

## Why Doesn't the Vatican Apologize for the Fascist Wars and Massacres that It Sponsored With Its Own Blessings Against Ethiopia in 1935?

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"...While Pope Benedict XVI is recognized for his prompt response to issues such as his travel to Turkey following his controversial remarks regarding Islam, his apology to the Jews, and his reaction regarding the alleged crime committed by paedophile clergy, it is a matter of a great concern that His Holiness has chosen, so far, not to own up to the Vatican's complicity with the Fascist crime, during 1935-41, which resulted in the murder of one million Ethiopians as well as the destruction of 2000 churches, 525,000 homes, and 14 million animals. Could it be because Ethiopia is a poor African country?" [Kidane Alemayehu, "[The Pope's Thundering Silence on the Ethiopian Cause](#)", an article I received via e-mail from a friend in the USA].

In 1993, the Time Magazine published an interesting story of a large number of public apologies by presidents, popes and other political leaders of the world, apologizing for past horrors that they were responsible directly or indirectly. The list was quite impressive and surprising. These included Pope John Paul II's apology on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church for its role in supporting the enslavement of Africans, Japanese Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa's apology for Japan's role in World War II, Russian President Boris Yeltsin's apology for the Soviet army's massacre of 15,000 Polish army officers in the Katyn forest during WWII, and Nelson Mandela's apology for atrocities allegedly committed by his African National Congress (ANC).

In view of this well recorded tradition of apologizing for past horrors perpetrated against innocent citizens of this world, the conspiracy of silence of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican in not yet apologizing for the wars and massacres by Italian Fascists against Ethiopia and the Ethiopians in 1935-41 that it publicly supported and blessed as 'a civilizing mission of the infidels,' as rightly and correctly mentioned by our patriotic citizen Kidane Alemayehu here above, is indeed puzzling and annoying, to say the least. Why double standards? Why choose utter silence and opt to delay this gross travesty of justice? Why does the incumbent Pope Benedict XVI of the Roman Catholic Church prefer to leave this open wound not healed in a country where live millions upon millions of Catholics, a sizable part of his Church's followers, or his own flock, so to speak? Why is this Pope still silent on the Ethiopian apology case when he has not taken time to travel to Malta on April 17, 2010 to talk to Catholic victims of sex scandals by members of the Catholic clergy of the Roman Catholic Church? "Is it because", as Kidane sarcastically and philosophically retorted, "Ethiopia is a poor African country?". To Kidane's question, my unambiguous reply is a categorical "yes". Is that all as a satisfactory answer for all the bestiality that surrounds this topical issue? Not at all! I would argue that this silence emanates from the sheer contempt for a black African nation; it is racism, nothing less.

Hence, I would add that this 'thundering silence' of the Roman Catholic Church is not only because Ethiopia is a poor African country that has no voice in world politics but the condoning of this barbaric act as well as the evil stance of silence is also, I strongly argue, sustained for so long by Western belief in its own superiority and in its self-declared altruism of bringing 'the savages and barbarians' of the primitive societies of this planet to civilization and Christianity. This ideology was strongly held and propagated by European/American philosophers, statesmen, popes, scholars and laymen alike for centuries.

We only have to take a glimpse of the positions of even the so-called universal philosophers as Marx and Engels of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, to substantiate our thesis. Despite the universalistic posture of Marxist theory, it is ethnocentric at many points.....To begin with, Marx held the Third World in contempt because it did not measure up to the West. In the Communist Manifesto Marx wrote that the bourgeoisie,

"...draws all, even the most barbaric nation, into civilization....and has rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of Bourgeois, the East on the West." Marx described Bengalese communities as "small barbarian, semi-civilized communities" [Karl Marx 1853], and found it "amusing" that China was "the seat of primeval reaction and conservatism" [Karl Marx 1850]. Later he referred to Chinese life as a "fossil of social life" [Karl Marx 1862]. Commenting on the Sepoy rebellion in India, he noted that it has "developed all at once on the part of the Hindoo and Mohammedan barbarians, a ferocious and fanatical hatred of their Christian and civilized masters." [Karl Marx 1858]. His views on the Moorish War were equally damning:

"From the Moors we cannot expect anything but irregular fighting carried on with the bravery and cunning of semi-savages. But, even in this, they appear deficient." [Karl Marx 1860].

This despicable stance of Marx was shared by Engels, who spoke of "Asiatic barbarity" and of the difficulties of training "Orientals" because of their ignorance, impatience, prejudice and vicissitudes and discussed the "Chinese nationality with its over-bearing prejudice, stupidity, learned ignorance and pedantic barbarism." [Frederick Engels 1857]

As part of his ongoing onslaught on Third World peoples, Marx rejected any notion of genuine virtues in traditional communal systems in the Third World. Instead he writes:

"We must not forget that these idyllic village communities...had always been solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind...making it an unresisting tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath traditional rules, depriving it of grandeur and historical energies...We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man to be sovereign of circumstances."

[Karl Marx 1853]

The Western European cultural bias comes out again when Marx wrote to Engels about the "idyllic republics" of north-western India:

"I do not think anyone could imagine a more solid foundation for stagnant Asiatic despotism. And however much the English may have hibernicized the country, the breaking up of those stereotyped primitive forms was the sine qua non for Europeanization. Alone the tax-gatherer was not the man

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to achieve this. The destruction of their archaic industry was necessary to deprive the villages of their self-supporting character." [Marx to Engels, June 14, 1853].

Engels, too, referred to state socialism in Java as a government in which "people are kept at the stage of primitive stupidity...It is proof of how today primitive communism furnishes there, as well as in India and Russia, the finest and broadest basis of exploitation and despotism (so long as it is not aroused by some element of modern communism)".[Engels to Kautsky, Feb. 16, 1884]

The biases implicit in this train of reasoning lead naturally into a critique of the whole Marxian concept of dialectics as Marx applied it to the Third World. His basic assumption was that since these traditional societies lacked their own internal dynamics for development, some external factor was necessary. Conceiving British civilization to be superior to Hindu civilization, he thus argued that "England has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerative--the annihilation of old Asiatic society and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia." [Karl Marx 1885]

Holding to this same axiomatic basis, Engels regarded the conquest of Algeria by the French as "an important and fortunate act for the progress of civilization." And after all," he continued, "the modern bourgeois, with civilization, including industry, order, and at least relative enlightenment following him, is preferable to the feudal lord or the marauding robber, with the barbarian state of society to which they belong" [Frederick Engels 1848].

It is interesting to note that this bias, endemic to Marx, puts him in the category of Walt Rostow, whose "entire approach to economic development and cultural change attributes a history to the developed countries but denies all history to the underdeveloped ones." [Andre G. Frank] This automatically denies the cultural autonomy and distinctiveness of Third World peoples. Furthermore, it was precisely the incorporation of foreign peoples into the expanding bourgeois empire that initiated the cycle of their underdevelopment. Fanon saw and recognized this important flaw in Marxist reasoning. Cabral, too, noted the Marxian assumption which implies that these countries lived without history or outside of history up to the time when they were subjected to the yoke of imperialism. For this old misguided position, Cabral, like Fanon, has substituted the view that imperialism, by imposing itself from the outside, interrupted the normal development of the productive forces of the Third World and thus interrupted their history; therefore, liberation implies freeing the productive forces from foreign domination, which would mean a return to history.

Nyrere has since voiced a Fanonian reservation to Marxism. The orthodox Marxist framework, he writes, "...gives Capitalism a philosophical status which Capitalism neither claims nor deserves. For it virtually says, "without Capitalism and the conflict which Capitalism creates there can be no Socialism/" This glorification of Capitalism by doctrinaire Socialists, I repeat, I find intolerable." [Julius K. Nyrere 1968]

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In sum, therefore, neither Fanon nor his later comrades could accept categorically the assumptions criticized above, for they boil down to a denial of the cultures and histories of the societies before the exploitative presence of the Whites. Those Blacks who tried to stick to the Marxian model mechanically soon got into trouble, either because of the arrogance of White Communists who accepted the dictates of the model, or because of the intrinsic weakness of the model itself when applied to Third World situations." [Harold Cruse 1968]

Even when we go to the 1930s we find the same ideology, dominating especially in the colonial motherlands. On that view, only some maybe, even rather few, colonies would ever be able to stand on their own feet and thus achieve development. A leading British authority on the colonies, Margery Perham, emphasized in 1941:

"Africans must have foreign rulers and for a long time to come" [quoted in Betts 1998:16]. The League of Nations explicitly recognized Mandates, areas to remain under 'tutelage' of 'advanced nations'. Most peoples in Sub-Saharan Africa were seen to require an "indefinite period of European tutelage" and the 'primitive peoples of South West Africa and the Pacific were likely to "remain wards of the states-system for centuries, if not forever" [quoted in Jackson 1990: 73]. "The African", Lord Lugard remarked, "holds the position of a late-born child in the family of nations, and must as yet be schooled in the discipline of the nursery" [quoted in Jackson 1990: 71].

The European 'tutelage' over Africa has not ended even after the decolonization of the continent and the political independence of African countries and the demise of apartheid regimes in South Africa and Namibia. Only the forms has changed; now the 'parental tutelage' is effectively done by foreign aid agencies, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the USA, the European Union, the UN-affiliated organizations, the USAID, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the ICJ, the ICG, VOA, BBC, Africa Watch, and many others. Our development policies, programmes and projects, and even our periodic elections need to secure the approval of the above patrons. This is the sorry situation of many an African country today. Unless we Africans wage a concerted and united struggle, just as the Chinese, the Indians and the other Asian nations that were formerly despised by Marx, Engels and many other Eurocentric and ethnocentric Western scholars and philosophers of the past as well as today, there is no easy escape from this imposed tutelage of foreigners for a long time to come. Under these circumstances, whether or not the Roman Catholic Church or its incumbent Pope publicly apologizes for the heinous crimes of 1936-41 that it wholeheartedly supported against Ethiopia and the Ethiopians does not mean a lot, as far as I am concerned. After all, in one form or another, the crimes by a large number of European/American churches, states and numerous institutions, public and private, are still continuing unabated and on a daily basis. May be as a symbolic gesture, the Pope's apology may please some of our compatriots at home and abroad for a short time, or it may even open the wounds that were long healed on their own because of the time factor. Isn't it too late to satisfy our long time expectations for an apology from the Pope of Rome? May be, BETTER LATE THAN NEVER!

Let us debate about it and pursue the best possible option. Adieu!

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