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### Comment by Tseegai Isaac

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**Dr. Tseegai Isaac**, a professor of History and Political Science at the Missouri University of Science and Technology, long-time member of the ISCSC and an editor of this journal for over a decade, sketches the stark and tragic history marking the encounter of pandemics with the Ethiopian civilization.

He observes as follows:

Ethiopia is celebrated for its ancient biblical civilization. Its political traditions for centuries blended Old and New Testament tenets, creating templates for daily social and religious life.

Ethiopia may nurture pride in its lengthy history and civilization, but its political and social experiences have also been ravaged with the advent of famine, pestilences, and pandemics.

The causes for the onset of Ethiopia's frequent pandemics can be traced to two factors: wars and post-crisis upheavals.

The first pandemic in Ethiopia, as noted in the liturgical chronicles, was recorded by church scribes. This was in the early years, when the Fatimid Dynasty was consolidating rule over Egypt. The fervency of jihad reached its highest ascendance there. From Egypt, however, the Fatimid branched out, driving forcefully to extend Islam over the neighboring territories of Sudan, North Africa, and Ethiopia.

This influence affected Ethiopia via the region that is known as Eritrea today. Fatimid's religious propagators were sent to convert the Christian Baja tribes living in Eritrea. When the fervency of this jihad that had been raging for over two centuries reached Eritrea, the result was a blockade of the Ethiopian Empire's sea access.

Muslim forces from the North pushed the Christian population ever southward as they occupied the Red Sea coast ports.

“As a result of these wars, the Abyssinian kings gradually lost control of northern Tigre (northern Ethiopia and today's Eritrea) and the coastal areas” (Luther, E. W. 1958:13).

Thus, the history of the Ethiopian civilization has been a long-term clash between the *status quo* faith of Christianity and the expansionist faith of Islam.

The determination to Islamize Ethiopia has been unrelenting throughout Ethiopian history.

With every jihad, wars have taken place; one repeated result of these has been that the Ethiopian highlands have experienced famine and pestilence. The population was decimated over and over again, and villages left empty. Corpses have been scattered by the roadsides for hyenas, rats, and vermin to feed on them.

One tragic result has been that between 1225 CE and 1880 CE, over 35 famine and pandemic scourges have attacked Ethiopia. Finally, however, there arrived in Ethiopia the severity of the 1880s famines, with various pandemics that followed.

As Hancock writes:

The greatest famine of all occurred towards the end of the [19<sup>th</sup>] century in the years 1888-92. Still referred to as “the Great Famine,” this had profound impacts on Ethiopian society. . . .The Rinderpest Epidemic started in the north, as the result of the introduction of infected Indian cattle by the Italians who were at that time annexing Eritrea, and it quickly spread through Tigray, Wollo and Gonder into Shoa (Hancock, G., 1985: 63).

We may conclude that, with the exception of the 1880s pandemic, a result of colonial invasion, all of the pandemics and pestilences in the recorded history of Ethiopia have come subsequent to wars that Samuel Huntington would call “Clashes of Civilizations.” In this case — Christian civilization vs. Islamic civilization.