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**Jesuit Missionaries in Ethiopia:
Their Role as Exorcists, Healers and Miracle-Makers (1603–1632)**

“What a mystery the world is,” he muttered as he
scrambled down the slope, “what a great mystery...
you can’t tell the good God from the Devil... There’s
many times, God forgive me, they look just the same!”

Nikos Kazantzakis, *Christ Recrucified*.

Abstract

The present article focuses on certain activities engaged in by both Jesuit missionaries and Ethiopian holy men, as for example, when missionaries acted as intermediaries between God and men, conjuring evil forces, exorcising demons and performing miracles through the use of holy water, relics or images of saints. In Ethiopian society, healing was not perceived as a secular activity. As we show here, the Jesuit point of view was not so different. In the eyes of the Jesuits, the success of Catholicism in Ethiopia depended on proving not only its intellectual or political superiority but also its worldly effectiveness. In sum, the present article reveals that demonstrating their superior power was an important part of the Jesuits’ attempt to win converts to Catholicism in Ethiopia during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The Jesuit mission sought for many years to subjugate the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to the Roman Catholic Church. The struggle between the two churches concerned political power,¹

¹ A. Bartnicki & J. Mantel-Niećko, ‘The Role and Significance of the Religious Conflicts and People’s Movements in the Political Life of Ethiopia in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *RSE*, 24 (1969–1970),

theological issues² and problems related to religious practice.³ However, as we shall see, the Jesuits in Ethiopia were not reluctant to compete with Ethiopia's "holy men" in the performance of miracles and exorcisms and to display their superior control of worldly phenomena, thereby increasing the prestige of the Catholic faith. The impact of the Jesuit approach to religious problems on the royal courts of Ethiopia is often emphasized, and the missionaries, in contrast to the local clergy, have been perceived as methodical, well-educated, and rigidly organized.⁴ Nevertheless, proper attention has yet to be paid to certain activities engaged in by Jesuits and Ethiopian holy men alike, as for example, when the missionary acted as an intermediary between God and men, conjuring evil forces, exorcising demons and performing miracles through the use of holy water, relics or images of saints. It is true that in speaking of miracles and exorcisms, we enter the thorny path of interpretation, but our focus will be on the concept of reality both the Jesuits and the Ethiopians applied to the realms of the miraculous or demonic. In what follows, we shall analyze the function that the Jesuit missionaries performed in Ethiopia as exorcists, healers and miracle-makers. Up to what point can we consider that the Jesuits took over a characteristic function of the Ethiopian holy men? Were the conceptions that both groups held in relation to the devil and witchcraft perhaps similar? Was healing a religious activity to the missionary's eyes, useful to demonstrate the superiority of their own religion?

The monastic 'holy men' played an important role in the promotion of Ethiopian Christianity among the pagan population of their country, making the Christian God

pp. 5–39; Merid Wolde Aregay, 'The Legacy of Jesuit Missionary Activities in Ethiopia from 1555 to 1632', in: *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*, ed. Getachew Haile, A. Lande and S. Rubenson, Hamburg 1998, p. 45 (31–56); M.J. Ramos, 'Machiavellian empowerment and disempowerment: the Violent Struggle for Power in the 17th Century Ethiopia', in: *The Anthropology of Power: Empowerment and Disempowerment in Changing Structures*, ed. A. Cheater, London – New York 1999, pp. 191–205. According to Chernetsov, the reason for the reciprocal attention between Susenyos and the Jesuits was the aspiration of the Emperor to autocracy and the establishment of firm control over the feudal lords. See S.B. Chernetsov, 'The Role of Catholicism in the History of Ethiopia of the First Half of the 17th Century', in: *Études Éthiopiennes: Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes*, Paris, 24–28 août 1988, éd. par C. Lepage & E. Delage, Paris 1994, pp. 205–212.

² E. Cerulli, *Scritti teologici etiopici dei secoli XVI-XVII*, 2 vols. (SeT 198, 204), Città del Vaticano 1958–60; S.B. Chernetsov, 'Ethiopian theological response to European missionary proselytizing activities in the 17th–19th centuries', in: *Ethiopia and the Mission: Historical and Anthropological Insights*, ed. V. Bøll & al. (Hamburg 2005), pp. 59–67. T. Beiene, *La Politica Cattolica di Seltan Sägäd I (1607–1632) e la missione della Compagnia di Gesù in Etiopia*, Ph.D. thesis, Roma, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1983, pp. 123–140, 362–367; I. Guidi, 'La chiesa abissina', *Oriente Moderno*, 2 (1922–1923), pp. 123–128, 186–190, 252–256.

³ A. Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, 'Paul and the Other: the Portuguese Debate on the Circumcision of the Ethiopians', in: *Ethiopia and the Mission*, op. cit., pp. 37–57; L. Cohen, 'Los portugueses en Etiopía y la problemática de los ritos judaicos', *Historia y Grafía*, 17 (2001), pp. 209–240; *idem*, 'The Jesuits in Ethiopia and the Polemics over the Sacrament of the Eucharist', in: *Les deux réformes chrétiennes: Propagation et diffusion*, ed. M. Yardeni & I. Zinguer, Leiden 2004, pp. 138–150.

⁴ G. Beshah & M. Wolde Aregay, *The Question of the Union of the Churches in Luso-Ethiopian Relations (1500–1632)*, Lisboá 1964, p. 79; D. Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, Oxford 2000, p. 67.

present in the time and place of the believers.⁵ The holy man who had gained power over demons and diseases, over bad weather and the disorders of the material world, could, through his prayers, open heaven's gates to the believer. As Steven Kaplan has correctly stated, the success of the "holy men" as missionaries during the early Solomonic period (1270–1527) depended primarily on their ability "to explain, predict and control this-worldly events. Thus, the holy men did not deny the validity of the religious worldview of potential converts. Rather, they entered into competition with the traditional religious specialists and attempted to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity".⁶ As a result, the spread of Christianity did not, in general terms, involve a change of cultural patterns as a precondition for receiving the new religion; rather, Christianity incorporated them as their own.

One of the main tasks of these missionaries was to scare away demons in whatever forms they presented themselves.⁷ As Kaplan states, "no area of Ethiopian life was free of Satan's influence⁸... [...] the idiom of satanic possession served to pinpoint the tensions that threatened to disrupt the court, monastery, village or family".⁹ But the diabolic forces at work reflected not only the social or political tensions but also disorders on a physical and emotional level. The demon was present as well in the explicative apparatus of personal crises.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as far as the Catholic Church was concerned, the devil's sphere of activity expanded. Saint Augustine had asserted that the demons of paganism were successful in their frauds and tricks only when they were granted divine permission.¹⁰ Many medieval theologians had adopted the idea of possession by the devil, though they conceived him as a mere imitator of God, a talented charlatan.¹¹ Nevertheless, demonic power in the eyes of 14th and 15th century clerics was not confined to the mental sphere and was believed to include the propagation of doctrines opposed to the faith.¹² This modification corresponds

⁵ The most important work on this subject is Steven Kaplan's book, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia*, (Studien zur Kulturkunde, 73), Wiesbaden 1984. There are other important works about the role of monastic holy men in other periods and places. See, for example, P. Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 61 (1971), pp. 80–101; *idem*, 'The Saint as Exemplar', *Representations*, 1 (1983), pp. 1–25; also *idem*, *Authority and the Sacred*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 55–78.

⁶ S. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

⁷ *The Life of Filmona the Saint* begins as follows: "Truly, God the Lord has given the patience and force to all his saints to vanquish Satan and all the bad demons." See *Actes de Filmona*, ed. M. Allotte de la Fuÿe, (CSCO 181; SAe 35), Louvain 1958, p. 1.

⁸ S. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁰ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, I, viii, 18.

¹¹ See J. Caro Baroja, 'Witchcraft and Catholic Theology', in: *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, ed. A. Benet & G. Henningsen, Oxford 1993, p. 23.

¹² See for example, P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400–1800*, Basingstoke, 2001, pp. 14–27; J.L. Pearl, 'French Catholic Demonologists and Their Enemies in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', *Church History*, 52 (1983), pp. 457–467; S. Sharot, *A Comparative Sociology*

to an increase in the belief in magic and a more extensive practice of its various manifestations.¹³

Among the Jesuits, demons played an important role in explaining personal crises and religious experiences.¹⁴ Loyola's autobiography tells us about an apparition he saw in the hospital, like a snake in the air, covered with sparkling things resembling eyes. He was delighted and consoled by the apparition till he saw it over Tort's cross and understood it was the devil.¹⁵

There is no doubt that by the end of the sixteenth century and beginning of the seventeenth century, Europe was obsessed with the idea of the devil's physical presence in the world. The Roman Catholic Church held that any number of popular rituals for healing, causing injury or predicting the future were the result of an express or tacit pact with the devil. The immense erudition displayed by authors such as Jean Bodin¹⁶ and the Jesuit Martín del Río,¹⁷ whose studies in magic and witchcraft were thoroughly detailed, show us that the belief in witchcraft was far from being just a matter for ignorant people.¹⁸

of *World Religions*, New York 2001, pp. 225–226; F. Cervantes, 'El demonismo en la espiritualidad barroca novohispana', in: *Manifestaciones religiosas en el mundo colonial americano*, ed. C. García Ayuardo & M. Ramos Medina, México 1997, pp. 129–146.

¹³ Witch-hunts are viewed by today's scholars as "originating from two contrasting but not necessarily opposed forces: from below, that is, from the substratum of ancient magic permeating popular culture and piety; from above, that is, from an intellectual ideology which, stemming from scholasticism, eventually culminated in the crystallization of the inquisitorial procedure and was reinforced by the emergence of demonological literature." See G. Mora's introduction to J. Meyer, *Witches, Devils and Doctors in the Renaissance*, Tempe, Arizona 1998, p. LV.

¹⁴ See the case of Jean-Joseph Surin, *Correspondance*, Paris 1966; *Triomphe de l'amour divin sur les puissances de l'enfer: en la possession de la Mère Supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun, exorcisée par le Père Jean-Joseph Surin, de la Compagnie de Jésus et Science expérimentale des choses de l'autre vie, 1653–1660*, ed. M. de Certau, Grenoble 1990; also L. Kolakowski, *Cristianos sin iglesia: La conciencia religiosa y el vínculo confesional en el siglo XVII*, transl. F. Pérez Gutiérrez, Madrid 1982, pp. 302–313. Some years before Surin's time, the Spanish Jesuit Juan de Maldonado, wrote: "Some people do not believe that the devil appears to anyone. Others, on the contrary, are so credulous that they believe that everything they see is a demon. The one and the other are in error." See J.L. Pearl, *op. cit.* p. 460.

¹⁵ Ignacio de Loyola, *Autobiografía y diario espiritual*, ed. L.M. Mendizabal, Madrid 1992, pp. 74, 83. (Nos. 19, 31).

¹⁶ J. Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, transl. R.A. Scott & J.L. Pearl, Toronto 1995; also, J.L. Pearl, 'Humanism and Satanism: Jean Bodin and his Contribution to the Witchcraft Crisis', *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 19 (1982), pp. 541–548; E. William Monter, 'Inflation and Witchcraft: the Case of Jean Bodin', in: *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe*, ed. T.K. Rabb & J.E. Seigel, Princeton 1969, pp. 371–389.

¹⁷ M. del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, Manchester, 2000. Del Río expressed a common, widespread fear when he wrote: "These days, as we are taught by both reason and experience, we have to do battle, not with the delusions of credulous old women or apparitions which the half-witted see in their dreams, but with actual evil spirits whose power and counsel is used by practitioners of magic". See P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, *op. cit.* p. 43; see also J. Caro Baroja, *El señor inquisidor*, Barcelona 1996, pp. 171–196.

¹⁸ See J. Caro Baroja, 'Witchcraft and Catholic Theology', pp. 19–43.

Ethiopian and Jesuit Healing of the “Possessed”

In dealing with demons and the “possessed”, the Jesuits acted in a manner similar to that of the Ethiopian holy men. The Ethiopian holy men dealt with the therapeutic task of exorcising demons out of physically or mentally ill men. Abba Anorēwos cured an epileptic with a prayer “O my Lord Jesus Christ, cure this invalid by your mighty hand to receive his soul and have mercy on him for you are merciful”.¹⁹ Gädlä Täklä Haymanot tells us how the saint expelled demons that escaped from the possessed screaming: “What do you want from us? Why do you hunt us? Is it not enough to leave you the land of Calalgi and Catata? Where shall we flee from you? Do not trouble us, and we shall leave by our own will”.²⁰ Another time, the demon brought a man down and the Abbot Mika’el asked Täklä Haymanot to heal that man. The saint replied: “How can I, sinner, heal? May the God you serve heal him by your own prayer”. This said, the demon came out screaming: “Do you even hunt me down to Amhara? Where shall I flee from you?” Not finding anywhere to rest, he appeared to everybody in the shape of an ape, and disappeared like smoke, never to be seen again. As a reward, Abbot Mika’el asked the man to quit the work he had been doing and join his brothers in the church.²¹

Some of the same motifs reappear in Jesuit narratives many years later. Father Pedro Paez tells how a few days after arriving in Fremonä, a noble man came and told him: “for a very brief period of time, the demon took him from one land to another, very far from the last one, and left him naked on the road or sometimes in some town, situations which made him suffer much hardship and shame; he solicited our Great Lord’s aid, and, to be freed, he promised to confess himself and obey the Roman Church.” Paez replied that out of good will, he would pray to God, certain that He would free him if he made such a promise from the heart. God served him and never more showed the demon to him, “so he confessed and perseveres to this day”.²² The Jesuit father adds that a man who had met him, knowing how the demon had left him, brought his 16-year-old child, saying that he offered him to the Church so God could free him, too, from the demon that knocked him down and tormented him on various occasions. As he [the son] kept praying in the church – Paez says – he was no longer possessed, so his father and mother and two brothers confessed too.²³

The similarity between these two examples should not surprise us for in both we see how the saint and the missionary aspired to heal the same way Christ had. The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke recount how Christ expelled a demon from the

¹⁹ *Acta S. Basalota Mikā’el et S. Anorēwos*, ed. C. Conti Rossini, (CSCO 28, Sae 11), Louvain 1955, p. 98. Also, S. Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁰ Petrus Paez, *Historia Aethiopiae, liber I et II*, (RAESO, 2), Romae 1905, p. 558. (Paez’s Portuguese text).

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 564–565; *The Life of Takla Hāymânôt in the version of Dabra Lîbânôs, and Miracles...*, ed. with English transl. by E.A.W. Budge, vol. 2, London 1906, pp. 65–66.

²² *Relationes et epistolae variorum, pars I. Liber 2*, (RAESO, 11), Romae 1911 pp. 219–220.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

body of a sick, epileptic boy.²⁴ The motif of imitatio Christi is therefore clearly present in each of these stories. Moreover, as we have seen, Catholics and Ethiopians attributed the same abilities to the forces of evil. In both cultures, the devil was present and could create disorder and emotional and physical malfunctions. In both cases, the missionary proved his effectiveness in conjuring evil, defeating the demon, making him flee and obtaining, as a consequence, the conversion of the man or family who benefited from his therapeutic work.

This competition between religious specialists is made clear in other instances, where the effectiveness of exorcism helped to confirm the superiority of one's faith over that of one's rival.²⁵ Father Manuel de Almeida tells how an Ethiopian monk challenged a youth, a Catholic seminarian in Gorgora, in order to demonstrate that his faith was the true one. The competition consisted of exorcising, through prayers, the demon which had possessed a woman. Who ever succeeded would be recognized as the holder of the true faith. Accepting the challenge, both arrived at the place where the possessed woman was. The Ethiopian monk prayed with his companions repeatedly but was unable to extirpate the demon. The seminarian then took a reliquary cross and extended it to the sick woman's neck. In that very moment, de Almeida said, she rose and said: 'It's gone, it's gone' and was freed from the evil spirit. The Ethiopian monk was shocked and kept his promise: "He confessed, took communion and continued his life as a good Catholic".²⁶

Other therapeutic acts are attributed to the same seminarian who warned a man guilty of reviling the Catholic faith that he could be punished. That very afternoon, this same man had a disagreement with another man who struck him in the eye. The eye became swollen. Having understood his sin, the man asked for forgiveness for what he had said and the seminarian took his reliquary cross out and put it over the swollen eye. By the next morning the man was completely healed.²⁷

Certainly the Jesuits wrote such tales for the sake of the mission and in order to edify their audience. However, at this point it is important to stress that they took their therapeutic acts quite seriously as a means of probing religion true and as proof of the power of Catholicism. Therefore, the question here is not what "really" happened but rather what the actors believed to have happened. The missionaries really did believe in the possibility of conversion through healing.

According to the Jesuit sources, an experience related to healing reinforced Se'elä Krestos' Catholicism. The Ethiopian nobleman was suffering from a disease with a rather negative prognosis. Se'elä Krestos' disease and recovery in 1614 happened a year after

²⁴ See Mk 9, 14–29; Mt 17, 14–21; Lk 9, 37–42; also S. Brailowsky, *Epilepsia: Enfermedad sagrada del cerebro*, México 1999, p. 22.

²⁵ Jonathan Barry has pointed out the relevance of exorcism in a context of competition. According to him "exorcism (and hence witchcraft) was also important to the Catholic Church in other countries, such as France, where they faced strong Protestant competition, lacked the same credibility in the more secure Catholic churches of Spain and Italy." See, J. Barry et al. ed., *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1996, p. 20.

²⁶ *Relationes et epistolae variorum, pars I. Liber 3*, (RAeSO, 12), Romae 1912, p. 276.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 276–277.

he embraced Catholicism. According to the story, Se'elä Krestos had been in a feverish state and spitting blood, but instead of the traditional remedy of boiled wine, he took the medicines provided by the Portuguese fathers, particularly barley with sugar. Pedro Paez was a frequent visitor of Se'elä Krestos who said to the Jesuit father: "They [the Ethiopian monks] are going to say that because I won't budge from those [Catholic] things, as they asked me to, they killed me with their prayers, which they recite publicly at some monasteries... that's what they did in Atanaf Çaguêd's time..." By the eighth day the fever had broken and Emperor Susenyos thanked Paez for keeping his brother company throughout his ordeal.²⁸

Overcoming a serious ailment is very often another catalyst for conversion.²⁹ The Jesuits undertook health care duties and in this way competed with local Ethiopian monks and showcased the superior effectiveness of their religion. The case of Se'elä Krestos recovery is indicative of the seriousness of the missionaries' concern with healing as a means of engendering religious change

The Use of Images, Relics, Crosses and Amulets

In Ethiopian society, much use was made of amulets and talismans against devils, demons, evil spirits and sickness. The Cross, however, superseded them to become the greatest of all amulets and protective symbols. Christians used the cross to protect their homes from evil spirits, and often set it on the body of the sick in order to eliminate the evil influences causing their illness.³⁰ Another means used to cast out the evil eye was the use of a spell that took the form of a legend. Such legends can be found today on parchment amulets.³¹

The Jesuits in Ethiopia distributed crosses and golden veronicas as protection against the devil.³² There are also many cases of missionaries healing and relieving pains using relics and images³³ or using "holy water".³⁴ In Hādaša, de Almeida tells that many of

²⁸ *Relationes et epistolae...*, (see note 22), pp. 319–320.

²⁹ L. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1993, pp. 49–50.

³⁰ E.A.W. Budge, *Amulets and Talismans*, New York 1961, p. 178.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185; see also *Textes éthiopiens magico-religieux*, [éd. & trad. par] Déborah Lifchitz, (Université de Paris: Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie, 38), Paris 1940; J. Mercier, *Art that Heals: the Image as Medicine in Ethiopia*, New York 1997.

³² A. de Oliveira, *Cartas de Etiópia*, Braga 1999, pp. 26–27. Ignatius of Loyola pointed out in his instructions the possibility of fostering devotion in Ethiopia with the help of holy relics imported from Europe. *Monumenta Ignatiana: Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Societatis Jesu fundatoris epistolae et instructions*, VIII, Madrid 1903–1911, p. 688.

³³ In various regions of Europe in this period, saints used to heal through their intercession or the touch of their relics, through holy water or oil taken from the church. See for example, D. Gentilcore, 'The Church, the Devil and the healing activities of living saints in the Kingdom of Naples after the Council of Trent', in *Medicine and the Reformation*, ed. O.P. Grell & A. Cunningham, London 1993, pp. 134–155; S. Sharot, *op. cit.*, pp. 225–226.

³⁴ It is well known how in many cultures water becomes "the supreme magic and medical substance; it heals, it restores youth, it ensures eternal life." See M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, transl. R. Sheed, Cleveland and New York 1963, pp. 193–194.

the sick were healed again by drinking water touched by a cross made out of the bread of Saint Francis Xavier's relic.³⁵ This procedure of rinsing the cross in water and the subsequent use of the water for healing appear several times in the Ethiopian hagiographies.³⁶

Another case recounted by de Almeida, is one in which a miracle was performed as a consequence of the conversion of a paralytic hermit "full of Luciferian pride", who lived locked in a hut, next to St. John's Church in the Amhara region. In this case it was not the missionary who created the miracle with his own powers, but rather the miracle occurred as a result of the sincere repentance and conversion of the "heretic" monk. After some disputes with father Souza about the interpretation of the Ethiopian books, he kept his faith. Only after listening to various sermons and praises of the virgin, he gave up, was baptized, confessed and took communion, and the effects of the miracle on him became distinguishable. "The devil who accompanied him appeared to him no more, and he started walking on his own feet, although he had previously been paralyzed to the point where he could not move from the bed upon which he rested".³⁷

The missionaries made use of the images of saints, relics and amulets in order to ease the difficulties of women in labor. De Almeida gives an account of a case which took place in Fremonä, where a woman suffered from premature labor. The pains had nearly killed the woman, so a Jesuit father was called in to hear her final confession. He found her unconscious, took an image of St. Francis Xavier and put it over her. At that moment, she gave birth to a black baby with a broken leg. The baby's color soon improved, but then he changed color, the father baptized him and suddenly the baby died, his body turning black again.³⁸ A similar case, recounted by Barradas, tells of two women who, with the help of an image of Saint Ignatius worn on their necks, escaped from danger and delivered their children with no problems.³⁹ Thomas Barneto also told about the daughter of the Bahernägaš,⁴⁰ who went into labor with much pain and without being able to deliver the child. They asked the Jesuit father for a remedy and he replied that he had none, but that he would send an image of Saint Ignatius to be applied with faith, and that through the Saint's intercession on her behalf the woman would be delivered of her child. As soon as the relic was brought to the place of birthing, the woman delivered a baby boy whom she named after the saint. They all became devotees of Saint Ignatius.⁴¹ The healing had proven his religious superiority.

³⁵ *Op. cit.* (in note 26), p. 279.

³⁶ *Actes de Marḥa Krestos*, ed. (& transl.) S. K u r, (CSCO 330, SAe 62), Louvain 1972, pp. 70–72. S. K a p l a n, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

³⁷ E. D ' A l m e i d a, *Historia Aethiopiae*, 3, (RAeSO, 7), Romae 1908, p. 95.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102. Black, in this context, should not be understood as a skin color.

³⁹ *Relationes et epistolae... lib. 3, op. cit.* (in n. 26), p. 437.

⁴⁰ The ruler of the northern province near the sea.

⁴¹ *Relationes et epistolae... lib. 3, op. cit.* (in n. 26), p. 201. About the use of the relics of Saint Francis Xavier as remedies for child delivery, *ibid.*, p. 463. The Jesuits in Cape Verde also used crosses and images of St. Ignatius to treat difficulties in childbirth and other maladies. See N. d a S i l v a G o n ç a l v e s, *Os Jesuítas e a missão de Cabo Verde (1604–1646)*, Lisboa 1996, pp. 163–164.

Various other problems and diseases were treated with the help of relics, crosses and sundry religious objects. According to Barradas, a certain nobleman was bleeding from the mouth and suffering from a disease considered fatal which no medication seemed to help. Then he ordered an image of St Francisco Xavier which was sent to him as a relic, and after soaking it in water which he drank for three or four days, the man was cured.⁴² In Goğgam there was a woman who fell on the ground and began trembling all over “as if it were the demon’s doing”. The woman was repeatedly told to utter the name of Jesus but she could not do it. Finally, Father Luis Cardeira applied the image of St Ignatius to her throat after which she was able to say several times “Jesus, Mary.” In this way, she was cured.⁴³ For an old woman who was deaf, the father made the sign of the cross over her ears with a St Xavier relic and she was able to hear.⁴⁴ Another person who could neither speak nor eat was also cured, thanks to the same cross.⁴⁵

The interaction between healer (the missionary) and healed occurred through shared meanings and the acknowledged position of the healer. Such patterns of interaction had been well known in Ethiopia before the Jesuits. The healing of cripples, for example, was often ascribed to Ethiopian holy men.⁴⁶ There are many accounts of the healing power of holy men who used religious symbols of the faith. Mārha Krestos, for example, made the sign of the cross and healed a man who was possessed by a demon⁴⁷ and treated a woman plagued by snakes with the water in which he had washed a cross.⁴⁸ In Ethiopia, there were several avenues to the sacred aside from the sacraments, and holy men, relics, tombs, icons and crosses continued to play an important role in daily religious life.⁴⁹ Thus, Jesuit healing or exorcism was a kind of shared reality among the Ethiopians with corresponding attitudes and expectations on both sides. In contrast to the holy men, however, the Jesuits saw their healing power as the result not of their own sanctity but of their role as agents and bearers of the true religion with a definite means of salvation, namely, the sacramental rites of the Catholic Church. In this sense, we see an important difference between Jesuits and Ethiopian holy men: the former did not conceive of themselves as holy men, in spite of the fact that the Ethiopians related to them as such. They performed miracles and healed the people as a means of persuading them to receive the sacraments. For the Ethiopians, the healing performed by a holy man was in itself sufficient to establish contact with the sacred.

⁴² *Relationes et epistolae...*, lib. 3, *op. cit.* (in n. 26), pp. 455–456.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 457–458.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁴⁶ See again the case of Abba Tāklā Haymanot in *The Life of Takla Hāymānôt...*, *op. cit.* (above, n. 21), vol. 2, p. 335; also the case of Abba Filmona in *Actes de Filmona* (*op. cit.* in n. 7), pp. 58–59.

⁴⁷ *Actes de Marḥa Krestos*, *op. cit.* (above n. 36), p. 35; also, S. Kaplan, ‘Seeing Is Believing: the Power of Visual Experience in the Religious World of King Zera Yaeqob of Ethiopia (1434–1468)’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32 (2002), pp. 403–421.

⁴⁸ *Actes de Marḥa Krestos*, pp. 70–71.

⁴⁹ See S. Kaplan, ‘The Social and Religious Functions of the Eucharist in Medieval Ethiopia’, *AE*, 19 (2003), pp. 7–18.

Locust Plagues, Social Tensions and the Use of Holy Water

The Jesuits had an ambivalent relationship to miracle-working. Pedro Paez, for instance, rejected requests to perform miracles on the basis of his "disbelief in sorcery." Nevertheless, in order to prove the truth of Catholicism, he willingly performed exorcisms whenever needed. He tells, for example, of a man from the countryside who came to him and said that a Moor had told him that if he wanted locusts to stop eating the town's harvests, he would have to support him and his people. The man said that when the locusts came, the Moor had picked one up in his hand and as he walked, the locusts flew away, but when he stopped, they swarmed down and destroyed the harvest till not a single green leaf remained. Paez writes:

"I replied that the Portuguese did not believe in sorcery, that they should not give him anything because, even though the Moor came with his locust and sat there, they should not be afraid of suffering, if God wanted to punish them. The man went away, saying that they would see. And some remained, even among our Catholics, with no small fear. In a few days, some came from the small town, crying, telling me they were lost, that I should give them some remedy because the locusts had covered the fields near their harvests and destroyed everything. Seeing their pain, I told them, not without emotion: 'the remedy is to pray to Our Lord to free us from this great plague'. And I went with them to the church, where we prayed litanies, and later I performed the exorcisms in the area where the locusts were, and I blessed the water, which they poured over their harvests. They did this with plenty of confidence in Our Lord. And it was because of Him, and his infinite mercy, that the locusts, arriving at the border of our land, after having destroyed all the harvests around it, did not do any evil to the lands of our town, nor to the nearby lands which had been sprinkled with holy water. Because the Portuguese man who had harvested land outside had watered it with holy water, when the locusts arrived at the boundaries of his harvested land, they flew to the other side to eat the harvests of the other lands, without touching his. This he assured me he had seen with his own eyes."⁵⁰

Paez adds that another villager, who was not a Catholic, asked a Catholic man for a small amount of holy water and took it to his harvested land to sprinkle it there. His neighbor tried to persuade him not to do this, that he should not pay attention to the words of the Portuguese. He said, in reply, that he had strong faith in them and spilled the water on his land. When the locusts arrived, they did not cause any damage to his fields, but the neighbor's land was destroyed, and the neighbor marveled at this and regretted not having poured the holy water on his land too. According to Paez, he repeated the miracle of the holy water and the exorcisms some time later.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Petrus Paez, *Historia Aethiopiae, liber III et IV*, (RAeSO, 3), Romae 1906, pp. 233–234.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

Since locust attacks over different provinces in Ethiopia occurred with relative frequency, this cannot be said to be a new or unique event.⁵² In 1627, Thomas Barneto writes about the locust that attacked many wealthy Ethiopian northerners and noblemen who had rebelled against the Emperor. According to Barneto, in this case, the “sorcerers” were also called upon to divert the locusts to the lands of the Portuguese. Spells were cast but the locust flew over the lands of the Portuguese in MayGwagwa without attacking them, says Barneto, devouring only the lands belonging to members of “the schismatic church”. Later, they attacked the rebels’ lands again, leaving them without a single grain, “so the schismatic followers were very confused, and the new Catholics were reassured of their faith”.⁵³ A very similar story is told by Manuel Barradas, who used holy water in the Kātāma in order to expel a plague of locusts. However, he was more skeptical about the effects of his exorcism. Barradas said that, “even if they [the locusts] left in a natural way, all of them [the Ethiopians] believed that it was because of the holy water”.⁵⁴

There appears to be a connection between the natural disasters provoked by these plagues and the social and religious tensions that followed. It is indeed interesting to observe how such events were viewed by the menaced population in connection with the constant threat of rival religious groups; the Muslims on the one hand and the Catholics on the other. In the case recounted by Paez, the permanent tensions between the religious groups is expressed by attributing to Muslims the ability to cause damage through magic. In a second case, Jerónimo Lobo relates that the Ethiopian (non-Catholic) priests and monks told the population that wherever the Jesuits go, a cloud of locusts follows them, proving that they have been cursed by God.⁵⁵ The locust plagues are then, within the Ethiopian conceptual world, expressions of the profound tensions provoked by social and religious conflicts.⁵⁶

Thus, by taking over the role which the holy men had traditionally occupied within Ethiopian society, and reciting litanies, combating evil, offering blessings, administering

⁵² R. Pankhurst points out various examples in which external sources give accounts of the multiple plagues of locust that attacked the fields of Ethiopia. See R. Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia: the Northern and Central Highlands from Early Medieval Times to the Rise of Emperor Tēwodros II*, Addis Ababa 1990, p. 10.

⁵³ *Relationes et epistolae... lib.2, op. cit.*, (in n. 22), p. 210.

⁵⁴ A. de Oliveira, *op. cit.* (in n. 32), p. 31.

⁵⁵ See J. Lobo, *Itinerário e outros escritos inéditos*, ed. M. Gonçalves da Costa, Porto 1971, p. 392; also Ph. Caraman, *The Lost Empire: the Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia 1555–1634*, London 1985, p. 145.

⁵⁶ Several anthropologists and sociologists have emphasized the strong relationship between misfortune and witchcraft existing in certain cultures. With the statement *witchcraft is misfortune*, Evans Pritchard translated the Azande’s thought in that sense. See E.E. Evans Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford 1950, p. 100; See also, J. Cazeneuve, *Sociología del Rito*, transl. José Castelló, Buenos Aires 1971, pp. 141–142. Magic would in a case like this be a guarantee against bad luck. If witchcraft is assimilated into concepts of misfortune and bad luck, magic uses the same extraordinary powers in an opposite sense, to fight misfortune. Mary Douglas remarks both the danger and power of a person who has no place in the social system and is therefore a marginal being. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London 1966, pp. 94–113. For the Freudian, the magic ceremony is enough to create, both for the magician and the patient, a feeling of satisfaction. The final result would be secondary. R. Laforque, ‘Le pensée magique dans la religion’, *Revue française de psychoanalyse*, 7, No. 1, (1934), pp. 19–31.

holy water and performing exorcisms,⁵⁷ the Jesuits asserted their power and the power of the Church in society. Paez did not deny the validity of the religious conception of the world held by his potential converts but rather engaged in a process of enculturation or adaptation to the traditional Ethiopian conceptions which gave the holy man the power to explain, predict and control events of this world, in order to prove the superiority of Catholicism over Ethiopian Christianity.

The lively debate over the relationship between magic and religion continues. While some scholars maintain the necessity of a theoretical distinction between the two, either as opposites or as two ends of a continuum,⁵⁸ others suggest that the difference between magic and religion is culturally defined and that magic is merely “a term used for other people’s rituals”.⁵⁹ The Jesuits condemned Ethiopian “magical” practices and performed others that they call “religious”. However, based on what we have seen, we can suggest that the magical character attributed to the former depends on the distinction employed by the particular social group and not by a universal, comparative definition of magic. In other words, the Jesuits used the term “sorcery” for practices they deemed worthy of condemnation.

Paez claims that “the Portuguese did not believe in sorcery”. Nevertheless, there were accusations of witchcraft, including condemnation of those who did not believe in it. Certain authors claim that the divine mirrors the diabolical, and such a conception was typical of the period. The demonological, in fact, lacked a language of its own and was merely the antithesis of the divine.⁶⁰ It is important to note that, according to Barneto, Paez not only performed an exorcism which “prevented” the attack of the locusts upon certain harvests in a manner resembling that of the sorcerers, but also reported it in a Portuguese-language book which was no doubt intended for a European reader. The similarity between the religious conceptions of Ethiopians and Jesuits regarding magic, exorcism and miracles permitted an easy interaction between the missionaries and the population: Missionaries could easily perform the miraculous functions traditionally required of holy men.

⁵⁷ By analyzing the role of the rite within emotional processes, Pietro Scarduelli suggests that conflicts demand a ritual process that permits cataloguing, converting individual and subjective emotions into symbolical objects. The tensions induced by social confrontations, conflicts and contradictions are reflected in society, which transforms them, through cognitive processes, into acts imbued with meaning, incorporating them into the cultural models already existing within the group. P. Scarduelli, *Dioses, Espíritus, Ancestros*, transl. S. Mastrangelo, México 1988, pp. 87–88.

⁵⁸ J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, New York 1970; E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, transl. Joseph Ward Swain, New York 1969; B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, Garden City 1954; W.J. Goode, ‘Magic and Religion: A Continuum’, *Ethnos*, 14 (1949), pp. 172–182.

⁵⁹ For a discussion on magic and religion in Ethiopia see S. Kaplan, ‘Magic and Religion in Christian Ethiopia: Some Preliminary Remarks’, in: *Studia Aethiopica: in Honour of Siegbert Uhlig on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. V. Böll & al., Wiesbaden 2004, pp. 413–422.

⁶⁰ D. Gentilcore, ‘The Church, the Devil’ (above n, 33); M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, transl. Tom Conley, New York 1988, p. 265.

Conclusion

The Jesuit or Ethiopian stories portrayed specific miracles and the success of healing and exorcisms as interim moments in a long, multifaceted process of salvation. However, from the Jesuit point of view, such acts were not a means of salvation like the sacraments, but rather a means of winning over the local population to the truth of Catholicism. In the eyes of the Jesuits, the success of Catholicism in Ethiopia depended not only on proving its intellectual or political superiority but also its worldly effectiveness. In the struggle between the forces of good and evil, represented by the heretic and the orthodox, each of these episodes acquires a meaning beyond physical or emotional transformation, within a broader context of religious identity and the struggle for dominance.

The transition from Ethiopian Orthodoxy to Catholicism and back again was relatively seamless because, symbolically at least, there were no major shifts in belief from one tradition to the other. The Jesuit fathers' arsenal was the same as that of the holy men: the cross, holy water, prayers and the power granted by God, all used as a means of achieving an effective influence over natural or satanic forces. The success of an exorcism or the ability to produce a miracle gave religious authority to the missionaries. In this context, the theological differences between the two churches were not so clearly discernible.