit missions in Ethiopia? I have a Ph.D. in Church History with a focus in Africa, and I even took a doctoral seminar on Jesuit missions in the early modern world. But the Ethiopian encounter did not appear on our class syllabus or on my comprehensive exams. Likewise, Ethiopia goes largely unacknowledged in mainstream works on Jesuit history (Worcester; O’Malley; Lacouture). The Jesuit story in Ethiopia has not received the cinematic attention of better-known Jesuit encounters among the Guarani (*The Mission*), the Huron and Iroquois in Canada (*Black Robe*), or, most recently, the Japanese (*Silence*). So, the question arises: why do we not know anything about a mission that was, along with Japan, the Society of Jesus’s most important global endeavor during the first century of its existence?

The simple answer is that this is not a Jesuit story we want to tell. Jesuit missions in Ethiopia reflected the Society of Jesus’s ethos from its earliest decades, a passionate, ambitious, and globetrotting effort, as Ignatius purportedly instructed Francis Xavier, to “go set the world on fire!” But it also reflected the risks of this type of strategy, namely that “setting the world on fire” from the Jesuit perspective can look like scorched-earth arson to those on the receiving end. In turn, the Ethiopian story reveals dimensions of early Jesuit mission that many moderns would just as soon forget, such as political authoritarianism, Tridentine dogmatism, and ecumenical intolerance. In turn, despite 80 years of effort, the Jesuits failed to leave much of a long-term legacy in Ethiopia. But the failures of the Jesuits in Ethiopia – and even our justified misgivings about their project of converting Orthodox Christians to Catholicism – should not dissuade us from learning from them.

I argue that many dimensions of this unloved Jesuit story resonate with questions of evangelization and globalization in the twenty-first century. These include the imagination of a global Islamic menace; the dangers to Christian mission posed by political power and elitist paternalism; the need to envision catholicity as unity in diversity rather than unity in uniformity; the resurgence of religious and cultural traditionalism in the face of cosmopolitan globalization; and the importance of long-term missionary witness. But first, let us uncover the largely unknown history of the Jesuits’ first international project in Africa.

## From Prester John to the Portuguese: Key Background Factors to the Jesuit Missions in Ethiopia

There were several key precipitating factors for sixteenth-century Jesuit missions in Ethiopia. First, there is the famous legend of Prester John. With roots in the medieval period, the Prester John myth posited that there was a powerful if schismatic Christian prince in either Asia or Africa. An alliance between Western Christendom and Prester John held the tantalizing prospect of breaking through the Islamic grip on the Middle Eastern world. By the fifteenth century, this myth was increasingly associated with the *negus* or king of Ethiopia, a figure whom Europeans had encountered through both trade and religious contacts. In fact, the first major sixteenth-century European account of Ethiopia from the pen of the Portuguese traveler Francisco Alvarez was suitably entitled “True Relations of the Land of Prester John” (Beckingham and Hummingford). Ignatius of Loyola later read this account, and the Jesuits justified their Ethiopia mission in part on the premise of strengthening this nascent alliance with the legendary “Prester John.”

Second, there was the Portuguese factor. The Portuguese became a global maritime power in the late fifteenth century, and Vasco de Gama sailed around Cape Horn and explored the East African coast in 1498. By the early 1500s, the Portuguese were the dominant European power in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean waterways. Soon King Manuel I of Portugal was calling himself “Lord of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, India, Arabia, and Persia” (Caraman: 5). Beginning in the 1510s, the Portuguese also developed closer diplomatic relations and ultimately a military alliance with Ethiopia. A Portuguese delegation including the aforementioned Alvarez spent six years in the Ethiopian capital in the 1520s. Twenty years later, a Portuguese army intervened in the 1540s to help the Ethiopian *negus* (king) defeat an occupying Muslim power. Critically, Portugal also emerged in the 1540s and 1550s as a very hospitable kingdom for the nascent Society of Jesus; it was only the second country after Italy in which the Jesuits were officially established.

Third, there is the ancient history of Christianity in Ethiopia itself. Ethiopia is one of the few African countries explicitly named in the Bible, including Psalm 68’s predictions that “Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to God” and the famous story of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. In the mid-fourth century, Ethiopia’s Aksumite kingdom converted to Christianity under the guidance of several Syrian and Alexandrian missionaries, establishing a historic connection between the Church in Alexandria and the Church in Ethiopia (Irvin and Sunquist: 215-19). Both churches later separated from the Latin West and Greek-speaking East after the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), supporting the Alexandrian “uniate” position that Christ had one mixed divine/human nature. Despite these divisions, Ethiopian Orthodoxy flourished in the centuries to come. By the thirteenth century, Aksum’s Solomonic monarchy was propagating the *Kebra Nagast* legend in which Solomon transferred the Ark of the Covenant to the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba (see 1 Kings 10:1-13), thereby establishing Ethiopia as the “chosen people” (Coakley and Sterk: 388-95). These legends also reflected some of the Jewish practices retained by Ethiopian Christians, including circumcision, the Saturday Sabbath, and extensive fasting and dietary laws. By the time that Jesuits began talking of an “Ethiopian mission” in the 1500s, Ethiopia herself had an established Orthodox church with over 1,000 years of history. This did not impress the Society

of Jesus. In the spirit of the counter-Reformation, Jesuits targeted the Ethiopian church for re-evangelization, bringing these schismatic Christians “home to Rome” while purifying their dangerously Jewish religious practices into more acceptable Latinized, Westernized forms. Or, in the enviable phrase of Andreu Martinez, the Jesuit mission embodied a theological spirit of “turning Saul into Paul” (137).

Fourth, there is an intriguing personal connection that lay at the root of Jesuit interest in Ethiopia. In the late 1530s and early 1540s, Ignatius of Loyola became acquainted with an Ethiopian Orthodox monk named Tasfa Seyon who had settled in Rome. This monk was close to Pope Paul III and became a trusted confidant of Ignatius. He even appears in the famous Chiesa del Gesu painting of Ignatius of Loyola presenting the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus to Pope Paul III (Martinez: 39-42). It seems likely that this monk also spurred Ignatius’s interest in sending the Jesuits to Ethiopia, a Portuguese ally, ancient Christian kingdom, and supposed home of the fabled Prester John.

### A Brief History of Jesuit Missions in Ethiopia

The Jesuit mission in Ethiopia was conceived shortly after Pope Paul III’s formal approval of the Society of Jesus in 1540. Between 1546 and his death in 1556, Ignatius of Loyola wrote over 150 letters on Ethiopia. Ethiopia mattered so much to him that he personally volunteered to go “in case none of our other men are willing” (Ignatius of Loyola: 144). Whereas he routinely rejected other efforts to enlist Jesuits in ecclesiastical leadership, he made an exception for Ethiopia, initially volunteering himself and his good friend and “first Jesuit” Pierre Favre. Ignatius’s interest was fueled by rumors that the Ethiopian *negus* was open to both Catholicism and a deeper Portuguese alliance, rumors that had been initiated by the Portuguese layman, Ethiopian court advisor, and self-appointed “patriarch” João Bermudez (Martinez: 24). In 1554, Ignatius appointed João Nuñez Barreto and Andrés de Oviedo, Portuguese Jesuits who had joined the society in the early 1540s, to lead the first Jesuit missionary delegation to Ethiopia. In his 1555 instructions to these “12 apostles of Ethiopia,” Ignatius shared his only extensive guidelines for cross-cultural missiology. His words here are notable for their spirit of both religious paternalism and strategic prudence:

While not depriving them of anything they are particularly attached to or value highly, try to get them to accept the Catholic truths and what needs to be held in the Church . . . Concentrate on the abuses or disorders that can be corrected gently and in a way that makes the need for reform evident to the people there; begin with these, and you will gain authority for reforming other abuses . . . May God take pity on these nations and deign to restore them to the unity of his holy Church and to the true religion and path of salvation for their souls (Ignatius of Loyola: 565, 568, 571).

It should be noted that elsewhere Ignatius described the Alexandrian church that oversaw the Ethiopian Orthodox as a “limb severed from the body” that does not “receive for himself the life of grace or any authority” (546). Ignatius’s counsel – especially his generally negative view of Ethiopian customs, calls for strategic prudence in modifying these customs, and long-term hopes for Latinizing change – would be followed to the letter by subsequent generations of Jesuit missionaries.

Oviedo and his companions arrived in northern Ethiopia in May 1557, disguised as Armenian merchants during their journey from Goa, India, to the Ethiopian coast. They earned an audience with the *negus*, Galawdewos, later that year. The Jesuits quickly stated their hopes that the *negus* and his royal court would convert. Toward this end, one of Oviedo's confreres wrote a treatise on Ethiopian Orthodox errors within 30 days of arriving at the court. The king was hospitable but not easily cowed by missionaries described locally as "Franks" (a term that echoed back to the medieval crusades). Galawdewos made it clear that he stood by Ethiopia's non-Chalcedonian orthodoxy, and he refused to countenance Roman papal authority. "And we walk in the royal path, straight and true, and we turn aside neither to the right hand nor to the left, in the doctrine of our Fathers, the Twelve Apostles and of Paul, the fountain of wisdom, and of their 72 disciples, and the 318 orthodox men who assembled at Nicaea, and of the 150 at Constantinople, and of the 200 at Ephesus" (Caraman: 12). After 18 months of fruitless efforts at "top-down conversion," Oviedo gave up on the royal court, moving with his fellow Jesuits to the northern region of Tigray. Here he ministered to a small community of ethnically mixed Ethio-Portuguese families whose ancestors had first settled in the region after the anti-Muslim conflicts of the 1530s-40s. Oviedo adopted a lonely, ascetic lifestyle, surviving a brief period of persecution under Galawdewos's successor Minas and refusing the Society of Jesus's and the Vatican's 1566 orders to disband the mission. In the words of Leonardo Cohen, the Jesuit mission in late sixteenth-century Ethiopia became a "dissident ideology" (31). Disillusioned with the mission's prospects and facing a hostile Turkish Ottoman power on the Red Sea, the society did not send any additional Jesuits to Ethiopia between 1557 and 1589, and the last Jesuit in the country died in 1598.

New hope was on the horizon, however, in the person of Pedro Páez, a charismatic Spaniard from Castile. Páez had first set off from Goa to Ethiopia in 1589 with Antonio Montserrate; Montserrate had achieved his own renown leading missions to the Emperor Akbar's Mughal court in India in the 1570s-80s. Captured by Ottoman Turks, Páez and Montserrate spent the next seven years working on slave galley ships, living under house arrest, and laboring in Yemen. After finally making it back to Goa in 1596, Páez briefly recuperated. He then demonstrated his indomitable Jesuit spirit by petitioning his supervisors for another chance to go to Ethiopia.

Páez arrived in Ethiopia in 1603 during a time of political turmoil. The long 34-year reign of the *negus* Sarsa Dengel had ended in 1597 without a named heir, and a succession struggle continued for the next decade. In 1604, one of the royal claimants, Za Dengel, embraced Páez, likely seeing in the Spaniard a possible entrée to a broader European military and trade alliance that could further his political ambitions. Reflecting Ignatius's own sense of strategic prudence, Páez discouraged Za Dengel from any hasty conversion to Catholicism. "Lord, it does not seem to be time yet for Your Majesty to stake everything. I think it would be better to go more slowly, so that it may penetrate gently" (Mkenda: 77). Páez proved prophetic. Za Dengel was killed just four months after publicly instituting a Sunday Sabbath and announcing his acceptance of the authority of the Roman pontiff.

It was Za Dengel's successor, Susenyos, who would prove to be Páez's long-term royal partner. After a three-year struggle, Susenyos vanquished his rivals and assumed the throne in 1607. In the meantime, Páez developed a close relationship with the new *negus*, embodying a missiological approach described by Andreu Martinez as "focusing on royal power, earning

the trust of important personalities and never confronting hostile subjects directly” (100). By 1609, the Jesuit had become a *de facto* royal chaplain to Susenyos, accompanying him on military campaigns and advising him at the royal court. Susenyos sent multiple letters to Rome and Lisbon seeking deeper military and economic ties. The Jesuits debated Orthodox leaders at court but also tried to avoid openly antagonizing Ethiopia’s established church. Orthodox leaders could see the way the winds were blowing, however, and in 1613 the Orthodox Abuna Simon excommunicated anyone who fraternized with the Jesuits. Four years later, Simon joined a failed rebellion against Susenyos. The crushing of this rebellion in 1617 really opened doors to the Jesuits. Páez was given permission to begin constructing a grand European-style church at Gondora, and he also began his monumental “History of Ethiopia.” In early 1622, Susenyos conveyed his intention to become a Catholic. Exhausted after two decades of missionary labors, Páez died in May of that year on the precipice of Catholicism’s public triumph.

It was Páez’s two successors, Antonio Fernandez and Alphonso Mendes, who would lead the Jesuit missions through their brief decade as the established church of Ethiopia. Fernandez had served in Ethiopia since 1604. In 1613, he undertook a secret and ultimately futile diplomatic mission to obtain Spanish military support for Susenyos. He took over the missions in 1618 and turned the Jesuit centers in Ethiopia into what Andreu Martinez has described as “centers for polemical anti-Orthodox theology” (170). Without consulting either the pope or the Jesuit superior general, the Portuguese king Philip IV in 1622 exercised his rights of *padroado* and appointed the Jesuit Alphonso Mendes, a Portuguese university scripture professor, as patriarch of Ethiopia (Caraman: 137). Mendes fit the growing Jesuit emphases on “scriptural prowess, theological preparation and an emphasis on hierarchy and authority” (Martinez: 120), but he would prove to be a very unfortunate choice.

In essence, Mendes was the opposite of the current Pope Francis. A university scripture professor, he lived in a world of theory and doctrine and had little to no missionary experience prior to arriving in Ethiopia. His zeal was rarely marked by Ignatius’s or Páez’s intuitive sense of strategic prudence, and he was also an ostentatious cleric. For example, whereas Jesuits typically kept a low profile in the Muslim and Hindu-dominated Indian Ocean region, Mendes caused a scandal when he formally processed into Goa in full episcopal regalia. In a similar vein, he arrived at the Ethiopian court in 1626 accompanied by 15,000 horsemen. In his opening 30,000-word homily, he banned the Saturday Sabbath and male and female circumcision, announced an immediate switch to the Latin liturgical calendar, and proclaimed that “all persons whatsoever should embrace the Roman faith under pain of death” (Caraman: 142). Benefitting from the full financial and military backing of the Ethiopian state and his own concerted efforts to control the local church, Mendes achieved some numerical success. Ethiopia’s baptized Catholic population doubled to 250,000 between 1622 and 1629. By the end of the decade, a record 22 Jesuits were ministering in the country. At the same time, the Jesuit ethos of “improvisation, harsh reformism and royal authoritarianism” (Martinez: 173) led to scorched-earth tactics that literally set the Ethiopian world on fire. Led by monastic communities, revolts spread across Ethiopia between 1628 and 1632 against Jesuit missionaries alternatively described as “sons of Leo,” “Nestorians,” “enemies of the Virgin,” “the Moors,” and even “relatives of Pontius Pilate” (Cohen: 69; Martinez: 281-82).

In response to this burgeoning popular insurrection, the Jesuits tried to dial things back. Under pressure from Susenyos (himself still a devout Catholic), Mendes in 1630 loosened restrictions on the Saturday Sabbath, Wednesday fasting, and local marriage practices. These steps failed to quell a growing tsunami of opposition. The tsunami crested with a June 1632 battle in which Susenyos's army killed over 8,000 of his own protesting subjects. After this, the *negus* announced a decree allowing for full religious freedom. Heartbroken and exhausted, Susenyos died several months later, and his successor Fasilidas quickly moved to exile the Jesuits and ultimately expel them from Ethiopia. Mendes and ten other Jesuits left Ethiopia in 1634, still scheming to arrange a Portuguese invasion that could restore them to political favor.

In the meantime, seven Jesuits remained to minister to the small Catholic communities. Like their more famous confreres in 1630s Japan, these Jesuits were hunted men, taking shelter with sympathetic local families, hiding in caves, and moving from safe house to safe house. By 1640, all seven had been arrested and killed, often in public hangings. Propaganda Fide, the Vatican's missionary branch, stripped Ethiopia from the Jesuits and turned over future (and universally futile) Ethiopian Catholic missions to their Franciscan rivals. The Jesuit mission in Ethiopia was effectively over. Writing from Goa in the late 1630s, even Mendes admitted in retrospect that he would alter his approach. "I would be firm in my intention of not changing anything in the rite of those people. I have learnt . . . that it is as difficult to eradicate customs that have been strengthened by centuries of tradition as to pull out the roots of an ancient tree" (Mkenda: 119). For their part, Ethiopian monks celebrated the restoration of Orthodoxy in song. "At length the sheep of Ethiopia are freed from the bad lions of the West . . . St. Mark and Cyril's doctrines have overcome the follies of the Church of Rome" (Caraman: 152).

Before we move into the land of lessons learned, let me add a brief and perhaps surprising postscript about the Jesuit story in Ethiopia. Namely, after 300 years, they came back. In 1944, the French Jesuit Michelle Gallet met Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie. Selassie was intrigued by the academic success of Jesuit schools in predominantly non-Catholic countries like Syria and Turkey, and he invited the Jesuits to revamp Ethiopia's secondary schools and initiate a new university. But there were strings attached. The Jesuits had to come from non-colonial Canada, they could not wear clerical dress, and they could not engage in pastoral or evangelizing ministries. In Festo Mkenda's words, "they could only come as tie-wearing professional Messieurs involved in educational projects rather than clerically clad Reverends on a proselytizing mission" (Mkenda: 144). Perhaps surprisingly, Pope Pius XII enthusiastically endorsed the mission, telling the Jesuits to commit "fifty years" to the project as necessary (Mkenda: 145).

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Jesuits established one of Ethiopia's leading secondary schools, Tafari Makonnen School, and laid the foundation for the University of Addis Ababa. In the late 1960s a Canadian Jesuit named Joseph Amédée Payour established food security and poverty relief programs in the slums of Addis Ababa. Showing just how much times had changed since the 1600s, the Jesuit Claude Sumner wrote a renowned series of books in the 1970s-80s on Ethiopian philosophy. In the words of Kenyan Jesuit Festo Mkenda, twentieth-century Jesuits carved out a niche as "ambassadors of the Catholic Church and of the universal Society of Jesus, sent to Ethiopia, not to proselytize, but to bear witness to the fact that universal human good can be peacefully served even in the context of religious

plurality” (Mkenda: 176). In this regard, they reflected the post-Vatican II ethos of the Society of Jesus under the leadership of Pedro Arrupe and his successors.

### **Lessons from the Jesuit Missions in Ethiopia: Six Resonances for Today**

Jesuit mission history is a particularly rich context for mining past lessons in globalization, evangelization, and cross-cultural encounter. Jesuits crisscrossed the early modern world from Japan, China, and India to Ethiopia, Brazil, Canada, and Paraguay. In the famous words of Jeronimo Nadal, the first secretary for the Society of Jesus, “We are not monks. The world is our house” (O’Malley: 68). I would point to six key resonances between the Jesuit cross-cultural encounter in seventeenth-century Ethiopia and the challenges we face in the twenty-first century.

First, the early Jesuit missions in Ethiopia embodied a romantic Christian imagination especially concerned with countering the perceived menace of global Islam. By the sixteenth century Ethiopia had attained a certain iconic status in Europe, enhanced by the legend of Prester John and the hopes for a global Christian alliance against Islam. Even after Europeans developed a more realistic sense of what Martinez describes as Ethiopia’s “resolutely earthly character” (Martinez: 22), the Portuguese commitment to aiding a besieged Christian kingdom was intrinsically linked to their overarching struggle to win back Red Sea trade routes from the Muslim Ottoman Empire. The Jesuits stoked these tensions to encourage broader European support for their project in Ethiopia. Five centuries later, this mythos of a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington) is on the rise again, fueled by ethno-nationalists in Europe and the U.S. and radical Islamist jihadists in the Middle East. Accompanying this has been a renewed and welcome attention to the plight of persecuted Christians around the world, especially in Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. The question, of course, is whether this renewed sense of global Christian solidarity can resist the geopolitical pressures to make a concomitant enemy of global Islam (Allen: 199-213).

Second, the Jesuit story in Ethiopia underwrites both the allure and danger of political power for the Christian church. Ignatius of Loyola himself taught the “top-down” missiology common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As he said in one 1555 letter, “the King of Ethiopia, Prester John, is humanly speaking the most important factor in this enterprise, and after him the people” (563). Following the guidance of their founder, the Jesuits set off to Ethiopia in the 1550s to convert the king and royal court in hopes that the rest of Ethiopian society would follow along. It took 65 years, but they finally achieved their Constantinian kingdom in the early 1620s. But even this political triumph proved fleeting, and a decade later the Jesuits were being expelled and hunted down by a new, hostile political regime. Although the Enlightenment ideal of separation of church and state is the constitutional framework for much of the twentieth-first-century world, Christians in Africa and America alike can appear desperate to cozy up to state power. This at times involves currying favor in government contracts or lobbying over policy issues; at other times this entails using the force of law and government power to restore or codify contested values in broader society. Much of this activism is a necessary correlative of the Christian commitments to social justice, human dignity, and the common good; a sectarian church is not necessarily a more faithful one. But we would do well to remember what happened to the Jesuits after the Pyrrhic political triumph

of Mendes in the 1620s. A story of “harsh reformism and royal authoritarianism” (Martinez: 173) did not end well.

Third, early Jesuit history in Ethiopia highlights a general spirit of elite paternalism and the Jesuits’ failure to reach the common people. The Jesuit focus on “top-down conversion,” the Ethiopian royal court’s own resistance to allowing broader evangelization, and the Ethiopian people’s commitment to their traditional Orthodox faith limited Jesuit impact in the Ethiopian countryside. Instead, Jesuit missions came across as elitist, cosmopolitan, and foreign (Martinez: 280). In turn, both the Jesuits and many of their Ethiopian Catholic converts often dismissed the common people as conservative, superstitious, uneducated, and/or in the grip of local monks. Ultimately, the Jesuits could not bridge the yawning gap between elite opinion and the attitudes of the masses, and their centralizing and homogenizing project gave way to deep centrifugal forces in Ethiopian society (Cohen: 187-91). The Jesuits also demonstrated little willingness to learn from the Ethiopians, preferring to view themselves as teachers imparting the true faith to misguided schismatics. Likewise, in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential elections, many of us in the Jesuit university world are tempted to write off the broad swathe of American Christians as “conservative,” “backwards,” “stupid,” and even “fascist” (to echo labels I have heard in recent months). Even in our social justice work, we must fight the tendency to pontificate on poverty without encountering the flesh of the poor. Like Alphonso Mendes, we need to be pushed beyond our university enclaves and the ideological straitjackets that can reign therein. Pope Francis’s “culture of encounter” is needed as much now as it was in the seventeenth century.

Fourth, this story has striking resonance to one of the major signs of our own times – namely a nationalist and religious backlash to globalization. The Jesuits were at the forefront of an early modern globalizing project. Hailing from Europe and based in India, they attempted to institute a religious, cultural, ethical, and familial revolution in Ethiopian society. This included their challenge to elite polygamy and universal male and female circumcision, their introduction of a new liturgical language and school system, and even an architectural and visual imprint that resembled Mughal India (Martinez: 220-59). But the speed and largely top-down nature of this revolution ultimately led to a massive Orthodox/nationalist backlash captured by the Amharic term “*Yatent*,” translated as “restoration” (Martinez: 310). In our own time, the past 50 years of accelerating globalization – famously encapsulated in Thomas Friedman’s phrase “the world is flat” (Friedman) – has led to unprecedented transnational integration in terms of technology, transportation, communications, and capital. At the same time, this has sparked a nationalist, populist backlash that Prankaj Mishra has recently described in terms of “*ressentiment*” (Mishra: 9, 36-80). This aggressive, violent “politics of rage” against cosmopolitan globalism often assumes the rhetorical form of a restoration of lost American, British, French, Chinese, Turkish, Islamic, Hindu, and/or Judeo-Christian values. In the face of this, Catholicism should not give up on its catholicity; nationalism may be the single biggest enemy of our Christian call to love our neighbor. But the Catholic cosmopolitan would do well to heed Pedro Páez’s own words when Za Dengel wanted to convert and immediately transform Ethiopia into a Catholic kingdom: “Lord, I think it would be better to go more slowly, so that it may penetrate gently” (Mkenda: 77).

Fifth, the Jesuit Ethiopian story reminds us of the importance of envisioning catholicity in terms of “unity in diversity” rather than “unity in uniformity.” In a year in which the world

commemorates the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, we are also commemorating the forgotten 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Abuna Simon in a fierce Ethiopian Orthodox revolt against the growing influence of Jesuit Catholic missions. Both conflicts stemmed in part from an inability to engage in respectful theological dialogue or accept a plurality of liturgical approaches. In the case of Ethiopia, Latinizing the local church was doomed to end in failure; the only path to unity was to accept the Ethiopian rite as a legitimate alternative to the Western Latin tradition. Interestingly, the Society of Jesus showed much more flexibility with Maronite Christians in Lebanon and the Syrian “St. Thomas” Christians in southern India, facilitating reconciliations with both churches between 1580 and 1600 that left local liturgies largely intact (Hastings: 157). In our more ecumenical times, Christian leaders have made ample progress on formal theological dialogues and the acceptance of liturgical pluralism. But intra-Christian divisions are ripe as ever. Today’s antipathies revolve more around questions of economic ethics and sexual morality than doctrine and denomination; issues of gender, homosexuality, and capitalism are far more divisive than those of liturgy, Eucharist, or the Reformation doctrine of justification. What is the way forward on today’s contested issues? Can we dialogue with respect and conviction? Can we accept a plurality of attitudes that undergirds a “unity in diversity,” especially in a global church with vastly different attitudes? Or are these “line-in-the-sand” issues that demand radical personal *metanoia* and cultural transformation? The Jesuit mission to convert Ethiopian Orthodox to Catholicism can be too easily dismissed as an outdated historical example of religious intolerance. In reality, the high stakes and mutual miscomprehension that marked that encounter haunt our polarized churches just as much in the twenty-first century.

Sixth, for all the evident flaws of early modern Jesuit missions in Ethiopia, they also remind us of the importance of long-term missionary witness and presence. Oviedo died after 20 years in country, refusing to leave even when the pope and Jesuits ordered him to do so. Páez died after 19 years of exhausting service; Fernandez stayed 30 years until his expulsion in the 1630s; twentieth-century Jesuits like Payour and Sumner dedicated their careers in Addis Ababa to solidarity with the urban poor and intellectual dialogue, respectively. This long-term missionary witness is a reminder that far from “setting the world on fire” and then running away, modern Christian missionaries should make a long-term commitment of solidarity to a people in a particular place. I am reminded of the image of Susenyos, weeping at Páez’s gravesite on the first anniversary of the latter’s death. “No, let me give vent to my love for this Father, who was for me not only a teacher but also a father and a faithful friend” (Mkenda: 91-92). Whatever its shortcomings, Jesuit missions in Ethiopia produced genuine personal relationships that crossed boundaries of culture, race, religion, and language. In our own era of globalization and cross-cultural encounter, that is a legacy surely worth imitating.

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