

4002 Blacksmith Drive  
Garland, TX 75044.

August 18, 2005.

Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI  
The Vatican.

Your Holiness,

These days the news is replete with Your Holiness' admirable owning up to your country, Germany's previous crimes against humanity during the Nazi period. It is remarkable that you have taken such a courageous step so early in your leadership of the most populated Christian organization on earth. Your Holiness deserves every accolade for the step you have taken as it exemplifies the true role of a spiritual leader. I pray that current leaders will learn from your example.

The fact that Your Holiness has seen fit to promote the important concept of taking responsibility for crimes committed even in historic contexts gives hope to other peoples throughout the world who were victims of such atrocious acts. Here I am referring to heinous crimes committed by Fascist Italy which, as Your Holiness is aware, was responsible for the murder of thousands of Ethiopians on the eve of and during the Second World War. Of the thousands of Ethiopians murdered by the Fascists were my grandfather, Grazmach (Ethiopian title) Gessesse Fanta, and my uncle, Merid Gessesse.

The relevance of the above tragic episode to Your Holiness now is the fact that when the Fascist army was about to set sail on its murderous voyage to Ethiopia, the then head of the Catholic Church, His Holiness Pope Pius XI gave them his blessing to go forth and commit their inhuman crimes. His Holiness declared, on December 20, 1926 that "Mussolini (was) the man sent by Providence." On August 27, 1935, His Holiness declared that the fascist aggression against Ethiopia was a "defensive war"! (Manhattan, Avro, The Vatican in World Politics, 1949) It is ironic that the Pope was blessing his seemingly Christian army to go and commit crimes against innocent Ethiopian Christians. Ethiopians including myself have been waiting, in vain, for the type of apology that Your Holiness and the German people and government have so magnanimously expressed to the Nazi victims.

I feel sure that Your Holiness would not differentiate between the crimes committed by the Nazis and that of the Fascists and their respective victims especially in the context of His Holiness Pope Pius XI's direct responsibility for the tragic episode. Therefore, I plead with Your Holiness to finally enable Ethiopians to put the matter to rest by offering a full and formal apology to our nation for the unholy blessing given by Pope Pius XI to the Fascist Army which perpetrated heinous crimes against Ethiopians including the use of poison gas.

"Ethiopia shall raise its hands unto God." (Psalm 68:31)

Yours respectfully,

Kidane Alemayehu  
A Christian