



**Robert N  
Thompson**

# The black Jews of Ethiopia

The world was startled a few weeks ago to learn that some 12,000 black Jews from Ethiopia had been secretly airlifted from the Sudan to Israel. So many have asked: "Who are the black Jews? If they are from Ethiopia, how is it that they were found in the Sudan? Are they really Jews?"

I know these people well: the Falasha, meaning "strangers in our midst" are Ethiopians, and have been for centuries, living in the north-west part of Ethiopia, in the provinces of Begimber/Gondar and Tigray. They are remnants of a Judastic era of the ancient land of Ethiopia in the ten centuries before Christ. They have held to the Judastic faith, and are more true to Orthodox Judaism than are many who live in Israel today. Their power and numerical strength are long since gone, but their Judastic faith remains intact.

At Axum, the ancient capital of Ethiopia, one is attracted first by the huge obelisks there, and secondly by the ruins of the ancient palace of the Queen Sheba. The tallest obelisks, 90 feet high, and beautifully sculptured from solid granite and stand true to the compass in foundations which go back to the 10th century before Christ. I have climbed the mountainside some 10km away to see the cavities from which these huge stones were cut 3,000 years ago, during and before the time of Queen of Sheba.

Tradition has it that Sheba was the richest of monarchs. Solomon, the wisest of monarchs, had gold mines in Sheba's country. He heard of Sheba and invited her to visit him in Jerusalem. She accepted, and the Old Testament (II Chronicles 9) tells of the great pomp and glory which surrounded that visit. The Queen of Sheba brought much

gold, pieces and precious stones to Solomon. Tradition has it that Solomon gave his love to Sheba. When she returned home to Ethiopia she later bore Solomon a son, named Menelik. His mother sent him as a lad back to his father to be educated in all the wisdom of Jerusalem and the Temple. Menelik grew into a handsome and brilliant young man, embracing the Jewish faith.

When he had completed his education, he asked Solomon's permission to take a number of his buddies back to his mother's pagan country, in order that they too might learn of God and the true faith. To this Solomon agreed, but he did not give Menelik permission to take the Ark of the Covenant with him. This the son did, though, putting a replica in its place with the holiest of holies. Tradition has it that the remains of the Ark of the Law is buried in Axum, and that Falashas are the descendants of the men who brought it here.

Historians dismiss this story as mere folklore. True or not, the fact remains that some 900 years before Christ, Ethiopia became a Judastic nation and continued as such until the advent of Christianity in the second and third centuries A.D.

Apart from their Mosaic beliefs, the Falashas are typical farmers and small craftsmen. Their part of Ethiopia is in the heart of today's famine area. Partly because of drought but also because the communist regime and its traditional anti-

Christian position, these people are caught between severe drought on one hand, and a severe dislike for communism on the other, resulting in a continuing civil war. Out of a total Falasha population of 28,000, nearly half of them have fled their homes, villages, and civil-war strife to find refuge in the Sudan.

In a recent agreement between Israel and the Sudan, the Israelis agreed to accept as many Falashas as could be safely flown to Israel. Some 15,000 have been transported from the Sudan to Israel by Belgian Aircraft. Approximately 12,000 still remain in Ethiopia, caught without food or vocation in their drought-stricken villages and farmlands. They claim persecution and extreme famine is forcing them west to Khartoum, or east to other famine areas where there is hope of food relief.

These black Falasha Jews have begged Israel to accept them; and finally nearly half of them have had their prayers answered. Coming from a primitive culture, living close to the land, carefully retaining their Jewish customs, they will find it difficult to adapt to a new lifestyle in Israel. At least it will bring hope and freedom to those who made it out. It will be a different story for those who remain behind without hope, because Ethiopia's military has closed the boundary, blocking their way to the promised land and to reunion with their neighbors and friends who have made it to Israel.



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I have just returned from the land of the Queen of Sheba and Haile Selassie.

It is land approximately the size of B.C. and Alberta, with a population of about 34 million people - of which at least are living on the threshold of starvation, with already

tens of thousands dead. One of the reasons that Ethiopia has received so much publicity recently is because this starvation population is more than the population of any of the 25 or more other African nations suffering from food shortage and famine.

Ethiopia today is a Marxist state with a military government. The two daily papers, the radio, and the TV constantly headline the Marxist goals of the government. Monuments, buildings and street arches display the red hammer and sickle of communism, while billboards display the pictures of Marx, Engels and Lenin in most public places. The days of Red Terror are over and private restaurants, shops, taxis and trucks are allowed to fill the streets as the crowds of people go about their business.

The severe famine areas involve the three northern provinces of Eritrea, Tigre and Wollo, as well as parts of the five southern provinces. In the food-producing areas of

## Ethiopia - nation at bay

the highlands, the cost of food for the populace has doubled and redoubled. In Addis Ababa 'tef' grain has jumped from \$40 Ethiopian to \$150 and in the provincial towns it has reached as high as \$250 Ethiopian. In these towns people are selling their furniture, books, family valuables - even doors and windows from their homes, just to get money to buy food.

In drought areas most of the livestock has died, while in the fringe areas the cattle have survived on grain and corn stocks while their owners starved, because as the grass and crops dried, they failed to produce the normal heads of grain. Such farmers in many areas have sold their livestock. Paradoxically, in the major seaport of Assab, large shipments of cattle were witnessed being shipped to countries across the Red Sea, such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

The famine in the north has resulted in a renewed stream of refugees fleeing

into neighboring Sudan, raising the possibility of an additional food gift to the Sudan of 200,000 tonnes of food worth \$47 million, to assist in meeting that need in a country which has not yet been classed as a famine country.

Ethiopia is plagued by civil war on at least three fronts, where those opposed to communist policies fight for liberation. It is for this reason Ethiopia maintains an army of some 350,000 with enforced military service for males from 18 to 30 years. In many areas this is resulting in forced recruitment of boys down to 14 years because the 18-year-olds disappear into the countryside or take refuge in the Sudan.

Famine workers from the free world are frustrated because they cannot reach the areas where the need is greatest - behind the liberation fronts. The Marxists government has indicated with stark clarity its priorities in the battle against famine. Last week an Australian ship carrying relief grain unloaded the larger part of its load at the government controlled port of Assab.

It then prepared to leave for the Sudanese port of Port Sudan, where it intended to unload the 6,000-ton balance of the shipment intended for the famine area in the rebel-held areas via the Sudan back door. It was to be distributed by Australian voluntary agencies working in those areas.

While the ship was still in the harbor of Assab, its remaining cargo was seized. The government of Ethiopia, in an effort to justify its action, stated that Australia was interfering in its international affairs. The only obvious explanation is that the government of Ethiopia is intent on starving these dissident people into submission.

On the other hand, it is true that many western nations could be said to be interfering in the international affairs of Ethiopia by supplying food to the hungry and dying. I counted 60 non-government organizations from 18 different countries with more than 500 relief and development personnel presently at work in Ethiopia. This does not include organizations such as the Red Cross and UNICEF, nor does it include the bilateral arrangements bet-

ween governmental agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency.

The church-related agencies work under a coordinating umbrella organization, The Christian Relief and Development Association. I was impressed with the work of this group, which covers every part of the country which is open to relief work. Some are better organized than others, some are well financed, and some are local Ethiopian organizations such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the two national Evangelical churches without a great deal of support.

Without exception, these are doing excellent work and deserve all the support which can be provided. There is no doubt that food which is available is being well distributed through a network of feeding centres. For most of these non-governmental organizations, distribution accountability is credible. Their need is for food and materials other than money

**More next week**

*Christian Relief*

*3 pm*



## Robert N Thompson

### Part II

My visit to Ethiopia earlier this month was full of heavy pressures and frustrations. The past 15-year involvement at senior government level had been in a country where food scarcity was unknown. Now to find a state of intense famine and starvation was, at best, frustrating.

Formerly able to travel freely as an accepted part of the social structure, I now was under the surveillance of a Communist state where government control was complete and rigid, creating new pressures. If it were not for the indomitable optimism of the people, combined with a generous hospitality from the general public, the visit would have been much more difficult.

With the government bowing to world pressure, non-government organizations had been granted permission to work. Those related to the church coordinated with the Christian Relief and Development Association. The secular groups such as Oxfam, Red Cross, and Care were placed under the governmental supervision of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). The Red Cross did an excellent job at the feeding stations, and generally NGO food supplies seemed to be well-managed.

This RRC has a fleet of trucks and aircraft to provide the necessary transportation from the seaport of Assab out to the starvation areas.

The RRC attempts to give the impression that it is efficient, effective and accountable, although I was not convinced that all donated aid was reaching starving people. Somehow the needs of the army and the populace have to be met.

One of the major goals of the RRC is to resettle as many people as possible from the desert drought areas to new areas where open land and normal rainfall exist. Some of the early attempts in November and early December were disastrous. More recently the resettlement camps in the West and Southwest have become well-established. The breakup of tribal and family units and the acceptance of new people by the local populations represent difficult problems. The principle of resettlement is sound for the areas where deserts have taken over the land.

An interesting development is that the huge new contribution of food of the United States is designated to the non-government organizations (NGO) of the Christian Relief and Development Association with distribution being made through a consortium of four church organizations - two Roman Catholic and two Protestant.

One-half of the new allotment of \$15 million made by the Canadian government is designated for the member NGO organizations of the CRDA. The only food aid from the Communist world has been 10,000 tonnes of rice, a food unknown in Ethiopia.

Russian military trucks and aircraft were very visible. A Swedish Air Force Hercules 130 arrived last week full of medicines and emergency food designated to the Mekane Yesus denomination.

The urgent immediate need is for a continued flow of food aid through the NGOs for the next six months. However, there is also an imperative requirement for short and long-term aid. It is not feasible that the Free World be called to feed some 150 million starving Africans year after year. True, the drought covering a third of the African continent is a climatic phenomenon. Yet, it cannot be denied that at least 50 per cent of the present famine situation in Africa is man-made.

In spite of the drought in Ethiopia, that country for years was a food-surplus country. It still is! The priority for African governments with Western help must be on food **production**, with water conservation and proper management.

If one-half of the cost of present military budgets and the tragedy of tribal and civil wars could be diverted to food and agricultural conservation and production, there would be no famine and starvation in Africa.

It was Confucius who said that to give a man a fish would satisfy his hunger for a day; but to teach him to fish would provide food for his lifetime. Politics and wars will never solve the food problems of any country. Only planned and peaceful long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction will abort the crisis of drought and famine.

With such progress, Africa once again can feed itself.

**Dr Thompson, Professor Emeritus of political science at Trinity Western College, Langley, will report on his recent 10-day Ethiopian trip at 7pm on Thursday (Jan. 31), at the college's Freedom Hall. All are welcome.**

## Africa: where does it go from here?



**Robert N  
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This column is a follow-up on Africa - a troubled continent where at least 27 of its 50 countries are short of food and where at least half of that number are in the midst of agonizing and desperate famine. It is a country where 25 years ago most of the continent was controlled by colonial governments, and the cry was "Uhuru" ('freedom' in Swahili).

The wave of independence which began with the Sudan in 1956 has failed in most instances to bring about political freedom, as military coups and the rule of despots became the order of the day, making ways for ruthless Communism in countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Mozambique and Angola. Kenya is the major exception where a democratic government with free elections has brought about an orderly development and comparatively stable economy.

Zaire, formerly the Belgian Congo, is the prime example of economic chaos and political graft. Ill-prepared for independence, the country went almost immediately into civil war. How well I recall when its first President, Patrice Lumumba, with his entourage of officials, came to Ottawa seeking financial aid after having been installed in the Chateau Laurier. He asked external affairs protocol to supply them with call girls for the night. Lumumba went home to his death, and then followed the siege of Stanleyville where about 3,000 foreigners from 11 countries were held hostage. I was part of the negotiating team for the release of the hostages, and finally we used the only recourse - military intervention, dropping in Belgian paratroopers.

Then followed the takeover of the government by Sergeant Mobutu who has been in charge for the past 20 years. Amid the backward slide of the economy, the virtual disappearance of the system of roads, President Mobutu is now listed as the fourth most wealthy individual in the world.

Ethiopia is an example of the takeover of Communism through a military coup backed by more than 20,000 Cuban troops, the surrogate forces of the U.S.S.R. Today a severe famine has rendered eight to ten million starving people. Perhaps as many as 200,000 are already dead. Relief efforts from Western countries are slowly bringing the situation under control. The need for corrective measures, including the cessation of military civil war on at least three Liberation Front areas, along with long-term development programs in most of the country now takes top priority lest the need of outside food aid go on indefinitely. It also includes the return to seasoned and competent government management.

One can legitimately have doubts about the future in Africa in face of the horrendous problems facing most of the 50 countries, particularly when

one studies the events which take place at the United Nations. On Dec. 22 the 122 member nations voted to grant \$73.5 million for a conference centre in famine-stricken Ethiopia.

Incredible as it may seem, only five nations had enough common sense and moral courage to vote against a project which obviously defied the fact that eight million Ethiopians were dying of hunger! The U.S. delegate spoke for the opposing nations of the U.S., Britain, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and stated that the money could have been used to provide 25,000 wells to provide water for 12.5 million people. *again!* Canada, by the way, had the nicety to avoid an opinion in the matter by abstaining!

As if to rub salt into the wound, a few days later two of the top leaders of the Marxist-Leninist Ethiopia proclaimed that the West, and not their government, was responsible for the continuing starvation by failing to provide enough food aid soon enough, and for allowing political ideology to interfere with humanitarianism.

### Some progress

Africa would do well to take note of the progress made by some Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand. And African leaders should take note of a meeting held early in January in Jordan, attended by 50 social scientists, businessmen and economic planners from Asia and the Arab world. This unusual meeting was marked by the absence of bombast and political diatribe, and was seasoned by a sense of the practical.

The first breath of realism was the unanimous recognition that the campaign for New International Economic Order, with the South blaming the North for all of its ills, had come to an abrupt halt.

They recognized the basic truth that power respects only its counterpart, as the world oil cartel has had to learn. They recognized also that before the Third World South could expect sympathy from the developed North, there must be a South-South dialogue resulting in a mobilizing of their own strengths through stable government and practical economics. South-east Africa pointed out the necessity of entrepreneurship.

In other words, each country in the South must develop its own new economic order before expecting any realistic dialogue with the North. In simple terms, the meeting ended on a note of practical realism which simply stated, "Let's first get our own houses in order." I hope African leaders were listening. If they weren't, this great continent where resources abound and which if utilized in the agriculture sector could feed itself, famine or no famine, will slip into a maelstrom of tragedy and horror.



**Dr Robert Thompson addressed a full house at Trinity Western University last week, reporting on his recent trip to Ethiopia - the subject of his most recent Times columns. He is pictured above with former Tory Youth executive member, Ray Castelli, left, Trinity student president Judi Johnston, and senior class president Skye Johnston.**