



# **Somali Bible Society Journal**

**Volume II, Issue 1**

**June 2021**

**Published by the Somali Bible Society, Mogadishu, Somalia**

**ISSN 4562-3988**

<https://www.somalibiblesociety.org/sbs-journal/>  
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## Table of Contents

1. Would it be More Accurate Not to Use the Word Kiniisad in Bible Translation? Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman* .....	3
2. The Blood of Christians is Seed: The 5 <sup>th</sup> Gospel and the Growth of the Church Aweis A. Ali .....	8
3. What Does “Religion” Mean for Muslims and Muslim Background Believers? By Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman* .....	20
4. A Brief History of Judaism in the Somali Peninsula Aweis A. Ali .....	24
5. Biblical Terms: Do You Have the Right Definitions? Dennis Dyvig .....	36
6. The Greatest Missionaries to the Somalis: The Heroes of 1881-1981 Aweis A. Ali .....	43
7. Reading, Understanding and Applying the Bible Stephen Thompson .....	56
8. A Brief History of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula Aweis A. Ali .....	64
9. The Somali Faith Hall of Fame Dr. Howie F. Shute .....	76
10. Socio-cultural Barriers to Evangelical Missions among the Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia Naol Befkadu Kebede .....	86
11. The Kingdom of God and the Caliphate Pastor Simon Fry .....	108
12. The Desert Shepherd: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Tibebu Haileselassie Naol Befkadu Kebede .....	126
13. The Kingdom of God and the Glory That God Will Reveal to Us: An Epistle to the Somali Church Júlio Lopes .....	138
14. An Ex-Muslim Christian in Secular Canada: A Personal Reflection Quule M. Egal .....	144

15.Cawaale and Waris Brother Albert .....	153
16.A Tribute to Russ and Pat Welford: The Perspective of a Son Rev. Ryan Welford .....	156
17.Tribute/Life Story: Harold E. Reed: 1934-2017 Barbara K. Reed .....	162
18.Somalia: 2020 Persecution Report SBS Peace Bureau .....	168
19.Reminisce about the Groves with me (A Poem) Aweis A. Ali .....	171
20.A Call for Papers (CFP).....	175
21.Advertise in the SBS Journal.....	176

## Would it be More Accurate Not to Use the Word *Kiniisad* in Bible Translation?

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman\*

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Translating the Bible is a difficult task under the best of circumstances. I commend the Somali translation team of the *Somali Bible Society* on their efforts to give us a more accurate—and more culturally understandable—translation of the New Testament. This new translation was released in March 2021. May God use it for the healing of many Somali spirits.

I have suggested that the translation team not use *kiniisad* when translating the New Testament Greek word *ekklesia*. Why did Somali Bible translators use *kiniisad* in the first place? Somali Bible translators followed a pattern that was set by English Bible translators. (Similar choices were used in other European languages.) But I believe this translation choice does not work well with the Somali Bible.

The origin of the word *ekklesia* lies outside the origin of the New Testament. It was an ancient Greek term that meant an assembly of people for a common purpose, such as an assembly of citizens in a Greek city to carry out political business. It was a neutral, non-religious word. The New Testament writers chose this term rather than other Greek terms which were readily available. For example, the word *synagogue* that Jews used could carry much the same meaning. It has been suggested that we ask “why the NT (New Testament) community avoids a cultic term for itself and selects a more secular one.” Pennington explains, “When believers used *ekklesia*, it did not flag them immediately as a separate and separatist religious ‘community.’ As a culturally neutral term for ‘assembly,’ it was not likely to raise alarms.”<sup>1</sup>

English Bible translators have translated *ekklesia* as *church* for hundreds of years. John Wycliffe was a dissident in the Roman Catholic Church. From about 1382 to 1395, he and a team of co-translators completed the earliest translation of the New Testament into English. They translated from the Latin Vulgate, not the Koine Greek language that the New Testament was originally written in. Their translation of Matthew 16:18 reads this way: “And Y seie to thee, that thou art Petre, and on this stoon Y schal bilde my *chirche*, and the yatis of helle schulen not haue miyt ayens it.” Using modern spelling, it would read: “And I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and on this stone, I shall build my *church*, and the gates of hell shall not have might against it.” The word *chirche* was a translation of the Latin word *ecclesia*.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Paul Pernnington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus*. Pasedena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017, p. 60.

The Wycliffe Bible was written in Middle English. At that time, the word *chirche* usually meant a building set aside for worship and religious activity, but it could also mean the community of followers of Jesus Christ. Perhaps surprisingly to modern readers, the word *chirche* could refer to a Jewish or pagan place of worship.<sup>2</sup> Obviously the Wycliffe Bible translation was not referring to a building that Jesus would construct when translating Matthew 16:18. It must refer to a community of believers.

But in the very first English translation of the New Testament from the Koine Greek language<sup>3</sup> in 1382 by William Tyndale, he refused to use the word *church* when translating *ekklesia*. He translated Matthew 16:18 this way: “And I saye also vnto the yt thou arte Peter: and apou this rocke I wyll bylde my *congregacion*. And the gates of hell shall not prevayle ageynst it.” Using modern spelling, it would read, “And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter: and upon this rock I will build my *congregation*.”

Tyndale only used the word *church* to describe pagan temples rather than a gathering of followers of Christ. You see this in Acts 14:13: “Then Iupiters Preste which dwelt before their cite brought oxe and garlondes vnto the *churche* porche and wolde have done sacrificise with the people.” Using modern spelling, it would read, “Then Jupiter’s priest which dwelt before their city brought oxen and garlands unto the *church* porch and would have done sacrifice with the people.” He does the same in Acts 19:37: “For ye have brought hither these me whiche are nether robbers of *churches* nor yet despisers of youre goddess.” Using modern spelling, it would read, “For you have brought hither these men which are neither robbers of *churches* nor yet despisers of your goddess.” In both of these verses, Tyndale reserves the word *church* for pagan temple buildings, not the *ekklesia*.

Notice how later English Bible translations handled this verse:

- The Miles Coverdale Bible of 1535 translated Matthew 18:18 this way: “And I saie to ye: Thou art Peter, & vpo this rocke wil I builde my *cogregacion*: and ye gates of hell shal not preuayle agaynst it.”
- The Great Bible of 1539 translated Matthew 16:18 this way: “And I saye also vnto the that thou art Peter: & vpon this rocke I wil bylde my *congregacion*. And the gates of hell shal not preuayle agaynst it.”
- The translators of the Geneva Bible of 1560 deviated from previous translations and chose to use the word *church* rather than *congregation*. They translated Matthew 16:18 this way: “And I say vnto thee, that thou art Peter, and vpon this rocke I will builde my *Church*: and ye gates of hell shall not overcome it.”
- The Bishop’s Bible of 1578 returned to using the word *congregation*. They translated Matthew 18:18 this way: “And I say also vnto thee, that thou art Peter, and vpon this rocke I wyll bylde my *congregation*: And the gates of hell shall not preuayle agaynst it.”

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<sup>2</sup> “Chirche,” Middle English Compendium (umich.edu).

<sup>3</sup> Koine Greek was the original language the New Testament.

Why did *ekklesia* finally become fixed in translation as *church* in the English language although *congregation* had been the dominant translation term for over 200 years? It was precisely because of the popularity of the Authorized King James Version first published in 1611. When James the First was crowned “King of England, France, and Ireland, defender of the faith” in 1603, he became the supreme Governor of the Church of England. King James directed a team of translators to begin their work on a new edition of the English Bible that would standardize English Bible use.

In 1604, King James issued 15 rules for translating the Bible. There was a question as to how *ekklesia* should be translated. Should it be translated as *congregation* like most previous English Bibles? Or should it be translated as *church* like the Geneva Bible of 1587? In Article 3 of the translation rules from King James, we read, “The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. the Word Church not to be translated Congregation & c.”

What was the problem with the word *congregation*? A congregation could meet anywhere—in homes, under a tree or in a church building. A *church* was usually identified with a building. People went to church. Religious dissent and subversive behavior could be more easily controlled if people gathered in church buildings. The word *church* had developed in the English language from the word *kirika*, which probably came from *kyriake (oikia)*, *kyriakon doma*, terms meaning “the Lord’s house.”<sup>4</sup> To state this simply, the word *church* came from terms referring to a house of worship, not a congregation.

There were no church buildings for followers of Christ in New Testament times. At the present time, we believe the oldest identified church structure is the Dura-Europos church from AD 235. However, this was not simply a church building, it was a house redesigned to be a church building. From the information I have been able to gather, it appears the early followers of Jesus Christ during the first two centuries of the faith met in homes *because this was their preferred meeting location*, not just because they were hiding from persecution.

Hundreds of years after the New Testament was written, the word *ekklesia* began to change meaning from an *assembly* of believers to a *building* where believers met. Procopius wrote that a church building completed in Jerusalem in 543 A.D. by Justinian was called “the New Church [*ekklesian*].”<sup>5</sup>

In 1611, the Authorized Version of King James team published Matthew 16:18 this way: “And I say also vnto thee, that thou art Peter, and vpon this rocke I will build my Church: and the gates of hell shall not preuaile against it.” If you have trouble with the English of 1611, here is an updated translation from the New King James Version: “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My

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<sup>4</sup> “Church,” Origin and meaning of church by Online Etymology Dictionary (etymonline.com).

<sup>5</sup> J. Spenser Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*. London: Longman, 1979, p. 75.

church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” *Ekklesia* was consistently translated as *church* throughout the King James Version of the Bible as well as in most English versions that came after it.

Today the word *church* can refer to many things, including

- A building or location
- Public worship by a congregation
- Ordained clergy with different ranks
- An institution and denomination

While we cannot expect to change from using the word *church* to using *congregation*, *assembly* or similar words in English translations of the Bible, I would suggest it would be best for us to create a new path to follow with the Somali New Testament translation.

There are connections between the Arabic language and the Somali language. *Kanisa* in Arabic has been used for a synagogue or a church building. It is believed to have been an Arabicized form of the Aramaic *knishta* (meeting place, school, or synagogue). In Arabic it denotes both Jewish and Christian places of worship (specific buildings).<sup>6</sup> This is how the word found its way into Somali as *kiniisad*.

Since both the words *church* and *kiniisad* primarily mean a house of worship rather than an assembly or congregation, I would suggest alternative words be used in translating the Somali New Testament when we find the Greek word *ekklesia*. In New Testament times the word *ekklesia* did not carry a specific religious connotation. It was a neutral term. To quote Pennington once more, “When believers used *ekklesia*, it did not flag them immediately as a separate and separatist religious ‘community.’ As a culturally neutral term for ‘assembly,’ it was not likely to raise alarms.”<sup>7</sup>

Somalis often prefer to meet in house fellowship groups. *Congregation* or *assembly* is a more accurate translation of *ekklesia*. If greater clarification is needed in a particular text to distinguish it from a gathering of citizens or other secular assembly, the term *fellowship of believers* could be used.

Somali believers sometimes talk about wanting their own “church buildings.” There are problems with this:

- Buildings are expensive to construct and maintain.
- Buildings become easy targets for terrorist attacks.
- Muslims who might be interested in the Gospel usually do not want to enter church buildings.

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<sup>6</sup> See article “Kanisa,” H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University press, n.d.

<sup>7</sup> J. Paul Pennington, *Christian Barriers to Jesus*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017, p. 60.

- Somali believers sometimes avoid church buildings.
- House fellowships are more biblical.

Whether Somali believers in the future choose to construct their own church buildings or not, would it not be better to use a term for *ekklesia* that focuses on the people rather than a building when we translate the Bible? We don't want to simply "go to church," which almost always indicates going to a building. We want to be the fellowship of believers.

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### About the author

\*Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman is a pseudonym. The author holds graduate degrees in Islam and in sociology. He has lived and worked among Muslims in Asia, Europe, and Africa. He is the author of 16 books and booklets published in several languages. The author can be reached at [info@somalibiblesociety.org](mailto:info@somalibiblesociety.org)



## The Blood of Christians is Seed: The 5<sup>th</sup> Gospel and the Growth of the Church

Aweis A. Ali

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### Abstract

*The belief that persecution of Christians contributes to the numerical growth and the spiritual reinvigoration of the Church is as old as the Church itself. The first church growth movement is chronicled in the Book of Acts because the early Christians in Jerusalem were targeted for their faith. The Roman Empire persecutions have also proven that the blood of Christians is indeed seed. Pagan onlookers followed Jesus after witnessing the heroic way the Christians faced the unjust persecution. The fastest growing churches today are in Iran and Afghanistan, two Muslim countries under the rule of Sharia Law. The church in Somalia has also proven many pundits wrong because of its resilience. Somali Muslims are regularly coming to the Lord despite the painful persecution awaiting them once they become disciples of Christ. Church historians and missiologists agree with Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, popularly known as Tertullian, (155 –240) that persecution is the lifeline of the Church. The North African author and apologist popularized the belief that the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church. Not all persecuted Christians are martyred. In fact, most persecuted Christians walk away bruised and bloodied. Persecutors often target the leadership of the community of faith and Christian materials including the Scriptures. The idea that the sheep will scatter when the shepherd is struck is a first century persecution strategy. This paper illustrates the direct relationship between the persecution of Christians and the growth of the Church. The Church describes persecution and martyrdom as the Fifth-Gospel. This Fifth Gospel is without a doubt a blessing in disguise.*

*Key Words: Persecution, Martyrdom, Fifth-Gospel, Church-Growth*

## An Overview

The Church terms martyrdom of Christians as the Fifth-Gospel according to Catholic News Agency.<sup>1</sup> The biblical record in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles shows the earliest form of persecution and the impact it had on the nascent Church. The first three centuries after the formation of the Church shows that the Roman Empire inflicted sporadic persecution on the Church. The Roman government accused Christians of antisocial behavior since they kept to themselves and refused to worship pagan gods promoted by the Empire and its sympathizers. As a result, they were considered antisocial outcasts and enemies of the state.<sup>2</sup> Christians were also accused of cannibalism, and incest; this is because of their terminologies of eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood at the Lord's Table, as well as the holy kiss that they practiced.<sup>3</sup>

Christians were misinterpreted and were thus considered dangerous to social harmony and a threat to the Empire.<sup>4</sup> While the persecution of Christians in the Acts of the Apostles resulted in church growth, contemporary persecutions have also resulted in a similar church growth in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has the fastest growing church in the world, according to Christianity Today.<sup>5</sup> An article by the Voice of the Martyrs, "Iran: Persecution Causes Church Growth," chronicles how the church in this conservative Muslim country is proliferating despite its severe maltreatment by the Islamic regime.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, Operation World reported Iran to have 19.6% growth annually in its Christian population, far more than any other country as confirmed by Mission Network News.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Operation World has recently described the Somali Church as the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest growing evangelical church in the world.<sup>8</sup> This reported growth is a divine achievement for the little known Somali Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Courtney Grogan, (2009, March 19). For families of 21 Copts Killed by ISIS, Martyrdom is 'Fifth Gospel.'" Catholic News Agency. Rome: Italy. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/for-families-of-21-copts-killed-by-isis-martyrdom-is-fifth-gospel-56908> (accessed 27 February 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Earle E. Cairns, (1996). Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 86

<sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce, (1973). The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans,), 169.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Carey Lodge, (2016, September 20). Which Country Has the Fastest-growing Church in the World?" Christian Today <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/which.country.has.the.fastest.growing.church.in.the.world/95924.htm>, (accessed 27 March 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Voice of the Martyrs. (2017, May 24). Iran: Persecution Causes Church Growth. <https://vom.com.au/iran-persecution-causing-church-growth/> (accessed 19 February 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Jason Mandryk, (2010). Operation World 7th Edition (Biblical Publishing.), 916.

<sup>8</sup> Evangelical Growth, Operation World, 2021 <https://www.operationworld.org/hidden/evangelical-growth> (accessed 29 March 2021).

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the persecution of Christians and church growth. The Acts of the Apostles documents the first methodical attack on the Church and the church growth that followed it. However, the Roman Empire persecution of Christians inspired the advent of systematic theology of persecution that is still expressed both in prose and poetry; these compositions all attest to the fact that the Church continued growing during the persecution. The persecution of Christians elicited widespread support in the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup> Though such persecutions were often localized and sporadic, *ad hoc* basis. There was no Empire-wide persecution until AD 249.<sup>10</sup> Church historian, Philip Schaff, comments, “[T]heir Jewish origin, their indifference to politics and public affairs, and their abhorrence of heathen customs, were construed into an *odium generis humani*,” hatred of the human race.<sup>11</sup>

Tertullian in AD 197 observes in his book, *The Apology*, addressing the Roman governor of his North African province, “[t]he oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”<sup>12</sup> In another apologetic work Tertullian wrote earlier in AD 196, he ridiculed the absurd accusations used to justify the persecution of Christians:

The Christians are to blame for every public disaster and every misfortune that befalls the people. If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise and flood the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises: “The Christians to the lions!”<sup>13</sup>

Philip Schaff’s description of the persecution is noteworthy:

It was in this hate and fear-filled atmosphere that saw the bloodbath of persecution. Multitudes of Christians were crucified; some dressed in fresh animal skins, were thrown to hungry beasts, and some were lit up on poles to be used as torches.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Schaff, (1882). History of the Christian Church, Volume I: Apostolic Christianity. A.D. 1-100. CCEL Publisher, 381.

<sup>10</sup> Everett Ferguson, (1990). Did You Know? Christian History, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20, 1, inside cover

<sup>11</sup> Schaff, (1882). History of the Christian Church, Volume I, 325.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. (Editors). (1997). Tertullian’s Apology, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3, Oregon, Books for the Ages, 182 (OR 1-2). [http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF\\_0\\_03.PDF](http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF_0_03.PDF) (Accessed 22 March 2020).

<sup>13</sup> F.F. Bruce (1973). The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans), 169 (OR 165).

<sup>14</sup> Schaff, (1882). History of the Christian Church, Volume I, 381.

From the Acts of the Apostles to the Roman Empire and even this modern era, persecution of Christians has always purified the Church; it has also generally contributed to the numerical growth of the Church. Rick Wade, examining the early persecution of Christians and its contribution to the health of the Church, writes:

However, history has shown that persecution ultimately strengthens the Church. It removes the nominal Christians, and it emboldens others to both stand firm when persecuted and become more aggressive in the proclamation. If persecution comes to us, the Church will remain, although church membership rolls will probably become shorter.<sup>15</sup>

Christian advocacy groups, such as the Voice of the Martyrs, have been reporting for years many instances in which the Church was displaying a numerical growth during persecutions. The belief that persecution stimulates church growth finds a basis in the Acts of the Apostles where the Church grew after the intense persecution in Jerusalem, a growth that started with Peter's preaching at Pentecost in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Jesus has also made it clear in the Gospel of John (12:24) that martyrdom and church growth are related using the example of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies to produce much fruit.

Persecution of Christians may not always end up in martyrdom. Sometimes, it may mean Christians who suffer community or state-sponsored persecution. Persecution of Christians may mean all or any of the following: beating, jailing, denial of proper medical care, job discrimination, community ostracization, death or denial of common basic needs on the virtue of being a Christian. In this paper, persecution of Christians includes all the above atrocities.

*Operation World* lists Afghanistan as having the second most significant church growth in the world, and that it is primarily the persecuted Iranian Christians reaching Afghans. It is indeed remarkable that Iranian Christians, who suffer state-sponsored persecution like beatings, jailing, and denial of proper medical care when in prison, are witnessing to Afghani Muslims who are coming to the Lord in great multitudes.<sup>16</sup> *Operation World* reports that Christianity in Afghanistan was growing at 16.7% annually, a significant feat in a highly repressive and anti-Christian country.<sup>17</sup>

Nigeria and Ethiopia have significant records of persecution of Christians. The church in Ethiopia faced intense persecution under the communist regime of 1974-1991.<sup>18</sup> Expatriate missionaries were expelled, church properties confiscated,

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<sup>15</sup> Rick Wade, "Persecution in the Early Church." Compass Crusade for Christ, Cru.org (April 2012). <https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/04/wadepersécutionintheearlychurch.pdf> (accessed 22 September 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Joe Carter, (2015, October 20). 9 Things You Should Know About Global Persecution of Christians. *The Gospel Coalition* <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-global-persecution-of-christians-2015-edition/> (accessed 25 March 2020).

<sup>17</sup> Jason Mandryk, (2010). *Operation World 7th Edition* (Biblical Publishing.), 916.

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Stamp, (2001). "Revival and Persecution in Ethiopia," *Charisma Magazine*

worship meetings prohibited, and Christ-likeness was considered a liability by the ruling military junta and their devotees.<sup>19</sup> Protestant Christians went underground and found ways to be the church without traditional buildings and conventional leadership structure. One young denomination was officially shut down in 1982 with 5,000 members and re-emerged with 34,000 members in 1991 when the communist regime was overthrown.<sup>20</sup> As of 2017, this denomination had a membership that exceeded over 500,000.<sup>21</sup>

### Persecution of Christians

Persecution of Christians started with the inception of the Church. Both the polytheistic Roman Empire officials and the monotheistic Jewish religious leaders saw the nascent Church as a threat to the status quo. The local Roman authorities were suspicious of Christians because of their rejection of the official cult of Emperor worship.<sup>22</sup> The Jewish religious leaders felt that Jesus and his disciples challenged their age-old traditions and the established religious system.<sup>23</sup> Jesus despised the human traditions which were enshrined in the oral and written laws of the Jews; he taught that this human religious system distorted the Torah, Mark 7:1-20. Jesus also criticized the legalistic and self-righteous religious leaders of the Jewish faith, rejecting their claim that they are the followers of Moses, David and other prophets. Jesus called these dominant Jewish figures the “servants of Satan” as seen in John 8:37-44. No wonder many Pharisees and other religious authorities wanted him dead.

The first severe and well-chronicled persecution by the Roman Empire started under Nero, AD 37-68, using the great fire of Rome as a pretext to target the Christians. The era of Constantine, AD 324, drastically reduced the persecution against the Church and the Edict of Milan, AD 313, paved the way for a new reprieve.<sup>24</sup>

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<https://www.charismamag.com/site-archives/189-features/africa/530-revival-and-persecution-in-ethiopia> (Accessed 21 March 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Jay Ross, (1981, November 17). “Ethiopia Seizes Headquarters Of Major Protestant Church. The Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1981/11/17/ethiopia-seizes-headquarters-of-major-protestant-church/c2fd5ac0-c74d-4d9d-ad2e624ce89a7d82/?utmterm=.4f0daf5d146d> (Accessed 23 March 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Dave Rogalsky, (2012, October 10). Ethiopian Church Grows in Maturity: Meserete Kristos Church Follows the New Testament Pattern,” Canadian Mennonite.

<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/articles/ethiopian-church-grows-maturity> (Accessed 27 March 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online (GAMEO). (1990). Meserete Kristos Church. 2017 Update. [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete\\_Kristos\\_Church](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Meserete_Kristos_Church) (accessed 23 March 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Earle E. Cairns, (1996). Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 86

<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, (1992). The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins And The Question Of God, Volume 1, (Fortress Press), 451.

<sup>24</sup> Religious Facts. (2005, March 17). Persecution in the Early Church. Last updated, November 19, 2016 <http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church>, (Accessed 22 March 2020).

The Islamic Umayyad Caliphate persecuted the Berber church in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries until many of the Christians were pressured to convert to Islam.<sup>25</sup> Muslim crowds looted and destroyed properties owned by Egyptian Coptic Christians from AD 832 to 837. This open season on Christian properties happened during the leadership of the seventh Abbasid caliph, Caliph al-Mamun. The Muslims looted churches and monasteries and martyred many Christians including monks.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, starting from the 14<sup>th</sup> century until 1517, violent subjugation, dispossession and discrimination under the Laws of Umar targeted the Egyptian Christians. Also known as Pact of Umar, Treaty of Umar and Covenant of Umar. These laws, for example, prohibited Christians from building new churches, monasteries or other places of worship; they also made it illegal to rebuild or renovate damaged churches and other Christian places of worship.

Many of these Coptic Christians were coerced to convert to Islam.<sup>27</sup> The Mamluk Sultanate in Cairo (1250–1517) demolished most of the church buildings and massacred over 300,000 Christian Copts throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century; Maronite and Greek Christians also suffered a terrible fate in the hands of Mamluks including the destruction of their homes.<sup>28</sup>

Ottoman and Kurdish soldiers persecuted the Assyrian Christians of the Ottoman Empire from 1843 to 1847. More than 10,000 Assyrian Christians were massacred in the Hakkari region. Many more thousands were sold into slavery by the Muslim rulers.<sup>29</sup> Christians in India were historically persecuted by various Muslim rulers like Tipu Sultan.<sup>30</sup> Hindu nationalists spearhead modern-day persecution according to *Human Rights Watch*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> C. J. Speel II, (1960). *The Disappearance of Christianity from North Africa in the Wake of the Rise of Islam: Church History*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Society of Church History), 379-397.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Morgan, (2016). *History of the Coptic Orthodox People and the Church of Egypt*, (FriesenPress), 203-205.

<sup>27</sup> Kristen Stilt, (2011) *Islamic Law in Action: Authority, Discretion, and Everyday Experiences in Mamluk Egypt*, (Oxford University Press), 120.

<sup>28</sup> Teule B. Herman G., (2013) Introduction: Constantinople and Granada, Christian-Muslim Interaction 1350-1516, in David Thomas and Alex Mallett, *Christian-Muslim Relations, A Bibliographical History*, Volume 5 (1350-1500), (Brill), 11.

<sup>29</sup> David Gaunt, 2006. *Massacres, resistance, protectors: Muslim-Christian relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*, (Piscataway, N.J. Gorgias Press), 32.

<sup>30</sup> James Scurry, (1980). *The captivity, sufferings, and escape of James Scurry, who was detained a prisoner during ten years, in the dominions of Hyder Ali and Tippoo Saib*, (London, H. Fisher, 1824), 103.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch. (1999, September 30). *Anti-Christian Violence on the Rise in India: New Report Details the Politics Behind Extremist Hindu Attacks*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/1999/09/30/anti-christian-violence-rise-india> (accessed 17 March 2019).

Abdul Rahman, an Afghani Christian convert, was arrested in 2006 for abandoning Islam.<sup>32</sup> Influential Afghani Muslims, including government officials, lobbied for the death penalty in accordance with the Sharia Law according to the *Associated Press*.<sup>33</sup> Initially, the Kabul judge rejected calls to end the trial of the Christian convert.<sup>34</sup> Abdul Rahman was eventually released because of pressure from some Western governments according to the *Washington Post*.<sup>35</sup>

The persecution against Somali Christians has been on the rise since 1991 when Somalia's central government collapsed. Christians started facing what amounts to a religious genocide because of increased lawlessness and resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>36</sup> Radical Islamists beheaded several Somali Christians and at least on one occasion, in 2008, videotaped the gruesome decapitation of a local evangelist and a humanitarian worker, Mansur Mohamed.<sup>37</sup>

### The Blood of Christians is Seed

The famed North African theologian, Tertullian, was a fervent believer that persecution of Christians helps the church to grow; he wrote in his 197 seminal book, *Apologeticus*, "the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church;" this is a poetic adaptation of what Tertullian has literally penned, "the oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."<sup>38</sup> Tertullian never doubted that persecution strengthens the community of faith and contributes to church growth. Non-Christians embrace Christ when they witness Christians dying heroically for their faith, according to Tertullian and many of his contemporaries. In a letter by an anonymous 2nd-century Christian apologist addressed to "most excellent Diognetus", a well-connected pagan man, affirms:

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<sup>32</sup> BBC. (2006, March 20). Afghan on Trial for Christianity: Afghan Man is Being Tried in a Court in the Capital, Kabul, for Converting from Islam to Christianity. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4823874.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4823874.stm) (accessed 26 September 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Associated Press. (2006, March 25). Afghan Judge Resists Pressure In Convert Case. *Washington Post*.

[www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on) (Accessed 27 February 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Associated Press. (2006, March 25). Afghan Judge Resists Pressure In Convert Case. *Washington Post*.

[www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/03/24/AR2006032401914.html?noredirect=on) (Accessed 27 February 2020).

<sup>36</sup> The Angelical Planet. (2009, March 30). Almost Expunged: Somalia's Embattled Christians. <http://anglicanplanet.net/international-news/2009/11/30/almost-expunged-somalias-embattledchristians.html> (accessed 11 September 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Compass Direct News (CDN). (20102, February 9). Islamic Extremists Behead Another Convert in Somalia: Young Christian Man Murdered outside Mogadishu. *Christian Post*. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/islamic-extremists-behead-another-convert-in-somalia-69102/> (accessed 18 March 2020).

<sup>38</sup> W. M. Reeve, Translator & Annotator. (1709). *The Apology of Tertullian*. 50, s. 13, initially printed in London in 1709 and Reprinted in a second edition in 1716/1717. [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve\\_apology.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/reeve_apology.htm) (Accessed 03 March 2020).

Do you not see that [the Christians] thrown to the wild beasts - that they may recant the Lord - do not allow themselves to be beaten? Do you not see that the more they are punished, the more the others increase in numbers?<sup>39</sup>

This Epistle to Diognetus, as it is known, is another compelling testimony of the early church's conviction that persecution contributes to church growth. Also, Ippolito Romano, a contemporary of Tertullian, wrote during lethal persecution, "that large number of men, attracted to the faith by martyrs, also became God's martyrs."<sup>40</sup> Professor Antonio Miralles of Pontifical University of the Holy Cross writes:

The martyrs gain through losing their lives in bearing witness to Jesus – they gain eternal life. But this is also positive for the Church, that receives new believers, encouraged to convert thanks to the example set by the martyrs, and she also sees a renewal in existing believers.<sup>41</sup>

The second and third centuries persecutions have profoundly impacted the young faith that resulted in theology that venerates martyrs.<sup>42</sup> Contemporary scholars estimate that 54 of the Roman emperors who ruled from 30-311, about 30 of them have persistently targeted Christians.<sup>43</sup> Some scholars estimate that from first government-sanctioned persecution under Nero in 64 to the Edict of Milan in 313 that established a government-sanctioned Empire-wide religious toleration for Christianity, the church faced 129 years of severe persecution and 120 years of peace or toleration.<sup>44</sup>

While many Roman Empire persecutions against the Church were brutal, the persecutors often targeted the Scriptures, other Christian materials, clergy, church property and influential sympathisers of Christians. The non-prominent lay Christians often escaped direct persecution.<sup>45</sup> Some Church historians and missiologists estimate that more Christians were martyred for their faith in the last 50 years than in the Church's first 300 years combined.<sup>46</sup> Sometimes the religio-political climates change in world areas where Christianity was already established in different degrees having a negative effect on the Church; Chairman Mao's China and Islamic North Africa being a case in point.

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<sup>39</sup> Antonio Miralles, (2004, May 31). The blood of martyrs, the seed of Christians. Clerus <http://www.clerus.org/clerus/dati/2004-05/31-13/12MarIn.html>, (accessed 13 March 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, (2000). A History of Christianity, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500, rev. ed. Prince Press, 81

<sup>43</sup> Mark Galli, (1990). "The Persecuting Emperors." Christian History, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20

<sup>44</sup> Maurice M. Hassatt, (1910). "Martyr." The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, Robert Appleton Company.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Everett Ferguson, (1990). Did You Know? Christian History, Issue 27 (Vol. XI, No. 3), 20, 1, inside cover.



## Conclusion

Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, church tradition recognised ten major persecutions by the Roman Empire:<sup>47</sup>

The Nero persecution (c. 64-68) which resulted in the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. The Domitian persecution (reigned 81-96). The Trajan persecution (112-117); though Christianity was banned, there was no dragnet to hunt Christians who kept a low profile. The Marcus Aurelius persecution (reigned 161-180) in which Polycarp is the most high-profile martyr. The Septimus Severus persecution (202-210) in which Perpetua, a fearless and an overachieving young Christian, is among the most well-known martyrs. The Decius persecution (250-251) targeted Christians who refused to offer pagan sacrifices or buy certificates (*libelli*) instead of sacrificing. Bishops of Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch, are the most prominent martyrs. The Valerian persecution (257-59) in which its eminent martyrs include Cyprian of Carthage and Sixtus II of Rome. The Maximinus persecution (235-38). The Aurelian persecution (reigned 270–275). The Diocletian and Galerius severe persecutions (303-324). None of these persecutions slowed down the growth of the Church.

During the first meeting of the International Congress on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland, Billy Jang Hwan Kim stated, “[p]ersecution is a storm that is permitted to scatter the seed of the word, disperse the sower and reaper over many fields. It is God’s way of extending his Kingdom.”<sup>48</sup> The 1974 meeting, popularly known as Lausanne Movement, was about the global persecution of Christians. The conviction of the Korean born church leader that persecution results in church growth is widely shared by many Christians that include Pope Francis. The Pope declared in 2014 that “[t]he Church grows thanks to the blood of the martyrs. This is the beauty of martyrdom.”<sup>49</sup>

Michael Green highlights that persecution has the potential to stimulate church growth. He cites that Stephen’s martyrdom did not hinder church growth but ushered in a new era of emboldened disciples whose ministry led many to the Lord.<sup>50</sup> Green’s theory is that a besieged church is more likely to grow as the persecution will inspire the Christians and purify the Church. The growth of the primitive Church, despite the persecution and martyrdom it faced, is an example par excellence that the blood of Christians is seed. Modern-day examples of persecuted churches growing in Islamic countries like Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia, are further evidence of Tertullian’s

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<sup>47</sup> Religious Facts. (2005, March 17). Persecution in the Early Church. Last updated, November 19, 2016 <http://www.religionfacts.com/persecution-early-church>, (Accessed 22 March 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Billy Kim, (1975). “God at Work in Times of Persecution,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses*, ed. James D. Douglas (Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publications), 57.

<sup>49</sup> Elise Harris, (2014, June 30). Pope Francis: Church grows from the blood of the martyrs. Catholic News Agency, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-church-grows-with-the-blood-of-the-martyrs-45498> (accessed on 12 March 2020).

<sup>50</sup> Michael Green, (1970). *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 172-173.

belief that the more the Christians are mown down, the more in number they grow because the blood of Christians is seed.

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## What Does “Religion” Mean for Muslims and Muslim Background Believers?

By Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman\*

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We cannot be completely sure of the origin of the word “religion.”<sup>1</sup> Nor is there a clear definition of the term accepted by scholars. However, most scholars who describe “religion” focus on three aspects:

1. *Beliefs* concerning God, gods, the spirit realm, or ultimate reality.
2. *Practice*—The things people do regularly or systematically because of their beliefs.
3. A sense of *community*.<sup>2</sup>

The word “religion” originated from Latin. This is important to remember. It did not come from Hebrew; therefore, a single word for “religion” is not found in the Hebrew Old Testament. It did not come from Greek; therefore, a single word for “religion” is not found in the New Testament. It did not come from Arabic; therefore, a single word for “religion” is not found in the Qur’an. We could say the same about Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and just about every other “religion.” Either Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional African religions are religions—or none of them are religions.

The word *daht* (or *dat*) in Modern Hebrew can mean religion.<sup>3</sup> However, in the Bible it is only used in Ezra 8:36 and several places in Esther, such as in Esther 1:8. In the Bible this word means decrees or laws; it doesn’t mean religion. The word “religion” is not found in most translations of the Old Testament.

In the Greek New Testament, we have two main words that have been translated as religion: *desidaimonia* and *threskeia*. *Desidaimonia* refers to fear or reverence for God or gods. It naturally includes beliefs concerning God or gods. *Desidaimonia* can also be translated as superstition. When Porcius Festus was a Roman ruler of Judea, the Apostle Paul was a prisoner. Festus introduced Paul’s case to King Agrippa. Festus explained to Agrippa that the Jewish authorities “had certain points of dispute with him [Paul] about their own religion (*desidaimonia*).” Here *desidaimonia* refers to religious beliefs held by Paul, the Jew, which Jewish opponents did not accept. Festus specifically mentioned belief “about a certain

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<sup>1</sup> “Religion,” Origin and meaning of religion by Online Etymology Dictionary (etymonline.com)

<sup>2</sup> Magic is not considered religion, because it does not require community participation. Magical practices are occasional; they are employed only when there is a special need. Magic focuses on manipulation of the spirit powers rather than submission to them. Even though magic is not religion, magical practices may exist within religions, including among Somalis, such as making protective charms against the evil eye, the *zar* ritual for an unhappy wife, or rainmaking rituals.

<sup>3</sup> “Hebrew In Israel: Is The Torah A Religion? – Learn Torah,” Hebrew in Israel.

Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.” (Acts 25:19)<sup>4</sup> In Acts 17:22, a form of that word is used to mean “very religious” or “superstitious” when Paul talks about the religion of the Greeks in Athens.

*Threskeia* is the other word translated as religion in the New Testament. We find it in Acts 26:5. The Apostle Paul said to King Agrippa, “They [the Jewish leaders] have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion [*threskeia*; the Jewish religion] I have lived as a Pharisee.” Here *threskeia* refers to religious practices by Pharisees and other Jews. In James 1:26-27, we find the same word used in a positive sense:

If anyone thinks he is religious (*threskos*) and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person’s religion (*threskeia*) is worthless. Religion (*threskeia*) that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

*Threskeia* is translated as *din* in James 1:26-27 in Arabic Bibles. (See below for the use of *din* in Islam.) It is also translated as *din* in Kiswahili. It has been translated as *cibaado* (worship) in Somali, but this not quite accurate. *Cibaado* works better for translating *desidaimonia*, not *threskeia*. Neither is *cabsiga* (fear or intense respect for God) an accurate translation of *threskeia*. That too would be a better translation of *desidaimonia*. *Threskeia* focuses on religious practices, rituals. James is agreeing with the Old Testament prophets concerning rituals. The Old Testament prophets often spoke about how rituals such as sacrifices were not enough. To quote the prophet Micah:

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He [God] has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8).

James wrote primarily for a Jewish audience who followed Jesus Christ. In 1:26-27, he was saying that the best rituals are not temple, synagogue, or household rituals, but rather service to others.

The two Greek New Testament words we looked at above cover religious belief and religious practices. The words can be used in both negative and positive ways. In the positive sense, we must believe certain things about God and Jesus Christ, and we must consistently take care of the needs of others.

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<sup>4</sup> All Bible quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2001.

We might ask why there is no word in the Bible that carries the full meaning of our modern word “religion.” Is it because nobody was religious in those days? No. it was because people in the ancient world were uniformly religious. They did not need a word to describe the three aspects of faith, practice, and community. Even if they held to many different religions, being religious was just the normal way people lived.

In the Arabic Qur’an, there is also no single word for religion. The word for religious belief is *iman*. The word for religious practice is *din* (or *diin* in Somali). *Iman* refers to faith in God as well as the things to believe. The Arabic root for the word *iman* includes the idea of “rest of mind and security from fear.”<sup>5</sup> *Din* emphasizes religious practice. The word *din* has three interrelated meanings: “judgment,” “customary practice,” and “religious deeds.”<sup>6</sup> *The Study Qur’an* compares *din* with *dayn* in *Surat ul-Baqarah* 2:282: “While *dayn* refers to a debt, *din* refers to the repayment of our debt to God, and God is also known as *al-Dayyan*, meaning ‘the One Who Repays.’”<sup>7</sup> In *Surat ul-Fathihah*, the opening surah, we find the phrase *yawm ud-din*; it is translated as “Day of Judgment.” After the time the Qur’an was written down, the word *din* came to refer to both what people believe and what they do, and so it became a synonym for religion.

In Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language*, the word “religion” was defined as something good. It was “Virtue, as founded upon reverence of God, and expectation of future rewards and punishments.” It was also “A system of divine faith and worship as opposite to others.”<sup>8</sup> But today many Christians see religion as a negative term. Often you will hear Western Christians say, “Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship.” Should Somali followers of Christ also say this? There are several problems with such a statement:

1. No better word exists today than “religion” (or *diin* in Somali) for the translation of James 1:26-27 to show what “religious people” are supposed to do.
2. Because we have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we are required to *believe* certain things and to *do* certain things; this fits with the description of “religion” whether we like the term or not.
3. Other religions could say that theirs is not a religion but a relationship, such as Amida Buddhism or the Hare Krishna Hindu sect. But they also *believe* certain things and *do* certain things based on their beliefs. We still called those beliefs and practices “religion.”

*But I have saved the most important reason for last. If Somali followers of Christ were to say they have no religion or they are not religious, what would Muslim*

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<sup>5</sup> H.A.R. Gibb & J.H. Kraemers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article “Iman.” Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, n.d.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, article “Din.”

<sup>7</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr and others, *The Study Qur’an*. N.Y.: HarperOne, 2015, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> “Religion,” Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary.

<https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.org/views/search.php?term=Religion>

*friends and family think? They would think these Christians are either atheists or immoral or both. In the Somali context, it is useful for Muslim background believers to use the word diin or religion.*

It is true that some of the worst things in world history have been done in the name of religion, such as the Crusades and the Spanish inquisition. Somalis today suffer from extreme interpretations of religion. There is no doubt that religion can destroy lives. Satan can twist what is good for his own evil purposes. But the Bible verses remain for us to obey:

If anyone thinks he is religious (*threskos*) and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion (*threskeia*) is worthless. Religion (*threskeia*) that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

It is the prayer of this author that Somali followers of Jesus Christ will show others this "pure and undefiled" religion by their good behavior as they help others in need.

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## A Brief History of Judaism in the Somali Peninsula

Aweis A. Ali

### Introduction

While Christianity in the Somali peninsula was in the past marginally examined, Judaism in this world area received far less attention. This negligence is surprising given the recorded history of Jews peacefully living among Somalis for centuries. Some of the Jewry in question were open about their faith, while others were crypto-Jews who practiced their faith in covert ways for fear of persecution. Many of the Jews who lived or simply traversed in the Somali peninsula as merchants and religious service providers, like circumcision and kosher slaughter of animals, were Adenite and Yemenite Jews. Some other Jews came from the Iberian Peninsula or even directly from modern-day Israel. The purpose of this paper is to document the often-ignored deep roots of Judaism in the Somali peninsula.

Ethiopian Judaism entered the Somali peninsula through Somaliland while southern Arabia Judaism entered the peninsula primarily through southern Somalia and also through Somaliland albeit with limited arrivals. While there is no strong evidence of any Somali clans embracing Judaism during the pre-Islamic era, the conversion of individuals and families cannot be ruled out. The Hebrew heritage of the marginalized Somali clans including the Yibir is an ancient one which goes back to the Beta-Israel, Ethiopian Jews. Somalis were, at least nominally, entirely Islamized by the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Islam remained very shallow in the interiors of the Somali peninsula until the 1800s.<sup>2</sup> Since 1500, no large scale of indigenous Somalis practicing a religion other than Islam has been reported.

### The Greater Ethiopia Influence

One of the five Somali inhabited regions in the Somali peninsula is part of modern-day Ethiopia. While the population of this Somali region is a negligible 6,000,000 people compared to the overall Ethiopian population of 110,000,000, the landmass of this Somali region is about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total Ethiopian landmass. It should be noted however, under its old name of Abyssinia, Ethiopia had ruled much of modern-day Somaliland, including sections of the semi-autonomous region of Puntland.<sup>3</sup> Zeila town in Somaliland was ruled by the Axumite Kingdom as early as the 900s before losing the strategic town to local Muslims and their Arab co-religionists. The Axumite

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<sup>1</sup> Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 141.

<sup>2</sup> Abdi Mohamed Kusow, *The Genesis of the Somali Civil War: A New Perspective*. In *Proceedings of the Sixth Michigan State University Conference on Northeast Africa*. Edited by John Hinnant & B. Fine. East Lansing, MI, USA: (Michigan State University, 1992), 189.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History*. 117.

Kingdom reconquered Zeila in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> The Ethiopian rule in most of Somaliland seems to have concluded by the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

Ethiopia, with its famous indigenous Jewish community, Beta-Israel,<sup>6</sup> took with it its brand of Orthodox Christianity and elements of Judaism wherever it ruled, including Somaliland.<sup>7</sup> Ethiopia, which was traditionally ruled by the northern Orthodox clans of the Amhara and the Tigray, was also once ruled with an iron fist by Queen Gudit, who was an Ethiopian Jew.<sup>8</sup> The Jewish faith of the Queen is affirmed by ancient Ge'ez manuscripts.<sup>9</sup> This Damot Kingdom, which laid the southwest of Axumite Kingdom, targeted the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with a vengeance.<sup>10</sup> The Queen eventually ransacked Axum in 979.<sup>11</sup> While the exact seat of the Damot Kingdom may be disputed, its reach and rule are not. For example, Paul Balisky is of the opinion that the seat of the Damot Kingdom was near the Gibe River Valley, currently inhabited by the Gurage and the Oromo people groups.<sup>12</sup>

It is not surprising that the Somali peninsula, especially areas still ruled or once ruled by Ethiopia, is littered with Jewish archeological evidence. The Dhubato village in the Hargeisa region, Somaliland, has ancient cemeteries embossed with the Star of David.<sup>13</sup> Dire Dawa, part of the Somali peninsula in Ethiopia, also has a long history of a thriving Jewish community of Adenite and Yemenite extraction.<sup>14</sup> Some of the Jews reportedly hailed from India and Greece. However, their ancestry could still have been Adenite or Yemenite. With its metal door embossed with the Star of David, one of the city's synagogues now operates as a cafeteria. This ex-synagogue is located in the Dire Dawa neighborhood of Dechatu.

<sup>4</sup> David Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1974), 71

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>6</sup> The Ethiopian Jewish community calls itself as Beta-Israel. Some outsiders call them Falasha, which is a derogatory term.

<sup>7</sup> Sada Mire, *Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire*. *Afr Archaeol Rev* 32, 111–136, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9184-9> (accessed 08 March 2021).

<sup>8</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*. (London: Oxford University Press 1952), 52

<sup>9</sup> Sergew Hable Selassie. *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*. Addis Abeba. (Haile Selassie I University, 1972), 225-232.

<sup>10</sup> Belaynesh Michael, "The decline of Aksumite Empire and the Rise of Warrior Queen Yodit (አሳቶ) The Fire." *Addis Herald*, 24 July 2019.

<https://www.addis Herald.com/the-decline-of-aksumite-empire-and-the-rise-of-warrior-queen-yodit-%E1%8A%A5%E1%88%B3%E1%89%B6-the-fire/> (accessed 08 March 2021)

<sup>11</sup> Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*. In *Oxford Studies in African Affairs*. General Editors John D. Hargreaves and George Shepperson. Oxford. (Clarendon Press, 1972), 40-43.

<sup>12</sup> Paul E. Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovations in Southern Ethiopia*, 1937-1975. PhD. Thesis, Scotland. (University of Aberdeen, 1997), 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Sada Mire, *Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland*, 124.

<sup>14</sup> Oxford African American Studies Center. "Isaac, Ephraim." 31 May 2013.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.38569> (accessed 11 March 2021).

## The Jews of Djibouti

The Jews of Djibouti belong to the influential Adenite and Yemenite Jewish diaspora, just like the Jewish communities in the rest of the Somali peninsula and Eritrea. While Jews initially settled in Obock, a small port town in the northern part of the Gulf of Tadjoura, they later moved to Djibouti City after the British handed the Gulf of Tadjoura over to the French in 1884.<sup>15</sup>

The first documented significant Jewish presence in Djibouti was in the 1800s, which coincides with the French development of Djibouti's port city in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Djibouti was at this time known as the *Côte Française des Somalis*.<sup>16</sup> The Jewish community played a significant role in the development of Djibouti City. These professional Jews emigrated from Aden. However, it is unknown whether these Jews were indeed from the Adenite community or were Baladi (from the north) who simply passed through Aden. Both communities share *minhag*.<sup>17</sup>

There were 50 Jewish families in Djibouti in 1901 and 111 in 1921.<sup>18</sup> Many of the Jews were traders, craftsmen, and jewelers. The several synagogues they frequented included the grand synagogue in the heart of the city in Rue de Rome. The Jews of Djibouti were known as expert *Hahamim*;<sup>19</sup> they were renowned for their superior *halakhic* knowledge.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent of the last few Rabbis of Djibouti was the prominent Haham Yoseph Moshe, who also ministered to the Jews of Asmara and Addis Ababa as a skilled *mohel* performing Jewish rituals, including circumcisions.<sup>21</sup>

As the number of Jews in Djibouti dwindled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two phenomena were evident: increased intermarriage between the Jews and natives and the latter's conversion to Judaism. Both anomalies vanished from 1948 -1950 when the majority of the Jews made *aliyah* to Israel. Operation Magic Carpet, which the new State of Israel organized in 1949, evacuated 45,000 Yemenite Jews to Israel. This group included 200 Jews from Djibouti who were also threatened by political unrest. A member of the Jews of Djibouti, Moshe Sion, later recalled, "a plane came from

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<sup>15</sup> Alain Rouaud, "Pour une histoire des Arabes de Djibouti, 1896-1977". Cahiers d'études africaines. 1997, 37: 319–334.

<sup>16</sup> "French Coast of the Somalis" Somali: *Dhulka Soomaaliyeed ee Faransiiska*. France later renamed this territory the French Somaliland.

<sup>17</sup> Hebrew: מנהגים, "motsuc", is an accepted Jewish tradition or group of traditions.

<sup>18</sup> Gabriel Angoulvant and Sylvain Vignéras, Djibouti, Mer Rouge, Abyssinie. Paris. 1902, 415.

<sup>19</sup> Hahamim, pl of Hakham is a term in Judaism, meaning a sage or skillful, wise man; it is often used for gifted Torah scholars.

<sup>20</sup> *Halakha* is the collective body of Jewish religious laws, practices, and piety.

<sup>21</sup> ZivotofskyAri and Ari Greenspan, "No Vital Signs In Djibouti" (PDF). Mishpacha. 391: 56–62. January 2012.

<http://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/djibouti-mishpacha.pdf> (accessed 07 March 2021).

Aden, and we all got on and flew to Israel.”<sup>22</sup> While in Djibouti, Moshe’s father ministered as a *mohel*, *hazzan*, *posek*, and *sofer*.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency report nonchalantly states, “All but three Jews of the Jewish community in French Somaliland [Djibouti] have immigrated to Israel, according to information received here by the organization department of the World Jewish Congress.”<sup>23</sup> The report adds, “A letter written by one of the three Jews remaining in French Somaliland to Dr. I. Schwarzbart, director of the W.J.C. organization department, reveals that the three have stayed in Djibouti in order to liquidate the affairs of their co-religionists after all other members of the community left for Israel.”<sup>24</sup> The Jews living in Djibouti today are expatriates with Jewish roots as well as “just a few isolated, unaffiliated Jews.”<sup>25</sup>

### The Jews of Somalia

There are records which indicate that 100-200 Jews moved to Somalia as traders around 1900.<sup>26</sup> Some of these entrepreneuring Jews may have settled the port town of Berbera “where Arab, Indian and Jewish trading communities once lived.”<sup>27</sup> Other Somali coastal towns of Yemenite Jewish presence included Zeila, Mogadishu, and Brava. Hussein A. Bulhan asserts that “there are indications that Jewish merchants traded in seaports along the Red Sea and established pockets of small communities wherever commerce and peace prevailed.”<sup>28</sup> Oral tradition has it that the “last Jewish family left Berbera in 1951 and headed for Djibouti.”<sup>29</sup> A debilitated synagogue still defies anti-Semitism in Berbera.<sup>30</sup> The Jewish neighborhood of Berbera still retains

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<sup>22</sup> Zivotofsky; Ari Greenspan. “Out Of Africa.” Jewish Action, 2011.  
[https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/travel/out\\_of\\_africa/](https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/travel/out_of_africa/) (accessed 07 March 2021)

<sup>23</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Only Three Jews Remain in Somaliland; All Other Members of Community Went to Israel.” 15 August 1949.  
<https://www.jta.org/1949/08/15/archive/only-three-jews-remain-in-somaliland-all-other-members-of-community-went-to-israel> (accessed 07 March 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Only Three Jews Remain in Somaliland; All Other Members of Community Went to Israel.” 15 August 1949.  
<https://www.jta.org/1949/08/15/archive/only-three-jews-remain-in-somaliland-all-other-members-of-community-went-to-israel> (accessed 07 March 2021)

<sup>25</sup> Zivotofsky, Ari; Greenspan, Ari, “No Vital Signs In Djibouti.” Mishpacha. January 2012, 391: 56–62.  
<http://halachicadventures.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/djibouti-mishpacha.pdf> (accessed 07 March 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, *The Last Two Jews of Mogadishu: Living Under Al Shabaab’s Fire*. New Rochelle, NY. (MultiEducator, 2017), 17.

<sup>27</sup> “In Pictures: Berbera Builds Future from Crumbling Past.” BBC, 04 June 2015  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32978845> (accessed 08 March 2021)

<sup>28</sup> Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. Bethesda, Maryland. (Tayosan International Publishing, 2013), 159.

<sup>29</sup> “The Berbera Synagogue and the Jewish Presence in Somalia.” Somalipost, 11 February 2018.  
<https://www.somalispot.com/threads/the-berbera-synagogue-and-the-jewish-presence-in-somalia.37613/> (accessed 08 March 2021).

<sup>30</sup> “The Berbera Synagogue and the Jewish Presence in Somalia.” Somalipost, 11 February 2018.

its name, *Sakatul Yuhuud*.<sup>31</sup> Apparently, Somalia's current hateful anti-Semitism is a new phenomenon that came to Somalia with the mother of radical Islam, the Muslim Brotherhood, in the 1970s.

A report by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) published in 1949 states, "...there are no Jews left in Italian and British Somaliland, according to information received here by the organization department of the World Jewish Congress."<sup>32</sup> Italian Somali Somaliland and British Somaliland united in 1960 to form the Republic of Somalia. Despite the JTA's pessimistic view of the existence of Somalia Jewry post-1949, there is indisputable evidence that both traditional (publicly known) and crypto-Jews resided in Somalia well after 1949. Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "Somalia was home to a diverse trading network, which extended from New York to Yemen to Somalia and continued all the way to Indonesia."<sup>33</sup> However, a significant Somalia Jewish community resided in Somalia until shortly before Somalia's independence in 1960. Interestingly enough, Israel was the first country to recognize Somalia's independence from Great Britain and Italy. Somalia did not return that favor but instead dispossessed and deported Jews from Somalia in 1967 in response to the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War.<sup>34</sup>

While people know about the traditional (publicly known) Jewry in Somalia, little is known of the crypto-Jews who appear like any other Somali Muslim but practice their faith discreetly. Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin corresponded with two crypto-Jews of Yemenite descent in Mogadishu from 2007-2010. Kobrin exchanged more than 300 emails with the mom, Ashira Haybi, and her adult son, Rami. Rami's dad, Shamul, was killed in the civil war that toppled the Somali government in 1991. This Jewish family has roots in Somalia that exceed a century. Rami's dad traces his ancestry to Aden, and his mom to Ta'iz, both in Yemen. Ashira was a successful textile businesswoman before the civil war. "She kept a kosher home, was Shabbat observant and raised Rami to continue the tradition. They fought vigorously to

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<https://www.somalispot.com/threads/the-berbera-synagogue-and-the-jewish-presence-in-somalia.37613/> (accessed 08 March 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Abdirahman M. Diriye, "Jews' Historic Presence in Somaliland." *The Times of Israel*. 26 April 2019

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/jews-historic-presence-in-somaliland/> (accessed 08 March 2021)

<sup>32</sup> Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "Only Three Jews Remain in Somaliland; All Other Members of Community Went to Israel." 15 August 1949.

<https://www.jta.org/1949/08/15/archive/only-three-jews-remain-in-somaliland-all-other-members-of-community-went-to-israel> (accessed 07 March 2021).

<sup>33</sup> Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, "Ilhan Omar Controversy: Where Does She Get Her Views?" Clarion Project, 18 November 2018.

[https://www.academia.edu/37798893/Ilhan\\_Omar\\_Controversy\\_Where\\_Does\\_She\\_Get\\_Her\\_Views\\_Clarion\\_Project](https://www.academia.edu/37798893/Ilhan_Omar_Controversy_Where_Does_She_Get_Her_Views_Clarion_Project) (accessed 08 March 2021).

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, "Ilhan Omar Controversy: Where Does She Get Her Views?" Clarion Project, 18 November 2018.

[https://www.academia.edu/37798893/Ilhan\\_Omar\\_Controversy\\_Where\\_Does\\_She\\_Get\\_Her\\_Views\\_Clarion\\_Project](https://www.academia.edu/37798893/Ilhan_Omar_Controversy_Where_Does_She_Get_Her_Views_Clarion_Project) (accessed 08 March 2021).

preserve their Judaism under extreme duress.”<sup>35</sup> Kobrin received the last email in 2010 and has no idea what happened to the mother and her son.

The most challenging group of the Somalia Jews to document is the crypto-Jews, most of whom are of Adenite or Yemenite origin. These are Jews who practice Judaism discreetly but outwardly appear to be practicing Muslims. A prominent wealthy business family from Mogadishu is often rumored to be “Yemeni Jews,” but the family denies this by claiming to be Ashraaf, descendants of Prophet Muhammad. The home of the late patriarch of this family was looted in 1991 after the collapse of Somalia’s central government. According to multiple sources, the looted goods including “Jewish scriptures and other religious books, were hidden away in a secret basement.”<sup>36</sup> According to Nancy Kobrin, it “was common for Yemenite Jews for families to own their own Torah scroll. Rami talked about how they had such an old Torah that they could no longer read the letters but they knew it was sacrilegious to write or fill in the faded inked letters.”<sup>37</sup> This “crypto-Jewish” family cannot be named in this paper for their own safety.

### The Yibir Clan

The Yibir, the most loathed among the despised Somali minority clans, is probably of an Ethiopian Jewish heritage.<sup>38</sup> The Yibir clan’s ancestral home appears to be either Harar or Jigjiga.<sup>39</sup> Both cities are located in eastern Ethiopia and are in close proximity. Xantaale, the wife of a powerful Yibir King, Bu’ur Ba’ayr, who ruled parts of northern Somalia around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is buried in Harar. However, some think her actual resting place might be in Jigjiga. Xantaale’s alleged tomb in Harar attracts a steady stream of Yibir pilgrims.<sup>40</sup> The Yibir are known as ritual specialists with mighty magical powers, thus the fear and suspicion most Somalis harbor against them.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that the libire clan of the Rendille in North-East Kenya, close cousins of the Somalis, are also ritual specialists with alleged powerful curses. However, the libire are honored among the Rendille and are not thus despised. “libire” and “Yibir” belong to the same etymological root. In fact, F.L. James, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century British explorer who visited Somaliland, spelled “Yibir” as “Ebir” in his book, *The Unknown Horn of Africa*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin, “What? There Were Jews in Somalia?!” *The Jerusalem Post*. 28 January 2018. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/what-there-were-jews-in-somalia-540076> (accessed 08 March 2021).

<sup>36</sup> Abdul Mohamed, phone conversation with the author, 08 March 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy Kobrin, “Wonderful Article.” Message to Aweis A. Ali. 12 March 2021. Email.

<sup>38</sup> “Yibir” is a Somali corruption of “Hebrew.”

<sup>39</sup> Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 18-19.

<sup>40</sup> I. M. Lewis. *Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar, and Saho*. Ethnographic Survey of Africa, North-Eastern Africa. Part I. ed. D. Ford. London: (International African Institute, 1969), 54-55.

<sup>41</sup> G. Schlee. *Identities on the Move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya*. Nairobi, Kenya: (Gideon S. Were Press, 1994), 10-11, 241-242.

<sup>42</sup> F.L. James. *The Unknown Horn of Africa*. (London: G. Philip & Son. 1888), 70.

King Bu'ur Ba'ayr, who also served as the High Priest, was eventually dethroned by a Somali Muslim preacher, Sheikh Aw-Barkhadle, also known as Sheikh Yusuf Ahmad Kawneyn. Sheikh Aw-Barkhadle was a prominent Somali Muslim scholar,<sup>43</sup> whose native pedigree has been confirmed by competent authorities, including H. Altenmüller,<sup>44</sup> Richard Bulliet,<sup>45</sup> and the Royal Geographical Society.<sup>46</sup> The power encounter between the two men is immortalized in the Somali psyche.<sup>47</sup> The King and his subjects practiced at the time a pre-Islamic religion.<sup>48</sup> The Yibir seem to have practiced a syncretic form of Judaism and traditional religion. The Yibir to this day harbor persistent resentment against Islam.<sup>49</sup> The Yibir today are between a rock and a hard place. The fact that fellow Somalis marginalize them because of their supposed clan inferiority is bad enough. However, their Hebraic heritage is also used against them by some Somali Muslims.<sup>50</sup> Some members of the Yibir clan coined various names for their clan to get rid of the name Yibir because of its Hebrew origin. The alternative names minted include "Anaas." No Somali would call a Yibir "Anaas." The Yibir to this day collect payments, known as "samanyo" from dominant clans during weddings or when a baby boy is born.<sup>51</sup> If they are denied the age-old payment, they supposedly use their magical powers to harm those who denied them the traditional payment.<sup>52</sup>

During the power encounter between the Muslim preacher and the King-High Priest, Bu'ur Ba'ar, the King went through a mountain multiple times until Kawneyn begged Allah to imprison the King in the mountain. In one version of the legend, the King's sons later demanded from Kawneyn the blood money of their murdered dad. Kawneyn "asked them whether they wanted an immediate payment or preferred to be paid in the future for every newborn boy and for every marriage; they opted for the second, and this is the explanation for the "samanyo" paid by the Somalis to the

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<sup>43</sup> I. M. Lewis, *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-based Society*. (Red Sea Press. 1998), 89.

<sup>44</sup> H. Altenmüller, J. O., Hunwick, R.S. O'Fahey, and B. Spuler. *The Writings of the Muslim Peoples of Northeastern Africa*, Part 1, Volume 13. Leiden [u.a.]: (Brill, 2003), 174.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Bulliet, *History of the World to 1500 CE* (Session 22). Tropical Africa and Asia. Youtube.com. 23 November 2010. Retrieved 23 September 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Royal Geographical Society. "The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society." Volume 19, 1849, 61.

<sup>47</sup> Sada Mire, Wagar, Fertility and Phallic Stelae: Cushitic Sky-God Belief and the Site of Saint Aw-Barkhadle, Somaliland. 22 March 2015, 103.

file:///Users/nomadmac/Downloads/Wagar\_Fertility\_and\_Phhallic\_Stelae\_Cushitic\_Sky-Go.pdf (accessed 21 January 2021).

<sup>48</sup> The King-High Priest was later given the Muslim name, Mohamed Hanif after his death by the Yibir, who later converted to Islam. The name change was probably an attempt by the Yibir to remove their clan from the stigma of the anti-Islam Jewish King.

<sup>49</sup> Ben I. Aram, "Somalia's Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey." *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Elia Vitturini, *The Gaboye of Somaliland: Legacies of Marginality, Trajectories of Emancipation*. University of Milan-Bicocca. "Riccardo Massa" Department of Human Sciences for Education. Doctoral Programme in Cultural and Social Anthropology. PhD Thesis, 2017, 53.

<sup>51</sup> The Yibir term for "samanyo" is "anasnimo."

<sup>52</sup> Elia Vitturini, *The Gaboye of Somaliland: Legacies of Marginality*, 25.

Yibir.<sup>53</sup>

The New York Times published in 2000 a widely circulated article titled, “Djibouti Journal; Somalia’s ‘Hebrews’ See a Better Day.”<sup>54</sup> The author eloquently puts the challenges the Hebraic Yibir clan faces:

The sultan of the Jews in Somalia is a handsome, silver-haired man named Ahmed Jama Hersi who does not know the first thing about Judaism. He is a Muslim, as were his ancestors back at least 800 years. But he and his people are treated badly, cursed as descendants of Israelites. The name of the tribe is Yibir, or Hebrew.<sup>55</sup>

While the Yibir clan’s Jewish origin is a widely accepted view among Somalis, there are few other marginalized Somali clans with alleged Jewish ancestry. The Tumaal, for example, is another ostracized Somali clan “thought to have a Hebrew origin.”<sup>56</sup> The Tumaal are traditionally known as a talented blacksmith. Other minority clans of alleged Jewish ancestry include the Madhiban and the Gaboye,

## Conclusion

Historically, there were Jews in the Somali peninsula and therefore the likelihood of practicing Jews residing today in this strategic Horn of Africa is very high. Throughout time Jews have shown great tenacity to survive or even thrive in hostile environments. The Jews suffered pain, discrimination, and dispossession throughout history. The very fact that throughout the world there are practicing Jews speaking Hebrew defies human logic. Not even the Holocaust, in which 6,000,000 Jews were exterminated, could rob them of their dignity, faith, and language.

Most of the Jews, who lived in the Somali peninsula, including Somalia and Somaliland, were of Adenite and Yemenite ancestry. There were undoubtedly other Jews from far-flung areas like India and Greece. Some Jews were also from Palestine before the rebirth of the State of Israel, but it seems these none-Adenite and none-Yemenite Jews were in the minority. In fact, most of the Jews Somalis know about are from these two latter groups.

The Yibir Somali clan is not the only “native” people group with Hebrew ancestry. There are other despised minority clans, including the Tumaal, Madhiban, and the Gaboye, which some Somalis view suspiciously because of their rumored Hebrew roots. All these clans are today practicing Muslims. The Yibir is the last Islamized clan of these cohorts of minority clans. Unlike any other Somali clan, these minority

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<sup>53</sup> J.W.C. Kirk, “The Yibirs and Midgàns of Somaliland, Their Traditions and Dialects.” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 4 (13), 98-99.

<sup>54</sup> Ian Fisher, “Djibouti Journal; Somalia ‘Hebrews’ See a Better Day.” *New York Times*. 15 August 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/15/world/djibouti-journal-somalia-s-hebrews-see-a-better-day.html> (accessed 21 January 2021).

<sup>55</sup> Ian Fisher, “Djibouti Journal; Somalia ‘Hebrews’ See a Better Day.”

<sup>56</sup> Sada Mire, “Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire.” *African Archaeological Review*. 32, March 2015, 124.



clans reside in the five regions of the Somali peninsula: Somalia, Somaliland, Djibouti, Eastern Ethiopia, and Northeast Kenya.

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## **About the author**

Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. Aweis, an ordained elder, has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a B.Th. from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an M.Div. from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Dr. Aweis can be reached at [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com).

## Biblical Terms: Do You Have the Right Definitions?

Dennis Dyvig

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Translating anything from one language to another is a difficult task. I guess that no translator always translates 100% accurately, even simple statements. Every language and culture have unique ways of thinking and of expressing themselves. Sometimes one word in one language might require a paragraph to accurately express the true meaning in another language. The task of translating the Bible accurately becomes even more difficult if we do not understand the true or best definitions of key Biblical terms.

I am choosing to write about what I think are key Biblical terms that I believe are often misunderstood. You don't have to agree with my definitions, but I do encourage you to not too quickly throw my ideas into the trash. The definitions I will propose as correct are not the result of my personal opinion or preferences. All of my proposals are made after much study and with much input from other students of His word.

My goal is to reduce darkness and misunderstanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which I take as the ultimate truth for all mankind. The New Testament claims that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is "the word of truth." If we do not correctly understand the Gospel, then we can't claim to have the truth since the Gospel IS the word of truth.

I again encourage you to not quickly dismiss the ideas presented below. I also challenge you to not think that merely because you were taught something or have always believed something that it must therefore be true. Maybe your teacher was wrong. He is only human as we are. Maybe he didn't intend to mislead you. Maybe he didn't know any better himself. I hope you and I both will have a humble and teachable attitude as we look at these key Biblical terms.

### **HOLY (holiness, sanctification, consecration, etc.)**

Holy does NOT mean clean and pure, though I observe that is the most commonly used meaning for the important term—holy. Holy does not mean sinless. Holy means special, not ordinary, not common. Holy means to be set apart for a special reason. Becoming holy is often expressed in passive terms. Someone else makes us holy. Someone else sets us apart and makes us no longer ordinary or common. God does this for HIS special purposes.

If we have the wrong definition for certain terms, it forces us to create or use different terms when our assumed definitions do not fit the context. For example, in Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses to take off his shoes because he is standing on holy ground. If holy means clean and pure, then in this context we are forced to think that the dirt on which Moses stood was clean and pure while other dirt is, well, dirty dirt. I believe God meant that His presence made that location a special place and taking off his shoes would show that Moses accepted that God's presence made a place special, and not ordinary, not normal, not common.

In the Old Testament, holiness is transferred by the touch. Touching the altar made something holy. Touching the sacrifice made something holy. Cities where sinners lived and sinned were called holy cities (Jerusalem for example). Jerusalem was not holy because there was no sin there. Jerusalem is where probably the largest and worst sin of all times was committed—people killed the true God there. Jerusalem was called holy because it was special. God chose Jerusalem as a special city where special things would take place, but Jerusalem never was sinless. Jerusalem was not cleaner and purer than other cities. In fact, it may have been less clean and pure than other cities.

A priest's clothing was considered holy, but not all of his clothing was holy. Was some of the priest's clothing holy because it had been washed with better soap? Was his unholy clothing unholy because he didn't wash it or the soap he used was of lower quality? No. Some of his clothing was holy because that clothing represented the special work Jesus would do as the True and only effective High Priest. Jesus was SPECIAL! Sin and death and weakness and ignorance did not characterize Him. Jesus was not ordinary. Jesus was not common. Jesus was special. Jesus was and is holy. Thus, the Old Testament priests wore special (holy) clothing to represent the SPECIAL work the TRUE Priest of God, Jesus Christ, would do.

In John 17 Jesus said he made Himself holy (literal Greek). The Bible in Basic English translates it that way: **John 17:19** *And for them I make myself holy, so that they may be made truly holy.* If holy means clean and pure, then we have a terrible problem. That would mean that before Jesus made Himself holy He was not clean and pure. Was Jesus a sinner before He made Himself holy? Of course not! But Jesus did decide and succeed in making Himself special in that He alone was the workable, successful, acceptable sacrifice to please the God of the universe and secure our eternal salvation! What Jesus did by His death on the cross was certainly one of a kind, and thus not normal, ordinary, or common. What Jesus did by His death on the Cross was indeed holy and perhaps more holy (more special) than anything else ever done in all of time! If holy means special, it certainly fits this context perfectly!

Peter commands us Christians to make Jesus holy. **1Pet. 3:15** *but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts . . .* (NASB) This same Greek is translated "make holy" in other places. Did you know that we are to make Jesus Christ holy? If holy means clean and pure, does that mean Jesus was dirty and we were instructed to clean Jesus up? Even the thought of that is blasphemy, if taken seriously. But the idea of being special would fit what Jesus did for us. His death on the Cross removed our sins as He became our Substitute. We do not clean Jesus but He **cleansed us** from all our sin by His sacrificial death on the Cross. Thus, if we accept the Gospel, we indeed are made clean and pure by Jesus' work on our behalf. But does that definition of clean and pure fit what Peter commands us Christians to do? Do we indeed make Jesus clean and pure? Of course not! Jesus always was clean and pure and always will be clean and pure and He never committed any sin in act or even in thought! Even if Jesus did sin (which was and is impossible) how could we mere humans make Him to become clean and pure? We could never do that. In fact,

we can never make ourselves clean and pure, let alone make the King of kings clean and pure, if He needed anyone to do that for Him. Jesus never was dirty, so He never needed to make Himself clean and pure (John 17:19) nor did He need to be made clean and pure by us.

So, what in the world did Peter mean when he commanded us to make Jesus holy? If *holy* means *special*, then we can understand what Peter meant. Peter said (literally), "Make Jesus holy as Lord in your hearts . . ." Hearts probably refers to our inner self, our beliefs. Thus, Peter most likely meant to recognize and accept that Jesus Christ is very, very special. He is the Lord! He is not ordinary like us. He is the only Savior; He is the King of all kings. He is God in the flesh. No one else ever was or will be like Jesus. Of the three Persons of the Trinity, Jesus is unique in that He alone received a body. He alone lived visibly as a man. He alone subjected Himself to the limitations of humanity. He alone died on the Cross. He alone defeated sin, Satan, and death by His resurrection. Indeed, Jesus is so special that no other Being is like Him. That is what earned Jesus the Name which is above ALL Names (Phil 2:9-11). So, Peter appeals to the believers to recognize and accept how amazingly special is Jesus Christ, and in understanding His very special nature and work we will be transformed and be able to answer anyone who asks why we have hope that others do not. When we believers recognize that Jesus is no ordinary God, nor ordinary Savior, nor ordinary anything or anyone, then we have made Him holy in our hearts. And in doing so (in tears as I write this) we are changed. We are then also special in that we do understand and appreciate how amazing, unique, one of a kind, yes HOLY our Savior is!

The MOST important question for us is, "How do I become holy?" Hebrews 10:10 is the answer. NASB **Heb. 10:10** *By this will we have been sanctified (Greek: made holy) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

### **Believe (belief, faith, etc.)**

Faith means to be convinced that something is true. Faith is not me trying to make myself believe in something when in reality I don't believe, whatever I am trying to convince God I do believe. *Faith* and *belief* and *believe* all come from the same Greek words and are simply variations based on grammar or spelling, and not different in meaning. Faith is not different than belief. What I believe in is not different than what I have faith in. Faith is also not measured in kilos or kilometers or minutes or percentages. Not only that, but in the end all people have faith. All people believe in *something*. But not all people have accepted that the Gospel of Jesus Christ IS THE TRUTH! Most people believe something that is not true in regard to God and eternity. They DO believe something, but they do NOT believe what God says is the truth.

If I close my eyes and pray, "Lord I believe you are going to give me a new, black Mercedes!" If we try to make ourselves have faith that God will do anything we ask Him to do and if I keep on asking and "believing," will that black Mercedes suddenly appear in my real world? Do you REALLY believe that God will do that? I hope you

do really believe that God *could* easily create a new, black Mercedes and place in in front of me, if He wanted to do that. But I hope you do NOT really believe that God is your worker, and you are His boss and that if you dictate to Him that you want a new, black Mercedes right now, that He is required by your so-called “faith” to do whatever you demand and whatever you claim you “believe” he will do. Many Christians do believe something like what I have just described. I believe that is Satan’s original lie to Hawa (you will be like God) extended into our modern day. In that scenario the one praying becomes God and God becomes that man’s obedient miracle worker or witch doctor or magician.

Biblical faith is when what you used to believe changes to what God says is true. Faith is when you become convinced that what you did not previously think was true, you now accept is indeed true! The Greek word translated *faith* or *belief* or *believe* means just that—to *become convinced*. I believe Biblical faith always has two components. First you hear or in some way are exposed to an idea or thought that is new to you (when you first hear it, learn it). When you first hear this new idea, it is different from what you had been thinking was true—different from what you had been believing before.

Before I became a true Christian, I thought I was a Christian (but I wasn’t). I was a baptized member of a large church and faithfully attended church and Sunday school services. I was a youth leader and had a good reputation for being a good guy. I did believe that God was real. I believed Jesus was real and really came to the earth. But I had no idea what God expected of me. I *believed* He expected me to do my best. What else could He expect? If I did my best then maybe I would reach heaven. But how do you ever know if you did enough good or not? My beliefs were actually similar to Islam, though I did not know it then. I later learned my beliefs were not true, and thus not a biblical belief, and thus not **true faith**. True faith must always be based on **truth**—what God says is true. God is the judge of truth, not me.

I had to become convinced of the truth. God did that, partly through using people and partly by His Spirit’s direct intervention into my life and belief. Eventually I admitted that, “No, I was not saved” and thus “No, I was not a true Christian,” which meant I was not a Christian at all. I also had to come to the point of accepting that the new teachings I had heard were true or not? That is the second part of Biblical faith. That is when you decide if you agree that this new teaching is really true or not. When you are finally **convinced** and decide (or accept) that this new idea is true and IS the truth, you are then a believer by Biblical definitions. You have become convinced of what God says is true.

Every human being who has a working brain is a believer. Everyone believes something, in fact many things! The Biblical word for faith (or belief) means just that—I had been convinced to **change my belief** about what is the truth. This is evangelism—convincing someone (by the truth of the Bible and by God’s Spirit at work) that the Gospel of grace IS the truth! Evangelism is persuading or convincing someone to accept as true what really is the truth.



For several days a Somali man named Yusuf has been calling me and arguing and arguing. Several years ago, he said he had become a Christian. But about one year ago in the house church I attend he publicly announced he was NOT a Christian. He was a Muslim, but a peaceful one and no one needed to fear him at all. For several weeks now, he has been visiting or calling frequently. Today he called and asked for a visit. I asked what he wanted to talk about. He said he wanted to talk about The Reality. I know he means he wants to convert me to Islam. I told him he has no evidence. He is trying to convince me to believe what he says is “The Reality.” When I asked him what evidence he has he went silent. I asked him to prove that Islam is the truth. He said he can do that. I said OK I am listening, but he went silent again. Yusuf’s belief is based on need (to be accepted and supported by Muslims). His belief is NOT based on truth. Yusuf is yet to explain to me what proves Islam is true? I am unpersuaded, unconvinced. Thus, from Islam’s perspective I am, an unbeliever, yet I do believe that the Gospel of grace IS THE TRUTH!

Everyone believes something. Most people do not believe the truth. That is why Jesus told us to go into the world and make disciples (students) and teach them what He says is the truth. Good teaching will accomplish the first part of Biblical faith—hearing the truth. Then the individual decides if he thinks what he just heard is true or not. No one becomes a true Christian without a change of belief. No single person is born as a Christian. He may be born into a Christian culture and a Christian home and he may have a Christian name and be baptized and talk Christian talk, but unless his belief changes from what he was born with, regrettably he will not go to heaven.

### **Repentance**

Becoming a Christian always requires a change in belief no matter what background the person comes from. That change of belief is repentance. Repentance is NOT being sad or sorry for your sins (although you ought to be sad about sin). Repentance is not turning from your sin or confessing your sin or forsaking your sin. I believe repentance is not anything at all about sin. Repentance is about a change of mind, a change of belief. Jesus said unless you likewise repent you shall all perish. (Luke 13:3 NASB).

So, repentance is really another way of explaining what Biblical faith is! Repenting is changing your mind, your belief, about what you accept as the truth. That is also what faith means—to be persuaded, convinced, that the new teaching you heard, you now have come to think is true.

Faith and repentance are both mind-things. Neither are emotions, though emotions may come as a result of repentance/faith.

### **Confession**

The Greek word for *confession* (*confessing, to confess*) is a compound word that literally is: *the same kind + word* (or *speak*). You could say that confessing is to say the same thing. God says Jesus’ death on the Cross is the only adequate payment for your forgiveness and salvation. When you say *the same thing*, when you say

Jesus' death on the Cross is the only adequate payment for your forgiveness and salvation, you have *said the same thing*. That is the meaning of the Greek word for *confess*, *to say the same thing*. A simpler and more common way to say that is that you *agree*. You agree with God that Jesus' death on the Cross is the only adequate payment for your forgiveness and salvation. When you agree with God about that you instantly receive His gift of eternal salvation! Hallelujah!

Confessing that Jesus is Lord is not as much a matter of speaking those words, but in your mind "saying the same thing." My iPhone can say, "Jesus is Lord." My iPhone is not saved. My iPhone does not have to think about if it agrees that Jesus is Lord or not, but a human must think about that, then decide if he agrees, accepts, says the same thing, or he does not agree.

So, in the end these last three terms all express the same idea, and they result in my holiness before God (not making myself clean and pure, but being made special by God).

1. **Believe** means to hear and become convinced that the Gospel is the truth.
2. **Repent** means to change your mind, your belief from your previous religious ideas to believing the Gospel.
3. **Confess** means you (mentally) say the same thing as God says, that Jesus' death on the Cross is the only adequate payment for your forgiveness and salvation.

If I agree with God about what He says is true in Hebrews 10:10 (and I think through the entire Bible, though seen less clearly in the Old Testament), then I am **made holy** by God when I **repent** (change my mind to believe the Gospel), **confess** (that I agree with God that only Jesus death will save me), and **believe** (become convinced or persuaded that the Gospel of grace is THE Truth), then I in one second am made holy.

Sometimes repentance and confession are taught as a kind of self-sacrifice. It may sound very good to claim you repented and you now feel sad about your sin. But your sadness is you punishing yourself in hopes that God will accept your sacrifice, your sadness and regret? You sacrificed your joy. Your punishing yourself with sadness is your own sacrifice that you hope God will accept.

Confessing your sin is another form of your own sacrifice. You confess your sin in front of other people and in so doing you have sacrificed your reputation and you hope that God will accept your sacrifice. You have punished yourself by telling other people what dirty things you have done.

I believe Satan is behind the false teachings about repentance and confession in that they are veiled attempts to remove the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross and replace His sacrifice with your own sacrifice. You sacrifice your joy (false understanding of repentance) and your reputation, your name (false understanding of confession). That is fake religion. That is not God's truth. What God says is true is that only

Jesus' sacrifice of Himself on the Cross is enough payment to secure your forgiveness and eternal salvation.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. Now please give it further time and thought and prayer to see whether you **become convinced** of what are the true meanings of these four important Biblical terms.

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### About the author



Dennis and his wife, Susan, were born in Iowa, USA in 1948 and 1952. They both grew up on farms. Sue was saved at an early age, but Dennis was not saved until age 22. The Gospel was new and wonderful to him! He had been baptized as a baby and grown up in a church. He called himself a Christian but had no idea what the Bible said about how to become a Christian.

One of his most real and apparent encounters with God was when he admitted to himself and to Him that there were not several different ways to reach heaven, but only one way. God led him to quit farming, go to Bible school, and prepare for a life focused on evangelism. Dennis met Sue after this call from God and learned that she had felt His call to Africa at a very young age.

For 33 years, he served as a missionary pilot here in Africa. He flew evangelists, pastors, teachers, Bible translators, etc. around east, central, and southern Africa. Dennis has flown into several locations in Somalia, but never Mogadishu. Sue was trained as a nurse. She serves people they know and love in various practical ways, as well as evangelism and discipleship. Dennis and Susan both are volunteers and have had no guaranteed salary for 45 years. God was and is faithful to meet all their needs! Dennis and Susan have no biological children, but there are several hundred Africans who call them Mom and Dad. The author can be reached at [ddyvig@gmail.com](mailto:ddyvig@gmail.com).

## The Greatest Missionaries to the Somalis: The Heroes of 1881-1981

Aweis A. Ali

### Prologue

The purpose of this paper is to acknowledge the sacrifices, challenges, and successes of the greatest missionaries to the Somalis. The one hundred years from 1881 to 1981 encompass the golden years of the Somali Church in terms of the quality and quantity of the converts who came to the Lord under the ministries of the Magnificent Four: The Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC),<sup>1</sup> the Mennonite Mission (MM), and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM).<sup>2</sup> Any Somali Christian, whose name became well-known, even outside Christian circles, was saved under the ministries of these four organizations within the one hundred years stated above.

The French Catholic Mission (FCM), under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), opened a famous orphanage in Daymoole village, British Somaliland, in 1881.<sup>3</sup> This orphanage, which was located near Berbera, is best remembered for contributing to the anger of the Somali Muslim scholar and freedom fighter, Sayid Muhammed Abdulle Hassan (7 April 1856 - 21 December 1920), who waged a relentless jihad against the British colonizers and their sympathizers. Hussein A. Bulhan writes that the Sayid's "wrath intensified when he met Somali boys converted to Christianity by missionaries who came and collaborated with the colonial administration."<sup>4</sup>

The British finally expelled the FCM in 1910 to appease the Sayid and his followers.<sup>5</sup> By then, the FCM had won numerous Somalis to the Lord before moving to the Somali town of Jigjiga, Eastern Ethiopia, 367 kilometers from Daymoole.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish name of this mission organization is Evangelisk Fosterlands-Stiftelsen (EF-S); the closest English translation is "Evangelical Homeland Foundation," better known today as "Swedish Evangelical Mission." See also: David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The work of the SIM was never intended to be limited to the modern country of Sudan. Sudan is a regional geographical area that stretches from the Senegal border to southern Mali (once known as French Sudan), Burkina Faso, southern Niger, northern Nigeria, northern Ghana, southern Chad, western Darfur (in modern-day Sudan), and present-day South Sudan.

<sup>3</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islam Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 121.

<sup>4</sup> Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somalis*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 263.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006), 76.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 77.

The RCC was known not only for its top-quality orphanages but also the high standards of its schools. By 1939, the Italian Colonial Authority had given the Church a subsidy to oversee 12 elementary schools with 1,776 students.<sup>7</sup>

The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) established its first mission in the coastal town of Kismayo in 1896, quickly expanding to Jilib, Jamaame and Mogaambo, all located in the Jubaland regions of southern Somalia.<sup>8</sup> SOLC opened schools, clinics and churches just like the RCC.<sup>9</sup> SOLC planted a number of Somali-led house-churches in southern Somalia before the Italian Colonial Authority expelled it in 1935.<sup>10</sup> SOLC is arguably the most effective Protestant mission organization in the Magnificent Four.

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953, setting up a mission base in Mogadishu.<sup>11</sup> In addition to evangelistic ministry, the MM opened much-needed schools and clinics. The MM eventually expanded its work to Mahaddaay, Jowhar Jamaame and opened two other mission stations. The Mennonites were very successful in their ministry. The Somali government expelled the MM in 1976.

The SIM entered Somalia in 1954 under the leadership of the legendary missionary couple, Warren and Dorothy Modricker.<sup>12</sup> Like the MM, the SIM operated schools and clinics in addition to their traditional ministry.<sup>13</sup> The Somali government expelled the SIM in 1976. Like the MM, the SIM was very successful in Somalia.

John Ethelstan Cheese (1877-1959), a Church of England member and an independent mystic missionary, invited the Modrickers to Somalia.<sup>14</sup> Cheese, who was known as the poor man of God, and the holiest man in Somalia, paved the way for the SIM work in Somalia.<sup>15</sup> He served thirty-three years among the Somalis.

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<sup>7</sup> Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1st edition, 1963), 77.

<sup>8</sup> These regions were known at the time as *Oltre Giuba*, Greater Juba, and Trans-Juba of British Kenya.

<sup>9</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 116.

<sup>11</sup> The Mennonite Mission registered in Somalia as Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM). See David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

<sup>12</sup> To learn more about the Modrickers, please see: Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Abdullahi, Abdurahman M., *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*. (Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2015), 21.

<sup>14</sup> To learn more about this saint, please read: Philip Cousins. *Ethelstan Cheese: A Saint of no Fixed Abode*. (Churchman Publishing, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> David A. Kerr, "Cheese, John Ethelstan." *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. <https://dacb.org/stories/somalia/cheese-johne/> (accessed 01 January 2021).

## The Greatest Missionaries

The missionaries who served among Somalis from 1881 – 1981 are indeed the greatest missionaries because of the holistic ministries they pioneered among Somali Muslims and the determination they demonstrated in the face of intense persecution. These heroes thrived in the inhospitable terrains of the Somali peninsula.

Some of these heroes were martyred in the Horn of Africa and others lost their minor children because of illnesses that could have been treated in their home countries. In fact, some wondered in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century if there were more missionary graves in the Somali peninsula than Somali Christians.

The greatest Roman Catholic missionary is arguably Monsignor Venanzio Francesco Filippini, O.F.M, the RCC Bishop to Somalia (23 May 1933 - 19 October 1970). Filippini reported 40,000 Somali Catholics in 1940, mainly among the Somali Bantus of Juba and Shebelle.<sup>16</sup> According to the Italian Colonial Authority, the population of Somalia in 1940 was around 1,150,000, and was updated to 1,200,000 in 1950 according to *Catholic Hierarchy*.<sup>17</sup> This RCC report puts the Somali Christian population in the 1940s at about 3.5%. If this report of Somali Catholics is accurate, then the often-repeated Somali Muslim mantra, “To be a Somali is to be a Muslim”, becomes a hollow claim. Ali Abdirahman Hersi, a Somali scholar, paraphrased this maxim in 1977 by asserting, “It is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity.”<sup>18</sup> Monsignor Giorgio Bertin, the RCC Bishop of Djibouti and the Apostolic Administrator of Somalia, considers the 3.5% figure too high.<sup>19</sup>

The greatest Protestant missionary couple is Warren and Dorothy Modricker. The Modrickers pioneered the Somali Protestant ministry in Somalia.<sup>20</sup> They arrived in British Somaliland in 1933 and temporarily relocated to Yemen after the British Colonial Authority had denied them entry to Somaliland. The Modrickers lived in a number of countries so they could better minister to the Somalis. These countries include Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. Even after retiring to the United States, the Modrickers continued ministering to the Somalis in the US. Almost every Protestant Somali Christian in the Somali peninsula directly or indirectly traces

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<sup>16</sup> Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia, Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 66. Tripodi refers to the Bishop as Franco Filippini. The Bishop’s legal name is Venanzio Filippini.

<sup>17</sup> “Diocese of Mogadiscio,” *Catholic Hierarchy*, (nd).

<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmgds.html> (accessed 21 December 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Hersi, Ali Abdirahman. *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 109

<sup>19</sup> Bishop Giorgio Bertin, “Re: The Draft Thesis Proposal.” Message to Aweis A. Ali. 17 April 2019. Email.

<sup>20</sup> The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) pioneered the Somali ministry in the Jubaland regions which were known at the time as *Oltre Giuba*, Greater Juba, and Trans-Juba of British Kenya. This region was technically part of British Kenya at the time.

their salvation to the ministry of the Modrickers. The Modrickers likewise helped Aadan Jim'aale Faarah and his Somali team translate the Bible into Somali. The Modrickers also started the most well-known and the most effective Somali radio ministry in 1972. Many Somalis first heard the Gospel because of this ministry, *Codka Nolosha Cusub* (Voice of New Life).<sup>21</sup>

## The Fruits of the Greatest Missionaries

### Somaliland

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) wins when it comes to the quality of Somali Christian converts. This Church produced first, second and even third-generation Somali Christians of very high caliber. The Protestant Somali Christians often struggle to gain acceptance in Somalia but not the Somali Roman Catholic ones. No Somali Protestant Christian ever won a national election in Somalia. However, a number of Somali Roman Catholics beat Muslim challengers in Somali elections. The high-profile Somali Christians from Somaliland include:

1. Michael Mariano Ali (1914 –1987), a Roman Catholic, was a freedom fighter, statesman, diplomat and politician. Michael Mariano, as he is better known, was a diligent lawyer and a businessman; Michael was the most prominent voice in the Somali Youth League (SYL).<sup>22</sup> He established the powerful Somali political party, National United Front (NUF), in 1958 and became its chairman. Michael was elected as a Member of the Somaliland Parliament (MP) in 1954. He was elected again in 1960 as an MP for the Somali Parliament after Somaliland and Somalia united to form the Somali Republic. Michael also served in the Somali cabinet as Minister of Economic Planning under the Premiership of Muhammed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Michael also served his country as an ambassador to Zambia and southern Africa from 1974-1986. He received a state funeral when he died in Mogadishu in 1987.

During one of these Parliamentary elections, Michael's political challenger circulated an infamous anti-Michael poem in which the refrain was "*Michael iska eeg iyo maska daba yaal.*" "Be careful of Michael and the snake behind him." The snake was Michael's Christian faith. The fear-mongering failed, and Michael was elected in a landslide.

Michael, a man of great courage and wisdom, once said to President Muhammed Siyaad Barre that Somalia would never enjoy peace until it returned to its Christian roots. Michael made this prophetic pronouncement

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<sup>21</sup> The author of this paper came to the Lord through this radio ministry in 1986.

<sup>22</sup> The Somali Youth League (SYL) (Somali: Ururka Dhalinyarada Soomaaliyeed, Italian: Lega dei Giovani Somali or Lega Somala della Gioventù), was initially established as the Somali Youth Club (SYC) to disguise its political ambitions from the Italian Colonial Authority. The SYL was the first political party in Somalia. It fought for Somalia's independence in the Somali Peninsula and in international arenas in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The SYL demanded the unification of the five Somali territories in the Somali Peninsula to form the Somali Republic.

during a cabinet meeting in 1974.<sup>23</sup> Sixteen years later, in 1991, the central government collapsed and ushered in a bloodbath and destruction the likes of which the nation had never seen before.

2. Lewis Clement Salool, a Roman Catholic, had a Somali father and an Indian mother. Lewis was “a native of British Somaliland and of a missionary Catholic family. Educated in Bombay where he graduated [with] M.A., LL.B., practiced as a lawyer in Addis Ababa under [the] Italian regime, later in British Somaliland. He came to Mogadishu in 1945 as Legal Advisor to SYL.”<sup>24</sup> Lewis also designed the SYL flag in 1942.

Lewis Clement Salool and Michael Mariano Ali, both SYL stalwarts, crafted the Somali Youth League’s core message in its pursuit of Somalia’s independence and unification. Lewis and Michael also “wrote all the party petitions.”<sup>25</sup>

3. Alex Qolqoole, a Roman Catholic, was “unequaled in the history of modern Somali nationalism.”<sup>26</sup> Alex was a businessman and a patriot who worked closely with Michael and Lewis. Alex supported the SYL financially and advised other key leaders of the movement. He was a brilliant statesman.
4. Awil Haji Abdillahi, a Roman Catholic, is better known as Anthony James. He was a member of the 1964 cabinet and served as the Minister of Finance under the Premiership of Abdirisak Haji Hussein. Anthony significantly contributed to the independence of Somalia and Somaliland and their unification in 1960.
5. Ahmed Ali Kootali, a Roman Catholic, is a second-generation Christian, a businessman and a senior leader of the Somali National Movement (SNM). The most well-known of Ahmed’s children is probably Layla Kootali, a singer and entertainer.
6. Dr. Omar Elmi Dihod (1947 – 2016), a Protestant, is one of only two Protestant Christians in this Somaliland list. Omar was a medical doctor and a colonel in the Somali Defense Forces. Omar later defected to the Somali National Movement (SNM) and became one of its vital early leaders. The

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<sup>23</sup> Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 7.

<sup>24</sup> “Personalities in Somalia,” 7 December 1948, FO 1015/51, UK National Archives. Cited in Abdi Ismail Samatar. *Africa’s First Democrats: Somalia’s Aden A. Osman and Abdirizak H. Hussen*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 235.

<sup>25</sup> Abdi Ismail Samatar, *Africa’s First Democrats: Somalia’s Aden A. Osman and Abdirizak H. Hussen*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Mohamed Haji Abdulahi Ingiriis, “Reframing Narratives of Statebuilding and Peacebuilding in Africa. Integrated Field Research Report.” A paper presented in the African Leadership Centre Research Project, 18-19 April 2016, in Nairobi, Kenya, 10.



SNM fought against the government of President Muhammed Siyad Barre until its collapse in 1991. Omar returned to Hargeisa victoriously and became the Minister of Health and later the Somaliland Envoy for International Recognition. Omar was later appointed as a presidential advisor by three consecutive Somaliland Presidents.

7. Prof. Haji Muhammed Hussein Ahmed (1951 – 1996), a Protestant, was educated in Somalia (Lafoole University) and Canada (University of Saskatchewan). He returned to Somalia and taught at the Somali National University. He stayed in Mogadishu during the early years of the Somali civil war to rebuild the education system in the country. Ahmed was kidnapped in Mogadishu and martyred because of his Christian faith on 3 April 1996.

## Somalia

Despite southern Somalia's (Italian Somaliland) long history of Italian occupation and colonization, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) did not attract or produce any prominent local Christians except for one. It is a topic for another paper why the RCC could not replicate its success in Somaliland, Djibouti, and the Somali region of Ethiopia. Following are five prominent Somali Christians from Somalia. The first two are Roman Catholic and the remaining three are Protestant.

1. Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudeen (d. June 1951), a Roman Catholic, was the founder and the first President of the SYL. Sakhawudeen, as he is known, recruited the first twelve key leaders of the SYL;<sup>27</sup> he contracted tuberculosis as a younger man and was treated in Forlanini (also known as Laansareeti) Hospital in Mogadishu. Sakhawudeen became a Christian during his hospitalization.<sup>28</sup>
2. Elman Ali Ahmed (d. 09 March 1996), a Roman Catholic, is a national hero. He was an Italian and German-educated electrical engineer, entrepreneur, peace activist and human rights advocate. Elman was murdered in Mogadishu by unknown gunmen suspected to be bankrolled by the late Somali warlord, General Muhammed Faarah Aideed. Elman was known for his motto, "*qoriga dhig, qalinka qaado.*" "*Put down the gun, pick up the pen.*"

Elman managed his football club, Elman FC, spearheaded a literacy campaign, created income-generating projects for thousands of poor and disadvantaged children. Elman rescued homeless children and found safe havens for them. He also founded Elman Peace in 1990 which "is dedicated

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<sup>27</sup> The thirteen SYL leaders are: Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudeen (who was the actual founder), Yasin Haji Osman Sharmarke, Mohamed Hirsi Nur (Seyedin), Haji Mahamed Hussein Mahad, Osman Geedi Raage, Dherye Haji Dherye, Dahir Haji Osman (Dhegaweyne), Ali Hasan Maslah, Mohamed Ali Nur, Mohamed Farah Hilowle, H. Mohamed Abdullahi Hayesi, Hudow Malin Abdullahi Salah, and Mohamed Osman Barbe Bardhere.

<sup>28</sup> Mohamed A. Gurhan, "The Persecuted Disciples of Jesus Christ: A Research Article on Somali Ecclesiology." (Somali Christian Mission, December 2012), 15.

to promoting peace, cultivating leadership and empowering the marginalized brackets of society to be decision-makers in the processes that ensure their wellbeing.”<sup>29</sup> Elman Peace is an award-winning human rights organization.

3. Professor Ahmed Ali Haile (1953 – 2011), a Protestant, is the highest-profile Somali Christian from Somalia (Italian Somaliland). Ahmed was an American-educated peace-maker and educator. President Ali Mahdi Muhammed appointed Ahmed in 1991 to become the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Ahmed declined to accept the official appointment.
4. Professor Da’ud Hassan Ali (1944 - 2008), a Protestant, was educated in Somalia, Lebanon and the United Kingdom. Da’ud moved to Britain in 1967 after completing his course of study in Beirut, Lebanon. He worked for the Birmingham City Council as an educational psychologist. He returned to Somalia in 2004 after early retirement to rebuild the educational system of the country. He was martyred for his Christian faith in Beledweyn alongside Rehana Ahmed (1975-2008) and two Kenyan colleagues.
5. Aadan Jim’aale Faarah, a Protestant, was an influential Lieutenant Colonel in the National Security Service (NSS Somali: *Hay’ada Nabadsugidda Qaranka*, HNQ), Somalia’s powerful secret service. He used his position to defend the rights of Christian organizations who were often targeted by unscrupulous elements in the NSS. Aadan was also a Bible translator, hymnologist and a prominent church leader. Aadan composed some of the most famous Somali Christian hymns of the *degrie* genre and translated the Somali Bible with the help of the celebrated SIM missionaries, Warren and Dorothy Modricker.

### Djibouti

Despite its small population, Djibouti produced the biggest number of high-profile ethnic Somali Roman Catholics. Many of these eminent Christians have ancestral roots in Somaliland. These renowned ethnic Somali Christians include:

1. Jean Paul Noel Abdi, (c. 1946 - 13 April 2012), a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament, president of the League of Human Rights and a fierce critic of President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh. Jean Paul was a fearless defender of the rights of his fellow Djiboutians.
2. Maitre Luc Abdi Aden, a Roman Catholic, was a highly acclaimed lawyer and former Governor of the Central Bank.
3. Antoine Michel Barthelemy, a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament
4. Vincent Omar Ahmed Youssouf, a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament and an active member of the *Front de Libération de Côte des*

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<sup>29</sup> Elman Peace: “Our Story,” <http://elmanpeace.org/about/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

*Somalis* (English: Front for the Liberation of the Somali Coast), a liberation-focused guerrilla organization in French Somaliland (known today as Djibouti). Vincent was often self-exiled in Hargeisa and Mogadishu to better fight for the liberation of Djibouti.

5. Alain David, a Roman Catholic, is a prominent medical doctor who never turned away any patient because they could not afford his services.
6. Chantal Lelong, a Roman Catholic, was an Inspector General of the Ministry of Education, University of Djibouti adjunct professor and senior advisor for USAID.
7. Robert Carton, a Roman Catholic, was a Caritas Director and humanitarian worker.
8. Wahib Issa Ali, a Roman Catholic, better known as Jean Pierre Issa, was a Member of Parliament.
9. Edouard Shamis, a Roman Catholic, was a Secretary at the Presidential Palace known for her humility and professionalism.
10. Thomas Ahmed Aden Youssouf, a Roman Catholic, was a Minister of Finance who strengthened the economy of his country.
11. Michel Dirieh, a Roman Catholic, was a Director General of the Ministry of Labor who was an advocate for the interests of the Djiboutian workers.
12. William J. F. Syad (1930 - 1993), a Roman Catholic, is the most celebrated Djiboutian author and novelist. William was the pioneer of the French language literature in his country. He wrote both in French and in English.

### **Somali Region of Ethiopia**

The most prominent ethnic Somali Christians include:

1. Dr. Peter Gabriel Robleh, a Roman Catholic, is a former Brussels-based Ethiopian ambassador to the Benelux.<sup>30</sup> Peter also represented his country in the European Union. During this assignment, Peter was often interviewed by the international media on issues pertaining to the Horn of Africa.
2. Arteh Mo'alim Muhumed Ali Omar (d. 2002), a Protestant, led a Somali militia that fought against the British Military Administration in the Somali region of Ethiopia, known then as British Ogaden (1941-1955). The British derogatively called him *Arteh Shuftay* (Arteh the highway robber). He later reconciled with the British colonial authority and ended his rebellion. Arteh later converted to

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<sup>30</sup> The Benelux Union, or simply Benelux, is a politico-economic union of three neighboring countries of western Europe: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

Christianity and the local Muslims in the region nicknamed him *Arteh Gaal* (Arteh the Christian).<sup>31</sup> Arteh's Muslim sub-clan subsequently anointed him as their Chief Elder in the region. The sub-clan christened him as *Arteh Mo'alim* to emphasize that his dad was a Muslim preacher and madrasa teacher.

Arteh was the founder and the CEO of Ecumenical Development Group for Somalia (EDGS). Arguably the biggest and most effective non-governmental organization (NGO) in Somalia for decades. EDGS implemented hundreds of projects all over Somalia. They dug hundreds of ponds, shallow and deep-water wells, supported livestock and agricultural projects, equipped technical schools, installed windmills in Lower Shabelle, etc. In 1991 when Somalia's central government collapsed, EDGS had several thousand employees in Somalia.

3. Ali Ibrahim Ahmed (d. 29 June 2005), a Protestant, was an Egyptian-trained Somali military officer who studied the Bible in India. Ali was a renowned hymnologist and a humanitarian worker. He served as the Minister of Agriculture in the Ethiopian Somali Regional State before he died in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

### Somali Region of Kenya

1. Shaafi'i Ibrahim Faarah (b.1932), a Protestant, is a retired longtime minister of the Gospel. Shaafi'i is known as a fearless witness, expert on the Somali culture, language and poetry. Shaafi'i came to the Lord in 1969 and ministered both in Somalia and Kenya for decades. Shaafi'i was once asked why his Muslim clan protected him from harm. He answered, "In popular Islam, the clan is more important than Islam! If a man from a different clan kills me, my clan would see that as humiliation because they could not protect one of their own from a rival clan. My clan is not protecting me as an individual; they are also protecting their honour."<sup>32</sup>

### Exclusive List

The fruits of the greatest missionaries chronicled above are those whose names are well-known, not only among Somali Christians but also among the Somali Muslims. The list is, therefore, very exclusive. For example, Dominic Colhaye (d. 1991) was born in Gabiley, British Somaliland, and moved to Djibouti (then French Somaliland) in the 1940s with his Muslim mother when he was a baby. The Catholic Church in Djibouti raised Dominic as a Roman Catholic Christian. He later became a Djiboutian citizen, Bible study leader and humanitarian worker before he died in a motorcycle accident. While Dominic was well-known among the ethnic Somali Christians in

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<sup>31</sup> *Gaal* is a derogatory Somali term which Muslims use for all non-Muslims

<sup>32</sup> "Courage in Our Conviction: A Conversation with Pastor Shafi'i Ibrahim Faarah." Somali Bible Society Journal, Volume 1, Issue 1, Version 2, December 2020, 60.  
[https://www.academia.edu/44571287/Courage\\_in\\_Our\\_Conviction\\_A\\_Conversation\\_with\\_Pastor\\_Shafi\\_i\\_Ibrahim\\_Farah](https://www.academia.edu/44571287/Courage_in_Our_Conviction_A_Conversation_with_Pastor_Shafi_i_Ibrahim_Farah) (accessed 28 December 2020)

Djibouti, he lacked name recognition among ethnic Somali Muslims in his country. Dominic will, therefore, not be featured in the Djiboutian list of the prominent Somali Christians who came to the Lord under the ministry of the greatest missionaries to the Somalis.

Another Roman Catholic Somali Christian of a similar caliber was Gregory Fidel who died in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in 2008). Unlike Dominic, Fidel Gidhi Gidhi, as he was locally known, was a second-generation Christian. His father, who was from Bur'oo, British Somaliland, became a disciple of Christ in the early 1900s. Also, not included in the list are the Christian children and grandchildren of these famed Somali Christians. Many of the children and grandchildren are lawyers, medical doctors, academicians and entrepreneurs but they lack the name recognition their parents enjoyed in the Somali peninsula.

### The SYL Flag



The SYL logo/flag with its founders  
Photo credit: symbolhunt.com

Lewis Clement Salool designed the Somali Youth League (SYL) flag in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1942. He later presented the flag in Jigjiga, eastern Ethiopia, during a meeting organized by some of the early supporters of the SYL. Lewis included in the flag a prominent cross, a crescent and five stars representing the five Somali territories the SYL wanted to be united under one republic: British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, French Somaliland, the Ogaden-Haud region of Ethiopia and the Northern Frontier District (NFD), Kenya.

The thirteen SYL founders, twelve of whom were Muslim, recognized that their struggle for independence could fail without the support of the educated Somali Christians from British Somaliland. This may explain why Lewis' SYL flag with a Christian symbol was accepted without much ado. The SYL flag colors are red, white and blue. Given the inclusion of a cross in the flag design, the first two colors were probably chosen because of their Christian symbolism. Lewis, Michael and Alex are indeed the unsung heroes of the SYL struggle.

### Successes and Challenges

The Roman Catholic Church dominated Somali ministry during the colonial era in the Somali peninsula until 1981. While the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Mennonite Mission (MM) witnessed the establishment of several Somali house-churches, fellowships and Bible study groups, the caliber of these Protestant converts was much lower than their Roman Catholic Church (RCC) counterparts. The faith of the RCC converts was also more deeply rooted than their Protestant counterparts. Exactly how the RCC accomplished this feat among Somalis remains elusive. The successes of the years from 1881 to 1981 soon faced challenges in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. The challenges started in the early years of the 1970s when radical Islam began to slowly infiltrate the otherwise popular Islam of the Somalis with its emphasis on piety and pragmatism.

Fundamentalist Islam, fueled by Gulf petrodollars, considered Sufi Islam as diluted and radicalized the Somali youth of both genders. This intolerant Islam spread among Somalis like a bushfire despite the Somali government's crackdown. The most significant force that propelled radical Islam was the Muslim Brotherhood (الإخوان المسلمون al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn), a transnational Sunni fundamentalist group founded by the Egyptian Muslim cleric, Hassan Ahmed Abdel Rahman Muhammed al-Banna (14 October 1906 – 12 February 1949) in 1928. All Jihadi groups have their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood.

### Epilogue

The greatest missionaries ministered to the Somalis from 1881 to 1981. These missionaries broke down barriers and built bridges to win the trust of the Somali Muslims to whom they were ministering. The missionaries did not have smooth sailing. Some were martyred, including Merlin R. Grove (9 February 1929 – 16 July 1962), William Donald McClure (28 April 1906 – 27 March 1977) and Bishop Pietro Salvatore Colombo, OFM (28 October 1922 - 9 July 1989). Some missionaries lost their children to diseases that could have been easily treated in their home countries. A number of female missionaries also experienced sexual violence.

Despite all these seemingly insurmountable challenges, the greatest missionaries from 1881 to 1981 overcame the challenges and led many Somalis to the Lord. Many of these converts, as detailed in this paper, contributed to the independence and developments of their countries, including Somaliland, Somalia and Djibouti. Other Somali Christians in the Somali regions of Ethiopia and Kenya positively contributed to the progress of their communities. These greatest missionaries left behind shoes too big to fill, but modern missionaries (from 1981 to the present) should not despair. The same Lord who used the greatest missionaries is the same One using the modern missionaries.

Several missionaries and local church leaders fact-checked this paper. Special thanks to Monsignor Giorgio Bertin, the Bishop of Djibouti and the apostolic administrator of Somalia, who fact-checked the Roman Catholic section of this paper.<sup>33</sup> I am also grateful to Rev. Mohamed Gurhan who fact-checked the Protestant section of this paper.<sup>34</sup> Despite their arduous effort to assure the accuracy and the integrity of the claims made in this paper, any shortcomings in this paper are entirely mine alone.

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<sup>33</sup> Bishop Giorgio Bertin, "Re: I Need Your Help." Message to Aweis A. Ali. 16 January 2021. Email.

<sup>34</sup> Mohamed Gurhan, "Re: Request." Message to Aweis A. Ali. 08 March 2021. Email.

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### About the author

Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. Aweis was a co-pastor of a house church in Mogadishu, Somalia, in mid 1990s when 12 of its 14 members were martyred for their faith. Aweis, an ordained elder, has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a B.Th. degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an M.Div. degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled, "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." Aweis is the author, editor or translator of 8 books and a dozen articles. He is the founder and the Series Editor of the annual *Maansada Masiixa* (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry.) Dr. Aweis can be reached at [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com).



## Reading, Understanding and Applying the Bible

Stephen Thompson

Throughout history there have been various approaches to interpreting the Bible. Traditionally in the Catholic branch of Christianity, Christians were discouraged from trying to interpret the Bible for themselves. Interpreting the Bible was left up to the priests and the church. In fact, like the Qur'an, translation of the Bible was discouraged. However, with the Protestant Reformation, from around 1500 AD, the Bible has been translated.<sup>1</sup> For the Catholics, they still used the Latin language in their masses (church services) up until the 1960s and acceptance of translations other than Latin is relatively recent. However, since the reformation, Christians are encouraged to investigate and interpret the Bible for themselves.<sup>2</sup> Some see the Holy Spirit and at least one good translation as enough.<sup>3</sup> The ability to access good Bible handbooks, commentaries or do word studies is a good bonus. A sincere student of the Bible is encouraged to do his own study first and then refer to commentaries.<sup>4</sup> Some of us can go to good churches where the Bible is expounded for us.<sup>5</sup> If you come up with an interpretation which differs from historic Christian belief then you need to do more research and you are likely to come up with a more common interpretation. Of course, more important than understanding the Bible is the applying of it. According to Saint James, "*Haddaba sidaas oo kale rumaysadku haddaanu shuqullo lahayn keli ahaantiisu waa meyd* (James 2:17) and Saint Paul *Haddaan ku hadlo afafka dadka iyo malaa'igaha, laakiinse aanan jacayl lahayn, waxaan noqday naxaas dhawaaqaysa ama saxan bir ah oo sanqadhaya oo kale.*" (1 Corinthians 13:1).

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther translated the Bible into German and in English we have the Authorized English Version (KJV), both dating back to early in the reformation.

<sup>2</sup> Henrichsen, Walter A., *A Layman's Guide to interpreting the Bible*, Navpress 1978, 37

<sup>3</sup> In English we have too many.

<sup>4</sup> In the past we had W.E Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996. After that there are a variety of commentaries and study Bibles. Now we have websites like: <https://Biblehub.com/> and <https://www.Biblegateway.com/>. <https://Biblehub.com/> is especially helpful for word studies. One can type in the verse one is studying using Google and add "interlinear" and get the original Greek and Hebrew words. (Websites accessed 23 March 2021).

<sup>5</sup> A great preaching series through the Bible on YouTube is David Pawson *Unlocking the Old Testament*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y7nN4TVX5Y&list=PLfk5IZQHKovKhMV09ekMLvZk8vFV9RJVc> and the New Testament [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KMYwBRngU&list=PLfk5IZQHKovK\\_7RzISco4nVgMvt0bqFUZ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KMYwBRngU&list=PLfk5IZQHKovK_7RzISco4nVgMvt0bqFUZ) (accessed 24 March 2021).

## God Inspired and written by people

Although we believe the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, it was written by people and revealed into particular cultural contexts. The Bible teaches us that it came through people who were inspired to write what they wrote. This is in contrast to the typical Muslim view that the Qur'an was written in Heaven and that Muhammad's mind had nothing to do with the revelation. A key passage on the Bible coming through humans is this, *"Oo waxaynu haysannaa hadalka nebiyadii sii sheegeen, oo aad loo sii xaqiijiyey, oo waad ku wanaagsan tihiin inaad u fiirsataan hadalkaas sida laambad meel gudcur ah ka ifaysa, ilaa waagu beryayo oo xiddigta waaberi qalbigiinna ka soo baxdo, idinkoo taas horta garanaya in wixii nebiyadii sii sheegeen oo la qoray ayan lahayn micnayn gooni ah. Waayo, wixii nebiyadii sii sheegeen weligood kuma ay iman dadka doonistiisa, laakiinse dad Ruuxa Quduuska ahu waday ayaa xagga Ilaah kaga hadlay."* (2 Peter 1:19-21).

John Stott likens the nature of the Bible to that of our Master Jesus Himself. He was both divine and human. The Bible has a divine aspect to it; it is inspired by God and so authoritative. (This does not mean it is God!) It also has a human character; the people who wrote the Bible used their minds and wrote out of their cultural context.<sup>6</sup> In fact some may have not been aware they were writing under divine inspiration; however, they were deeply committed to God and His cause. The authors wrote with a God-centered purpose. Some were writing like historians and others as poets or preachers. Some claimed to have thoroughly researched it, using eye-witnesses and written resources (e.g. Luke, Luke 1:1-4),<sup>7</sup> others were writing from what was known to them at that time.

An over emphasis of the divine can result in excessive spiritualization or what McQuilken calls "Supernaturalistic Approaches." Early Church Fathers were often guilty of this, especially Origen. The opposite are the more rational and critical approaches where the text is only seen through the human mind and can be seen as irrational (textual criticism fits in here). For some then, the only way to accept the Bible is what is termed "existential." The Bible is not understood as the Word of God but as becoming the Word of God as we apply it (Karl Barth was an example here). "An irrational "leap of faith" becomes necessary to personally experience a word from God."<sup>8</sup>

## Culture is important in understanding the Bible

Important in understanding and applying the Bible is culture. The Bible was revealed into one culture or various cultures that existed during the 1400 years or so while it was being written. Our goal, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is to understand how it can be applied to our context or culture today. The Willowbank Report says that culture is simply defined as "the patterned way in which people do things together."

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<sup>6</sup> J.R.W. Scott, Culture and the Bible, 3 (I only have a photocopy of this booklet).

<sup>7</sup> Stott, J.R.W., 2.

<sup>8</sup> R. McQuilken, Understanding and Applying the Bible, Moody 1992, chapters 1-5. The quote is taken from page 50.

Culture includes: world-view, values, language etc.<sup>9</sup> Just as humans are God's creation, created in the image of God, so culture comes with the stamp of God on it but also affected by the Fall (Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden). "Because man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic." (Lausanne Covenant, para. 10).<sup>10</sup>

The cultures of Bible times were largely what are today referred to as Honour-Shame cultures (in contrast to Western culture). Honour-Shame cultures are characterized by some of these things: group decision-making, relationship-orientated, God centred in theory, segregation of roles in the family, respect of the elderly, hospitality and discipline. Western culture on the other hand is characterized by: individualistic, efficiency oriented, man-centred, equality of the genders, fragmented nuclear family, time-oriented, one-to-one relationships.<sup>11</sup>

Somalis have a head-start on us "Westerners" because their culture is largely Honour-Shame like the Bible. So, understanding the Bible and applying it should in many ways be easier for them. In order to get your brain working let me share an illustration. Warren Modricker, the great SIM pioneer among Somalis, wrote a paper on Somali Culture and Customs. The first point he makes is "Thieving and Lying." He tells the story of how one of his early workers lied to him and even when confronted he continued to lie. For his worker (although he had professed to be a Christian) honour was more important than the shame of being "found out."<sup>12</sup> Stealing might be similar; if the family has needs and a person is responsible for providing those needs, it is on his honour that he provides them even if he steals to do it. Otherwise it is shameful. In these cultures wealth also brings honour no matter how it is obtained.

A lot more is now being written on reaching people whose cultures are based on honour and shame and also on honour and shame in the Bible.<sup>13</sup> (It could be the basis of another good paper but would be best written from someone who comes from that cultural background). People from an Honour-Shame cultural background are not much convicted by the penal nature of sin.<sup>14</sup> The freedom and purity from knowing sin removed and the restored honour is often more powerful. One Somali

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<sup>9</sup> *The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture* - Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (1978) available at <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-2#2>, section 2.

<sup>10</sup> The Willowbank Report, section 1. Also The Lausanne Covenant, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov> (accessed 28 March 2021)

<sup>11</sup> S. Bell, *Friendshipfirst the manual*, Kitab-Interserve Resources 2011, 36.

<sup>12</sup> H. W. Modricker, *Somali Culture and Customs*, unpublished by Mr Modricker, 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> For example an article from CT - Exposing the Truth about Honor and Shame, The Four Dimensions Christians Must Understand by Jackson Wu and Jayson Georges - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/february/exposing-truth-about-honor-and-shame.html> (accessed 28 March 2021)

<sup>14</sup> *Penal substitution theory*. From google – "Definition. The penal substitution theory teaches that Jesus suffered the penalty for mankind's sins. Penal substitution derives from the idea that divine forgiveness must satisfy divine justice, that is, that God is not willing or able to simply forgive sin without first requiring a satisfaction for it." (accessed 28 March 2021)

believer, at his baptism, presented a poem on being pure (*daahir*), the stain and dishonour of his past life of sin and immorally was removed and he had a new honour as a believer. If you think about the Lord Jesus, he was very counter-culture in relation to honour and shame. He gave up his honour and glory in order to take our shame on the cross so that we might receive the honour of being called his Children, “*Waad garanaysaan nimcada Rabbigeenna Ciise Masiix in isagoo hodan ah uu aawadiin miskiin u noqday, inaad miskiinnimadiisa hodan ku noqotaan.*” (2 Corinthians 8:9). The disciples were to be very counter-culture in their leadership style.

### Literary context and grammar

In terms of understanding the Bible, understanding the culture is important however grammatical and theological principles are also important. The authors usually only had one meaning and that was a literal one. We may not be understanding a passage because we are not ready to obey it. Words are to be understood according to their meaning in the language they were revealed in. We have mentioned word studies which take us back to the original languages. Words should be understood within the context of the sentence they are used in. Similarly, sentences and passages should be understood in the context of the book in which they are situated and in the context of the Bible as a whole. We need to consider whether a word is being used in figurative sense or a literal sense. For example, when our Master Jesus says “I am the bread of life (John 6:35)” *Bread* is being used in a figurative sense. The words of the prophets need to be considered first in the context in which they were given and usually it is clear from the Bible how at that time there was a fulfilment. However sometimes there is also a future fulfilment most of which are given to us in the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> A great book on understanding the Bible is professors Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart’s book *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* (Zondervan 1982). They deal with the types of literature in the Bible.

Theology is about the study of God and His relation to the world.<sup>16</sup> Once we understand the Bible grammatically and culturally we can start to understand what it is teaching about God and his relationship with us. A particular belief (doctrine) is only considered biblical when it sums up and includes everything the Bible says about it.<sup>17</sup> Some doctrines appear to be contradictory; in this case we accept that they are resolved in a higher unity. An example is the sovereign choosing of God (election) and the responsibility of humans.<sup>18</sup> Both the Old and the New Testament are important parts in understanding God’s revelation. Revelation is progressive being in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> W. A. Henrichsen, chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

## Inspired by God

The Bible is inspired by God. Key verses are: - “Qorniin kastaa wuxuu ku ahaaday Ruuxa Ilaah oo waxtar buu u leeyahay waxbaridda, iyo canaanashada, iyo hagaajinta, iyo edbinta xagga xaqnimada; in ninka Ilaah u ahaado mid dhan oo aad loogu diyaariyey shuqul kasta oo wanaagsan.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We have mentioned some of what this means; there should be unity in what it teaches.<sup>20</sup> The term *inspiration* means that the words the original authors wrote were the exact words God wanted us to have. Literally they were breathed out of God’s mouth. The apostle Saint Paul writes, “Oo sababtaas daraaddeed ayaannu joogsila’aan Ilaah ugu mahadnaqnaa in, markii aad naga hesheen ereygii Ilaah oo aad naga maqasheen, aydaan u aqbalin sidii dad hadalkiis laakiin siduu run u yahay ereygii Ilaah oo haddana idinka dhex shaqeeya kuwiinna rumaysan.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). God has used human words to “clothe” his thoughts.<sup>21</sup>

Under “Interpreting the Bible” Stott goes on to refer to the second paragraph of the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Bible is “without error in all that it affirms.”<sup>22</sup> Stott says this is important in helping us understand what we mean by “biblical inerrancy,” not everything written in the Bible is affirmed by the Bible. For example, some people in the Bible exhibited very bad behaviour which is positively disgraceful; these are recorded for us as bad examples not to be followed. Job’s friends in the book of Job are an example also. They tried to prove that Job was being punished for sin but really that was not God’s aim in the book.<sup>23</sup> Since the Bible is inspired by God it is authoritative and trustworthy in what it teaches.<sup>24</sup> It teaches us about God, how to know God, salvation and how to behave but is not authoritative about other matters such as science and technology.

## Methods for Studying the Bible

So, what are some good methods to go about studying and understanding and applying the Bible? Firstly, we need to be in the right place mentally and spiritually. The authors of the books I have been referring to on interpreting the Bible see saving faith and the Holy Spirit as necessary. You need to have accepted Jesus as your Saviour and King in your life and know you have the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> Once this transformation has occurred a light goes on in one’s heart and much immediately makes sense. Also necessary is diligence and a keen (inquisitive) mind. The Berean Christians in Acts 17:11 were commended for receiving “the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” “Haddaba kuwaasu waa ka sharaf badnaayeen kuwii Tesaloniika joogay, maxaa yeelay, ereygay aqbaleen iyagoo xiiso weyn u qaba oo maalin kasta baadhaya Qorniinka inay hubsadaan waxyaalahaasi inay sidaas yihiin iyo in kale.” It is through the Bible that we get to know our Master Jesus, “Qorniinka ayaad baadhaan, waayo, waxaad u

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<sup>20</sup> R. McQuilken, 209.

<sup>21</sup> J. R. W.Scott, under inspiration.

<sup>22</sup> The Lausanne Covenant.

<sup>23</sup> J. R.W.Scott, under interpreting the Bible.

<sup>24</sup> R. McQuilken, 20

<sup>25</sup> W. A. Henrichsen, 25

*malaynaysaan inaad nolosha weligeed ah ka helaysaan, waana iyaga kuwa ii marag furayaa.*" (John 5:39).

Several organizations have developed good methods for studying the Bible. One is the *Scripture Union* method.<sup>26</sup> Pray before you start that God would help you understand and apply the Word to your life (Psalms 119:18). Read the passage you have selected. Have a systematic approach where you read a book at a time. Ask some questions about the passage. What does it teach about God? What does it teach about how I should live? What new thing have I discovered? Choose something to apply to your life, make it specific (e.g. *Show Ali how much I care for him by visiting* or *Plan to share the Gospel with Faduma.*) Finish with a prayer time. Scripture Union also gives some ideas of how you can use this method in a group. *The Navigators* also give a method for what they call "Inductive Bible study".<sup>27</sup> Henrichsen sees four principles as important in studying the Bible. 1. *Observation* "what do I see?" Like a detective try to list all the things in the passage some of which you may study in more depth later. 2. *Interpretation* "what does it mean?" Why and how questions about what is going on or being said in the passage. 3. *Correlation* "How does this relate to the rest of what the Bible teaches?" Look up other passages on the passage.<sup>28</sup> 4. *Application* "What does it mean to me?" "What is God saying to me?" What should I do as a result of reading this passage.<sup>29</sup> Each person needs to find an approach they are comfortable with, don't be lazy. Oletta Wald has also written a very practical book called; *The Joy of Discovery*.<sup>30</sup>

### Let it change your life

Apply the Bible to your life. Every keen disciple of our Master and person keen to influence others for God should be a keen student of the Bible. Don't wait until someone pays you to go to Bible school. However, more important than being a keen student is being someone who is quick to apply it to his or her life. Applications are general and specific. A general application might be to love my neighbour. A specific application may be that I should help my neighbour with his or her garden. *Noqda kuwa hadalka yeela, oo ha ahaanina kuwa maqla oo keliya oo nafsaddooda khiyaaneeya. Waayo, haddii mid yahay kan hadalka maqla oo keliya, oo uusan ahayn kan yeela, wuxuu la mid yahay nin wejiga abuuristiisa muraayad ku fiirinaya. Waayo, wuu isfiiriyaa, oo iska tagaa, oo markiiba is-illoobaa siduu ahaa.*" (James 1:22-24).

The Somali Church is blessed with a good translation of the Bible (and more on the way!) and with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps one day they will also have Bible Handbooks,

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<sup>26</sup> How to read the Bible, <https://scriptureunion.org/how-to-read-pray/> (accessed 28 March 2021)

<sup>27</sup> How to Study The Bible <https://www.navigators.org/resource/how-to-study-the-Bible> (accessed 28 March 2021).

<sup>28</sup> This is where word studies come in using a concordance or a website like Biblehub.

<sup>29</sup> W. A. Henrichsen, 15.

<sup>30</sup> O. Wald, *The Joy of Discovery*, Augsburg 1975. Her book, Fee and Stuart's book, Henrichsen's book and McQuilken's book are all available on Amazon. Some of these books have been updated from my copies.

Study Bibles and commentaries to help them understand the Bible better. This paper has given some keys to reading and understanding the Bible. Accept that the Bible is inspired by God and authoritative and given to bring you to our Master Jesus and change our lives. It is not a science text book or a history book (although we find it reliable in these areas). Some of the difficulties and apparent contradictions that appear as we study the Bible need to be studied through the context it was revealed in. Important in understanding the Bible is to understand it in its cultural context. It was revealed to people who like the Somalis have an Honour-Shame culture. This gives the Somalis an advantage in understanding the Bible. It is both a human and a divine book. Find some good Bible study methods and read it prayerfully and diligently looking for how God would like you to use it to change your life.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y7nN4TVX5Y&list=PLfk5IZQHKovKhMo9ekMLvZk8vFV9RJvC> and the New Testament

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KMYwBRngU&list=PLfk5IZQHKovK\\_7RzISco4nVgMvt0bqFUZ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KMYwBRngU&list=PLfk5IZQHKovK_7RzISco4nVgMvt0bqFUZ) (accessed 24 March 2021).

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### About the author



Stephen Thompson grew up in East Africa until he was 13. Later as an adult he served with his wife (Rachel) as a global partner with SIM in NEP Kenya and Eastern Ethiopia where he helped the people with water and agricultural projects. Later they lived in Addis Ababa where he managed the *Codka Nolosha Cusub* radio programme, ran a discipling programme and was an elder at the International Evangelical Church. At present Stephen and Rachel live in a multicultural suburb in Auckland, New Zealand. Stephen has a bachelor degree in agricultural science, MA (English Bible) and a DipGrad (religious studies and social anthropology).



## A Brief History of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula

Aweis A. Ali

### Prologue

The triple purpose of this paper is to:

1. document the long history of Christianity in the Somali peninsula
2. encourage more research on Christianity among Somali people
3. enrich the literature reservoir of the Somali Church

Unbeknownst to many, Christianity reached “at least the coastal areas of the land Somalis inhabit” by the 7<sup>th</sup> century as attested to ancient graves and other traces.<sup>1</sup> This fact alone should put to rest the famous Somali Muslim mantra that to be a Somali is to be a Muslim. Ali Abdirahman Hersi, a Somali scholar, wrote in 1977 that “it is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity.”<sup>2</sup> Somalis are about 99% Muslim, and the tiny Christian minority in their midst faces intense persecution because of their Christian faith. Somali Muslims also fight over power, and resources and the collapse of Somalia’s central government in 1991 unleashed carnage and bloodbath. According to the Center for American Progress, up to “1.5 million people have died in Somalia’s conflict or directly due to hunger since 1991.”<sup>3</sup>

While attending a cabinet meeting in 1974, a prominent Somali Christian and a statesman, Michael Mariano Ali, said to Muhammad Siyad Barre, the President of the Republic, that Somalia would never experience peace until it returned to its Christian roots.<sup>4</sup> The Somali government was violently overthrown 16 years later by a consortium of armed groups. Siyad Barre, as he was locally known, knew well the indispensable role Somali Christians played in the struggle for Somalia’s independence. Somali Christians were represented in the cabinets of the two presidents prior to Siyad Barre. For example, Michael once served as the Minister of Economic Planning under the Premiership of Muhammed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Another Somali Christian, Awil Haji Abdillahi, better known as Anthony James, served as the Minister of Finance under the Premiership of Abdirisak Haji Hussein.

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<sup>1</sup> Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somali*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 218

<sup>2</sup> Ali Abdirahman Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 109.

<sup>3</sup> John Norris and Bronwyn Bruton, “Twenty Years of Collapse and Counting: The Cost of Failure in Somalia.” Center for American Progress. September 2011, 10  
<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/09/pdf/somalia.pdf>  
(accessed 31 December 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 7.

Somali Christians also played a disproportionate role in the struggle for independence. The first President and the primary founder of the Somali Youth League (SYL), Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudeen (d. June 1951), was a Roman Catholic Christian.<sup>5</sup> The SYL was the first Somali political party, and its struggle led to Somalia's independence.

Lewis Clement Salool, a Somali Christian, designed the SYL flag with its cross, crescent, and five stars. He was also a key legal advisor to the SYL. Alex Qolqoole, another Somali Christian, supported the SYL financially and served as its primary policy advisor. The SYL's struggle could have faltered without the selfless support and leadership of Michael, Anthony, Lewis, and Abdulkhadir who is better known as *Sakhawudeen*.

### Coat of arms of Somalia



Photo credit: Wikipedia.org

The coat of arms of Somalia portrays three full crosses and two partial ones at the top of the shield. The coat of arms was designed in 1953 by Osman Geedi Raage, one of the key leaders of the Somali Youth League.<sup>6</sup> The coat of arms was adopted on 10 October 1956. The Somali Constitution is silent about the crosses when describing the nation's top symbol:

“The emblem of the Federal Republic of Somalia, as shown in section B of Schedule One, is a blue shield with a gold frame, in the centre of which is a silver-coated, five-pointed star. The shield is surmounted by a decorated emblem with five golden heads, with two lateral ones halved. The shield is borne from the sides by two leopards facing each other under the lower point of the shield, along with two palm leaves, which are interlaced with a white ribbon.”<sup>7</sup>

Osman Geedi Raage was a Muslim albeit a secular one. It is possible he chose the cross as a mere decoration. Osman may have also chosen the cross for its spiritual prowess, consciously or subconsciously, as many Somali Muslims still do it today. It is a matter of great significance that a transnational people group that is about 99%

<sup>5</sup> Mohamed A. Gurhan, “The Persecuted Disciples of Jesus Christ: A Research Article on Somali Ecclesiology.” Somali Christian Mission, December 2012, 15.

<sup>6</sup> The Somali Youth League (SYL) (Somali: Ururka Dhalinyarada Soomaaliyeed, Italian: Lega dei Giovani Somali or Lega Somala della Gioventù), was initially established as the Somali Youth Club (SYC) to disguise its political ambitions from the Italian colonial authority. The SYL was the first political party in Somalia. It fought for Somalia's independence in the Somali Peninsula and in the international arenas in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The SYL demanded the unification of the five Somali territories in the Somali Peninsula to form the Somali Republic.

<sup>7</sup> “The Federal Republic of Somalia: Provisional Constitution.” Adopted 01 August 2012, Mogadishu, Somalia. University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library, n.d., 2 <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf> (accessed 09 January 2021)

Muslim uses the cross, the most recognizable Christian symbol, in so many ways, including as a sign of blessing and protection.

### Christian Roots

The Arab and Persian historians, scholars, and geographers who wrote about Christianity in the Somali peninsula include: *Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Ali al-Mas'udi* (896–956), Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (973-1050), and Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Qurtubi al-Hasani as-Sabti (1100-1165). Al-Mas'udi, al-Biruni, and al-Idrisi all described the Somali port city of Zeila as a Christian city with a few Muslim merchants.<sup>8</sup> Zeila is near the border with Djibouti in northwestern Somalia. Zeila was at the time ruled by Abyssinian Christians, thus the powerful Christian community in the city.

However, Abu al-Ḥasan Ali ibn Musa ibn Sa'id al-Maghribi (1213–1286) described Zeila as a wealthy city in which its inhabitants were completely Muslim around (1214-17). Zeila must have reverted to Muslim control by the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, according to Ibn Sa'id. Zeila's Muslim population, by this time, is also affirmed by the famed Moroccan explorer, geographer, and scholar, Ibn Battuta (1304 –1369).<sup>9</sup> Zeila, once staunchly Christian city, played a significant role in bringing Islam to the Oromos as well as the other Ethiopian ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup>

While the Christianity practiced in the Somali peninsula as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century disappeared; its once prominent presence in northwestern and northeastern regions of Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) is visible in rich archeology. The British explorer, Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), visited the Sanaag Region of eastern Somaliland supported by the Royal Geographical Society. Members of the Warsangeli clan explained to him that certain ruins in the area were the remains of a derelict local church.<sup>11</sup> Burton also learnt of similar ruins in what seemed like replicas of the Warsangeli ruins, among the Dhulbahante clan in Sool, the southeastern of Sanaag. The Dhulbahante clan members explained the ruins as the mosques of their forefathers. Burton understood the latter ruins to be a former church converted to a mosque before it became derelict. Burton noted that the Dhulbahante clan, like the Warsangali, “a *Mala*, or cross of stone or wood covered with plaster, at the head and foot of every tomb.”<sup>12</sup> When asked about the crosses, the Dhulbahante clan members said it was their custom which they learnt from their parents and

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<sup>8</sup> Hersi, *The Arab Factor in Somali History*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Henry A. Rayne, *Sun, Sand and Somals: Leaves from the Note-book of a District Commissioner in British Somaliland*. (London: Witherby, 1921).  
[https://archive.org/stream/sunsandsomalslea00raynuoft/sunsandsomalslea00raynuoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/sunsandsomalslea00raynuoft/sunsandsomalslea00raynuoft_djvu.txt) (accessed 27 December 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Richard F. Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*. (London & Toronto: Published by J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. & in New York by E. P. Dutton & Co. First Edition 1910. Reprinted 1924, 317

<sup>12</sup> Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

grandparents.<sup>13</sup> Burton concluded this finding by stating that this “again would argue that a Christian people once inhabited these now benighted lands.”<sup>14</sup>

Burton also reports a ruined structure, converted by the Somalis into a cemetery that resembled “a convent or a monastery.”<sup>15</sup> To the west of this ruin, Burton reports another derelict structure of white mortar from burnt limestone rock, fifty yards away from what appeared a convent or a monastery. The local Somalis described this ruin as “a Christian house of worship.”<sup>16</sup> Burton stated that some of the walls of the derelict Christian building were still ten feet high which “show an extent of civilization now completely beyond the Warsangali.”<sup>17</sup> The local “people assert these ruins to be those of Nazarenes.”<sup>18</sup>

### Socotra Christianity

Socotra Island, while a Yemeni territory, is off the coast of Somalia and has close Somali links. The Island is closer to mainland Somalia than mainland Yemen. There is also a Somali clan, Arab Mohamud Saalah, in Puntland regions of northeastern Somalia, who claim Socotra as their ancestral homeland. Socotra is located between the Arabian Sea and Guardafui Channel. The Island is the largest of the four islands known as the Socotra Archipelago.<sup>19</sup> The Island lies 380 kilometers (240 miles) south of the Arabian Peninsula. While mainland Yemen is in Western Asia, Socotra and the rest of its archipelago are geographically part of Africa.<sup>20</sup> Minority groups in Socotra include south Arabians, Indians, and Somalis.<sup>21</sup>

Church tradition states that Thomas the Apostle, on his way to India, was shipwrecked by the Socotra Island. Thomas used the debris of the shipwreck to build a church. According to the *Endeavors of Saint Thomas*, the Apostle visited a mysterious island on his way to India.<sup>22</sup> G. W. B. Huntingford notes that:

The inhabitants seem always to have been mixed people. Some of them at one period were Christians, converted it was said by St. Thomas in AD 52 while on his way to India. Abu Zaid Hassan, an Arab geographer of the 10th century, said that in his time, most of the inhabitants of Socotra were

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<sup>13</sup> Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 317.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Nazarene, *Nasaara* in Somalized Arabic, is a positive term Somalis use for all Christians.

<sup>19</sup> A. G. Miller and T. A., Cope. *Flora of the Arabian Peninsula and Socotra*. Volume I Edinburg University Press in association with Royal Botanic Garden Edinburg, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 1996, 7,11

<sup>20</sup> “Paradise Has an Address: Socotra – Geography.” <http://www.socotra.cz/about-us-2.html?lang=en> (accessed 28 December 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times: India, 1541–1544*. (Jesuit Historical Institute, 1982), 122.

<sup>22</sup> J. K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 488-454.

Christian... but by the beginning of the 16th century, Christianity had almost disappeared. Leaving little trace but stone crosses at which Alvares said the people worshipped... However, a group of people was found here by St. Francis Xavier in 1542, claiming to be descended from the converts made by St. Thomas....<sup>23</sup>

St. Francis (1506 –1552), a Navarrese Catholic missionary, described the people he met in Socotra:

The natives esteem themselves to be Christians and are very proud of it. They can neither read nor write, possess no books nor other sources of information and are very ignorant. But they have churches, crosses, and ritual lamps, and in each village, there is a *caciz*, who corresponds to a priest among us. Having no bells, they summon the people to services with wooden clappers, such as we have during Lent.<sup>24</sup>

It is hard to tell how much of the ignorance St. Francis, co-founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), attributed to the Christians in Socotra is accurate and how much of it is based on misunderstanding exacerbated by the cultural and language barriers. For example, the famous Venetian explorer, Marco Polo (1254-1324), wrote of the people of Socotra:

The inhabitants [of Socotra] are baptized Christians and have an archbishop...I should explain that the archbishop of Socotra has nothing to do with the Pope at Rome, but is subject to an archbishop who lives at Baghdad. The archbishop of Baghdad sends out the archbishop of this Island.<sup>25</sup>

Douglas Botting wrote of the Christians in Socotra, “On this outpost of the Arab world a race of people impervious to the great tide of Islam, who had retained some remnants of the Christian faith for nearly a thousand years after the birth of Mohamet...They were all strictly monogamous.”<sup>26</sup> Any trace of a visible Christianity disappeared from Socotra by 1680 due to Muslim occupation and lack of support from the nearby Christians in the Middle East.<sup>27</sup>

While the Christians in Socotra were most likely of the Assyrian confession with a Syriac liturgy, there is a strong probability that the Christians in Socotra were also influenced by the Abyssinian Orthodox Church. Greville Stewart Parker Freeman Grenville (1918 – 2005) wrote of the observation of St. Francis Xavier about the Christians in Socotra. St. Francis observed that their Lenten fasts paralleled those of

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<sup>23</sup> G. W. B. Huntingform, ed. Trans. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (The Hakluyt Society, London, 1980), 103.

<sup>24</sup> S. G. Pothan. *The Syrian Christians of Kerala* (Asia Publishing Company: New York 1963), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald Latham, Trans. *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Penguin books, London, 1958), 296-298.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Botting, *Island of the Dragon's Blood* (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1958) 215

<sup>27</sup> “The Socotran of Yemen” [http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p\\_code3/891.html](http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code3/891.html)

the Abyssinian Orthodox Church, including length and strictness.<sup>28</sup> This is not a surprise since Christian Abyssinia once ruled Yemen. Hussein A. Bulhan, a Somali scholar, writes:

In the early sixth century, Christian Arabs on the opposite side of the Red Sea asked the Axum King to help them fend off religious persecution they experienced from a Jewish Himyar King. In response, the Abyssinians crossed to Arabia and conquered Yemen in about 525 and continued to rule them for fifty years....<sup>29</sup>

Bowersock describes the massacre perpetrated against Yemeni Christians in 516 by a Jewish King, Yousef Asa'ar.<sup>30</sup> This Jewish King of Arabs massacred more than 20,000 Christians in the cities of Zafran and Najran after they had refused to convert to Judaism.<sup>31</sup> The King himself took great joy in describing the atrocities he committed against the Yemeni Christians who chose to die martyrs rather than convert to Judaism.<sup>32</sup> Abyssinians killed the King and liberated the Yemeni Christians. Some of the descendants of the Abyssinians who gave a helping hand to the Yemeni Christians still live in Yemen as a marginalized minority group.

### Western Missionary Effort

The French Catholic Mission (FCM) opened an orphanage in Daymoole village, near Berbera, British Somaliland, in 1881.<sup>33</sup> This orphanage became the target of Sayid Muhammed Abdulle Hassan (7 April 1856 - 21 December 1920); he objected to the efforts of introducing (or reviving to be more accurate) Christianity among the Somali Muslims. One well-known incident reports that the Sayid's "wrath intensified when he met Somali boys converted to Christianity by missionaries who came and collaborated with the colonial administration."<sup>34</sup> The Sayid, whom the British colonial authority called the "Mad Mullah", fought the British and their supporters for twenty years. The Sayid and his dervish warriors were finally defeated with superior military assets, including warplanes.<sup>35</sup>

The British colonial authority was finally forced to expel the FCM in 1910 to appease the Sayid and the local *ulama* supporting him.<sup>36</sup> The twenty-nine years the FCM

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<sup>28</sup> Freeman-Grenville, G.S.P. *The East African Coast: Select Documents From The First to The Early Nineteenth Century*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 135-137.

<sup>29</sup> Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations*, 218.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Dhu Nuwas, also known as Yousef Asa'ar was a self-styled Jewish king-warlord who ruled several Yemeni tribes AD 517 – 525 and possibly until 527.

<sup>31</sup> Glen Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Ryckmans, "La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle," (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Inst. in *het Nabije Oosten*, 1956), 1–24.

<sup>33</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 121.

<sup>34</sup> Bulhan. *In-Between Three Civilizations*, 263

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 172, 263.

<sup>36</sup> Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*. (Guardian Books, 2006), 76.

spent around Berbera was not wasted; a significant number of local people became Disciples of Christ. The FCM moved to the Somali town of Jigjiga, Eastern Ethiopia, 367 kilometers from Daymoole.<sup>37</sup> This Catholic mission in Jigjiga, which eventually expanded to other areas in the region, produced some prominent ethnic Somali Catholics who are widely respected among Somali people in the Horn of Africa.

The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) arrived in the southern coastal town of Kismayo in 1896. The mission eventually expanded to Jilib, Jamaame, and Mogambo, all in the Jubaland regions of southern Somalia. In addition to traditional evangelistic ministry, SOLC operated schools and clinics.<sup>38</sup> SOLC facilitated the planting of a number of Somali-led house-churches in southern Somalia. The Italian colonial authority expelled SOLC in 1935.<sup>39</sup>

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953, setting up a base in Mogadishu.<sup>40</sup> The MM also operated schools and clinics. The MM expanded its work to Mahaddaay, Jowhar, Jamaame in addition to two other mission stations. The Somali government eventually expelled the MM in 1976. The MM continued its Somali ministry from Nairobi, Kenya.

The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) entered Somalia in 1954 under the leadership of Warren and Dorothy Modricker.<sup>41</sup> The SIM also ran schools and clinics.<sup>42</sup> The Somali government also expelled the SIM in 1976. The SIM continued the Somali ministry from Nairobi, Kenya.

The RCC, the SOLC, the MM, and the SIM comprise the Magnificent Four because of their ministry success among the Somalis. The progress of the Somali Church is directly linked to the missionary work of the Magnificent Four.

### Somalis and Crosses

Somalis are a transnational ethnic group that lives in their ancestral homes in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Regardless of where Somalis reside, the cross, to this day, has a hallowed place among Somali Muslims.<sup>43</sup> The crosses observed by Richard Burton during his visit to the Sool and the Sanaag regions of

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<sup>37</sup> Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

<sup>39</sup> Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 116.

<sup>40</sup> The Mennonite Mission registered in Somalia as Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM). See David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

<sup>41</sup> More about the Modrickers, please see: Helen Miller. *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*. 2015, 21.

<sup>43</sup> The cross very often used by Somali Muslims is a hybrid of the Greek, and the Latin crosses. The Greek cross has arms of equal length while Latin cross has a vertical beam that sticks above the crossbeam.

British Somaliland appear more Greek than Latin.<sup>44</sup> The Abyssinian Church which influenced the most in British Somaliland, uses a variety of crosses including the Greek and the Latin.<sup>45</sup> This Church also has selections of elaborate indigenous crosses.

Sada Mire, a Somali archeologist, describes the annual Aw-Barkhadle Muslim religious celebrations in present-day Somaliland, “People come to the site and paint a cross on their foreheads.”<sup>46</sup> Sada describes in Aw-Barkhadle “where there is at least one burial with stelae decorated with a Christian Orthodox cross in situ.”<sup>47</sup> Sada adds “Other Christian burials also exist across the country.”<sup>48</sup> Aw-Barkhadle is a Muslim shrine near Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Sada Mire, again describes Christian burial sites in Somaliland which demonstrate clear Abyssinian Christianity. This is not a surprise since ancient Abyssinia sometimes included areas currently deep into Somaliland including Hargeisa and Berbera:

There are also megalithic burials where the stones are arranged in a cross. The area of Dhuxun (62), in Saahil region, has many cruciform burials.... There are many isolated, single Christian burials, massive in their design.... Dhubato in the Hargeysa region and the Saahil area have many ancient Christian burials which are aligned as a cross. Sites such as Suuqsade... contain ancient Christian burials. There are also finds of Christian codices in Somaliland.<sup>49</sup>

*Madrassa* students in certain regions in the Somali peninsula traditionally receive a temporary cross on their foreheads or on both cheeks by their teacher as a symbol of blessing. The teacher uses a black ink, the same ink students use to write the Qur’an on their wooden tablets. This practice has been in decline in southern Somalia since the last twenty years because of radical Islam which objects to all practices it considers non-Islamic.

A bad episode of cholera hit Somalia in the early years of the 1970s. Many people lost their lives as the country was not equipped enough to handle such a huge medical emergency. Victims of cholera often died of dehydration. One ominous sign

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<sup>44</sup> Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

<sup>45</sup> The official name of this Monophysite Church is the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church (Amharic: የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ ቤተ ክርስቲያን).

<sup>46</sup> Sada Mire, *Divine Fertility: The Continuity in Transformation of an Ideology of Sacred Kinship in Northeast Africa*. 1<sup>st</sup> Edition. UCL Institute of Archeology Publication. (Routledge, 2020), 26 - 30

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

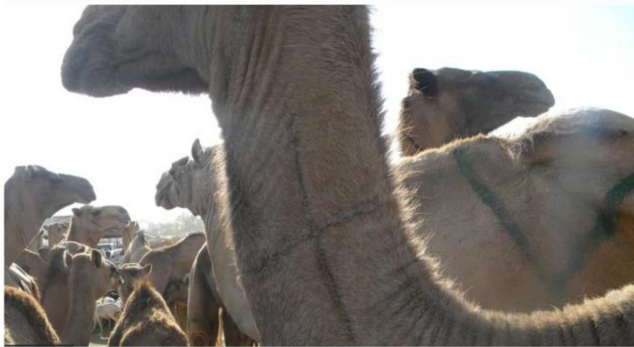
<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>49</sup> Sada Mire, “Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire.” *Afr Archaeol Rev* 32, 111–136 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9184-9> (accessed 30 December 2020).



that a patient could die was when they developed pruned feet (*cago miin* in Somali). Muslim traditional healers would then burn a cruciform on the soles of the feet as that was believed to have a medicinal value. Many Somali Muslims who survived the cholera epidemic walk around today with cruciform on the sole of their feet. The era of this deadly cholera is known in Somalia as *Daacuunkii* (the cholera era) or *salaan diid* (the no handshake era).

It was very common in pre-civil war Somalia for metal gates to have crosses embedded in them for decoration. Another common practice in the Somali peninsula is that people who cannot read use a cross symbol to mark any possession they own so they can claim theirs when mixed with others. Crosses are therefore used for five different purposes: decoration, blessing, protection, healing, and identification. Identification crosses are like signatures; everyone has a unique way to draw their own cross. Sometimes what makes the difference is where the cross is placed or how many crosses are placed on one's possession like a sack of millet.



A Somali camel with a cruciform branding  
Photo credit: BBC Somali/Dr. Jaamac

Some Somali Muslim clans brand their livestock, especially camels and cattle, using the cross symbol. These clans include: The Hawiye sub clans of Murusade, Harti Abgaal, Isaaq Daa'uud, Sheekhaal, and Gaal Je'el. The Isaaq sub-clans of Ciida Gale, Habar Yonis, and Habar Je'lo, especially the sub-clans on the Haud Reserve area of the Somaliland-Ethiopia border. Some members of

the Abdalla and Mohammed Subeyr of the Ogaden sub-clan and few members of the Marehan sub clan, all of whom belong to the Darod clan, brand their camels and cattle using a cruciform.

## Epilogue

Christianity is not a stranger in the Somali peninsula. While Somali Muslims may have forgotten their Christian heritage, they still cling to Christian symbolisms in which the cross is of paramount importance. Somalis seem to have a subconscious awareness of their Christian roots and this may explain their excessive use of the cross for decoration, blessing, healing and identification purposes. The cross, the most recognizable symbol of the Christian faith, has shown resilience among Somali Muslims. Archeology has also demonstrated time and again that Christianity was once widely practiced in much of Somaliland, the only area in the Somali peninsula in which its archeology has been studied to some extent.

While Abyssinian Christianity left indelible footprints in the Somali peninsula, there are hardly any Somalis today who identify themselves as belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the biggest Christian denomination in Africa. Somali Christians have traditionally been either Roman Catholic or Protestant. The most prominent ethnic Somali Christians have historically been Roman Catholic. Why this is the case

is open to debate. The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) had only fifteen years of a head start before the first Protestant mission arrived. This negligible head start cannot explain the enviable fruits of the RCC in the Somali peninsula.

The Western missionary effort in the Somali peninsula revived the long-dormant Christianity among Somalis. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant mission organizations led many Somalis to the Lord, thus breaching the perceived hegemony of Islam on the Somalis. Four ministries will forever be remembered for their courage and sacrifice in bringing the Gospel to the Somali peninsula. These giants are: The Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church, the Mennonite Mission, and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) which comprise the Magnificent Four in the Somali peninsula.

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### About the author

Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. Aweis was a co-pastor of a house church in Mogadishu, Somalia, in mid 1990s when 12 of its 14 members were martyred for their faith. Aweis, an ordained elder, has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a B.Th. degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an M.Div. degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled, "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." Aweis is the author, editor or translator of 8 books and a dozen articles. He is the founder and the Series Editor of the annual *Maansada Masiixa* (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry.) Dr. Aweis can be reached at [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com).

## The Somali Faith Hall of Fame

Dr. Howie F. Shute

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### Introduction

When I first sensed a calling as a missionary to the Horn of Africa, I was thinking that God was sending me there to mentor young and inexperienced church leaders. What I was unaware of was that God was sending me there for these young leaders to mentor me. Someone once said about their missionary experience that *God sent me to the mission field to do in me what he could not do at home.*<sup>1</sup> Helen Roseveare<sup>2</sup> made a very significant statement when she said: *“If you think you have come to the mission field because you are a little better than others, or as the cream of your church, or because of your medical degree, or for the service you can render the African church, or even for the souls you may see saved, you will fail. Remember, the Lord has only one purpose ultimately for each one of us, to make us more like Jesus.”*<sup>3</sup> Looking back at the fifteen years I spent as a global missionary, it is very clear that my call to Africa was for God’s purpose of making me more like Jesus.

I had no idea what impact the people of the Horn of Africa would have on me. Truly, God used these people to help shape me into a person who would be more like Jesus. I found this to be the case wherever I worked in the Horn of Africa. The people of Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia (and elsewhere in Africa) had a lasting impact on my life. I had rarely seen the depth of commitment in American Christians that I witnessed in the followers of Jesus in Africa. Nowhere did I find this to be truer than with my experiences with Somali Christians. It was Somali believers who helped me to understand better what Jesus was saying in passages like Matthew 10:37-39: *“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”* Somali disciples taught me more about the complete abandonment of self in following Jesus than I had learned anytime in my journey with Jesus up to this point. They taught me what it means to truly live by faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from an unknown source.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Roseveare was a doctor and missionary to Africa. She served in the Congo, training nurses and managing a clinic for leprosy and maternity patients. She experienced brutal treatment when held captive during a civil war in the Congo. She speaks of a deepening of her relationship with Jesus because of the suffering she experienced throughout her missionary years and especially during her capture.

<sup>3</sup> Ethnos 360 Bible Institute, *8 Quotes That Will Change the Way You View Missionary Work*, Anna Wishart 4/27/2017, e360Bible.org. Accessed March 15, 2021.

When someone becomes a follower of Jesus Christ in Somalia, they face severe persecution. Losing employment and one's livelihood is anticipated. Being ostracized from society is almost a certainty. Most lose their spouse and children as the clan interferes with the family relationship. Occasionally a convert to Christianity is executed for their audacity to leave Islam. Sometimes they are killed by the sword, losing their life by a cruel decapitation. It was in this context that I observed Somali men and women giving up their lives to follow Jesus. When I hear people in the West talk about how they have faith in God, I wonder if such a faith would pass the test of the Somali experience.

The Writer to the Hebrews admits that time and space prevented him from including many more who could have been included in the list of his *Faith Hall of Fame*.<sup>4</sup> He speaks of "...Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies."<sup>5</sup> It is clear that the list for the *Faith Hall of Fame* in Hebrews 11 is incomplete. That many more at the time of his writing and even on into the future could have been added as men and women of true biblical faith. My experiences with Somali ministry convince me that many *Ciise*<sup>6</sup> followers deserve to be mentioned in the *Faith Hall of Fame*.

### **The Somali Church – Sharing Christ at the Risk of Their Own Lives**

Guleed<sup>7</sup> is one such *Ciise* follower that I would recommend to the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. This young man grew up on the streets of Mogadishu. His mother had died when he was a young child. His father then married a woman who was very mean to Guleed. Her treatment of him was unbearable causing him to leave home to fend for himself. He had no access to an education. His diet was far from being nutritional. He lived like any other street vagrant. It was not until he was befriended by a Catholic nun that he had any chance of a normal life. She provided for Guleed through her ministry, and more importantly prepared him to one day become a follower of *Ciise*.

Guleed eventually came to Ethiopia because of the religious persecution that existed for Somali Christians. When arriving in Addis Ababa, he came into contact with our ministry. It was obvious that this young man was a serious follower of Jesus. He had a heart for God and a passion to go to his own people and share Jesus with them. After training Guleed in how he could share his faith with others, we sent him to evangelize Somalis living in Ethiopia. Although Guleed lacked a formal education and good upbringing, he became very effective in sharing his faith and leading others to Jesus. Eventually he felt God burdening his heart for Somalis living in their

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<sup>4</sup> See Hebrews 11:32.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 11:32-34.

<sup>6</sup> *Ciise* is Somali for Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> All names of Somalis included in this paper have been changed for security purposes, except for Mansur mentioned in the last story of this paper.

home country. At his request we sent him to share Jesus there. It was amazing how quickly he developed an underground<sup>8</sup> church in the region of Somalia where he was working. He experienced great danger there. A young boy was killed right before him. Others were killed and maimed as he traveled on the road from place to place. He was even hunted by Muslims with an execution order on his life.

Regardless of living in such terrible circumstances and with a very real and constant threat to his life, Guleed persisted in his ministry. After returning to Addis Ababa for some equipment repair and further training, he prepared to return to Somalia. At that time the conditions, which were before horrible in the area of his ministry, had grown even worse. Our Somali leaders would not send him back to Somalia at that time, because they were certain that if they did, Guleed would become another Somali martyr for Christ. Guleed, however, urged his leaders to allow him to return. He pleaded with the leadership council to allow him to return to his place of ministry, even if it might lead to him becoming a martyr. I'll never forget his words as he pleaded for authorization to return to Somalia. His cry was this: *"It doesn't matter what happens to me. Please send me back...Seven young men there have recently given their hearts to Jesus...If I don't go back, who will disciple them?"*<sup>9</sup> When the Somali Leadership Council would not relent, Guleed persisted: *"Eight other young men are very, very close to saying 'yes' to Jesus. If I don't go back, where will they spend eternity?"*<sup>10</sup> That's a faith rarely seen in today's church: *If I don't go, where will they spend eternity.* Eventually, Guleed returned to Somalia and was nearly martyred, as he was pursued relentlessly by his would-be executioners.<sup>11</sup> **By faith Guleed persisted in sharing Christ at the risk of his own life.**

### **The Somali Church – Becoming a Global Influence for Christ**

I believe that Omar would be another candidate for the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. Omar had been studying the Qur'an in pursuit of his father's desire for him to get the best Islamic education possible. His father, Ali, was a leading tribal elder, who was passionate about spreading Islam. He was a very influential leader in Somalia, having great influence in his community and the full support from the military. Ali wanted his son, Omar, to succeed him as tribal leader. Thus, he pushed his son to study the Qur'an diligently. As Omar studied the Qur'an, he was impressed with the many favorable references to Jesus. He then began to read the Bible, so that he could learn more about Jesus. He became fascinated with Jesus and his teachings. As he gained more and more knowledge of Jesus, he talked with his father about

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<sup>8</sup> An underground church in Somalia worships quietly and secretly in their homes and evangelizes in non-public forums. Believers courageously share their faith with friends, family, and community members, but only after relationships have been established and determinations have been made that the seeker will not expose the evangelist. Even with these safeguards, many Somali believers have been either disenfranchised from their families and community or martyred for their faith.

<sup>9</sup> Howie Shute (self), *Revival Fires: The Horn of Africa Story*, (Nazarene Publishing House, 2015), p. 80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 80-81.

<sup>11</sup> For further information on Guleed's life and ministry, see my book, *Revival Fires: The Horn of Africa Story*, pp. 77-81.

some of his misgivings about Islam and how he was considering to follow Jesus Christ. His father was not happy. In fact, he threatened to kill him, if he continued to pursue this radical departure from his religion and culture. This did not keep Omar from his thirst for more of the Bible and his great desire to know more of Jesus Christ. Eventually, Omar gave his heart to Jesus and became a follower of *Ciise*.

Omar had discovered a Christian Radio Broadcast that had helped him to come to a place of decision. This broadcast also became a place for his spiritual nurture after that decision. He grew in his knowledge and experience with Jesus. He also grew in desire to share Jesus with his family. As he shared Jesus with his mother, he was labeled a rebellious son. Then he was declared insane by the whole family as he shared Jesus with other family members. Eventually he was asked to leave home. He was disowned by family and clan. *“In his culture, identity and self-worth were derived from family, and now he was no longer Ali’s and Afeefa’s son. Omar had completely forfeited the acceptance and the protection of his clan. His inheritance was completely nullified. He was persona non grata in a country that would never accept his faith in Jesus the Messiah.”*<sup>12</sup>

His shortwave radio served as both his church and pastor for seven years. *“He had not met one Christian during that time.”*<sup>13</sup> At the end of those seven years he finally met Ibraahim, an underground Christian like himself. The two of them began an underground church, which eventually grew to fourteen members. This was a great blessing to Omar, since he had previously had no Christian fellowship. However, this blessing did not last long. His underground church was discovered and execution orders went out for all fourteen members (including Omar himself). One by one they were hunted down and eliminated. Ibraahim was the first martyr for Christ in their fourteen-member underground church. Omar left Somalia and came to Addis Ababa, where he came into contact with our ministry. In the end twelve were murdered in cold blood.

Mahdi, another believer, has since died of natural causes, leaving Omar as the only survivor of that underground Mogadishu church. We sponsored Omar in a Bible College in Addis Ababa, where he earned a Bachelor of Theology Degree. While attending college, he made a visit to Somalia and planted an underground church. He became our Somali Ministry leader and over a period of five years this one underground church became a network of twenty-five churches. Today it is estimated that there are approximately two hundred house-churches, fellowships or Bible study groups in the Somali peninsula, all operating underground. Omar attended a seminary in the USA, where he earned a Master of Divinity Degree. During the years working on his Master’s, he ministered to the Somalis in America. Even here in the United States Somalis are persecuted for faith in Christ, especially when news of this reaches their families back in Somalia. Today, Omar is serving as

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<sup>12</sup> Howie Shute (self), *“Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,”* (Nazarene Publishing House, 2014), p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 16.



a Global Missionary,<sup>14</sup> “where his influence and ministry has resulted in house churches all over the world, even in nations that are closed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup> He has also been used in the planting, development, and oversight of above ground churches in another country in Africa. **By faith Omar left family and clan to become a global influence for Christ.**

### **The Somali Church – Following the Voice of God Wherever It Takes Them**

Mohamed, a Somali living in the neighboring country of Djibouti, certainly finds his place as a viable candidate for the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. He grew up in a typical Muslim family, committed to the Qur’an and its teachings. Life was normal until one night in a dream he heard God speak to him, telling him that he should get a Bible and read it. He knew he had to obey this voice, even though it would bring great persecution if it was discovered he was reading this book. His family and friends would believe he was a Christian if he even possessed a Bible. He had no idea how he would obtain a Bible. He didn’t know even one Christian. One day as he was considering how he might safely obtain a Bible, he passed a stranger on the street. This man placed a book in his hands and told him, as he was passing, to read it. He told him that it would change his life. When he looked down at what the stranger had placed in his hands, Mohamed was shocked to see that it was a Bible. He knew that it must have been God that arranged this transaction.

Mohamed was fascinated as he read. Every night he spent hours in what he came to believe was the Word of God. He made a covenant with God to follow Jesus wherever it would take him. Shortly after becoming a Jesus follower he had another dream. In this dream God spoke to him again. This time telling him to leave Djibouti and go to the neighboring country of Ethiopia. God gave very specific instructions in this dream, calling out the city he was to go to, the church he should find, and two men he should look up when he got there. The faces of these two men were burned into his memory. Although his family did not understand why he was leaving home, Mohamed made this journey the very next day.

On arrival to the Ethiopian city of Dire Dawa he searched for the church until he found one that looked exactly like the one in his dream. He entered the church and found that a worship service was underway. He sat down quietly in the back until the service was concluded. Before anyone left their seats, he stood and relayed the whole story to the worshippers there. He told about his dreams and how he was led by God to this very church. He also talked about how he saw two men in his dream that he was supposed to talk to when he arrived. Then he pointed out these two men. They were both in the front of the church. They appeared exactly as he saw them in his dream. One of these men was the pastor of that church and the other was Omar, the Global Missionary whose story was told above.

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<sup>14</sup> For further information on Omar’s life and ministry, see my book, “*Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa*,” pp. 12-20.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

He met regularly with these two men. They disciplined him and gave him training in leading Muslims to Jesus using an underground strategy. Eventually, he left for another Muslim country, equipped and burdened in reaching Muslims wherever he might go. He was certain that God would continue to speak to him and guide him in the days ahead, just as he had brought him this far.<sup>16</sup> **By faith Mohamed followed the voice of God without knowing where it would take him.**

### **The Somali Church – Overcoming Ridicule of Family and Friends to Follow Jesus**

Farah is another deserving to be added to the list of the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. Her story is unique, but one where unbelief was replaced by a living faith in God. She grew up in Somalia in a good Muslim family. The routine of her life became everything but routine on the day she saw a vision. As she was entering the main living room of her home on this fateful day, she saw something written on the wall. *I Am the Bread of Life* was boldly printed there. No one could see this except for Farah. She pleaded with her mother, her father, and her brothers to look again and again. When friends would come to her home, she would ask them to read what was so prominently displayed there for all to see (as she had thought). Day after day Farah would see what no one else could see. Her family and all of her friends began to think that Farah was insane. Farah eventually believed that she was hallucinating.

Later she travelled to the neighboring country of Kenya. While walking on the street one day, she met a pastor there. He witnessed to Farah about the love of Jesus Christ. Feeling a little safer than she would have felt in her home country, she told the pastor about the whole story of her persisting hallucinations of seeing writing on the wall in her home. She then asked the pastor what the writing meant, telling him that it read *“I am the bread of life.”* The pastor smiled as he heard her mention this and turned in his Bible immediately to John 6:35. *“Farah was shocked when the pastor showed her the same words written on that page. It was only a matter of days before Farah knelt down in the pastor’s office, confessed her sins, and put her faith in Christ. Jesus, who had spoken these words centuries before, had spoken them again to Farah.”*<sup>17</sup> Farah’s story<sup>18</sup> (as well as Mohamed’s story) reminds us that God can reach anyone, even those living in societies where there is no Christian witness.

**By faith Farah overcame ridicule from family and friends and became a follower of Ciise.**

### **The Somali Church – Overcoming the Enemy and Impacting Muslims for Christ**

In my opinion, Faisal is a shoe-in for the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. He was a Somali, who lived on the streets of Djibouti. He had lost his mind because of his addiction to *khat*, *“a shrub (Catha edulis) of the staff-tree family that is cultivated in*

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<sup>16</sup> For further information on Mohamed’s life and ministry, see my book, *“Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,”* pp. 21-27.

<sup>17</sup> Howie Shute (self), *“Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,”* (Nazarene Publishing House, 2014), pp. 28-30.

<sup>18</sup> For further information on Farah’s amazing conversion, see my book, *“Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,”* pp. 28-30.

*the Middle East and Africa for its leaves and buds which are the source of a habituating stimulant when chewed or used as a tea.*<sup>19</sup> *“Chewing khat is part of some social traditions in parts of the Middle East, such as Yemen, and in Eastern Africa, such as Somalia.”*<sup>20</sup> Somalis are reportedly the leading users of this drug in the Africa continent. Many chew this drug until their mind no longer functions properly. *“Little by little, Faisal began to slip from reality.”*<sup>21</sup> He became a creature of the streets. No one would talk with him. He was completely lost until one day someone bent down and shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Who would have thought he would have understood the message? Who would have expected his response? Faisal not only gave his heart to Jesus and was restored to a relationship with him, but God restored his mind right there and then.

Faisal began to tell everyone there in Djibouti City that Jesus had touched him and saved him from his pitiful lostness. He became a great witness for Jesus in this Islamic nation. This was a very dangerous thing to do, especially for a Somali. That proved to be true when one day he was walking on the street and he noticed a policeman approaching. The policeman cried out to Faisal, *Christian?* When Faisal responded, yes, the policeman raised his weapon and fired a bullet into Faisal’s forehead. He dropped to the ground with blood gushing from his head. At first, he lay there motionless, but then he slowly got to his feet and stared into the policeman’s eyes. The policeman was shocked, and he cried out, *turn around and move away.* Faisal fully expected to get another bullet in the back as he slowly moved away from the policeman, but the bullet never came. No one knows if his pistol jammed and the policeman could not fire again, or if the policeman could not shoot in his dumbfounded state, or was it Jesus refusing to let the gun fire.

It is also not known how Faisal survived such a shooting. Did the bullet ricochet off the top of Faisal’s head? For certain, Faisal knew that God had saved his life. *“The word spread, and others began to plot Faisal’s death. Faisal knew that the only way he could live to tell others about Jesus was to leave his country and retreat from his enemies so he would live to fight again. It was a fight to speak to his Muslim brothers and sisters about Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.”*<sup>22</sup>

I first met Faisal in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He was enrolled in a Bible College there and after graduating with a Theology Degree, we hired him to act as our Radio Ministry Coordinator in our field office. Faisal oversaw radio broadcasts with the Gospel message being proclaimed back into Djibouti and Somalia, and throughout North Africa and the Middle East. What the enemy meant to stop him from preaching Jesus, God made into an open door for Faisal to take Jesus throughout the Islamic

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<sup>19</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/khat>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2020.

<sup>20</sup> ADF: Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Drug Facts List, <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/khat/>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Howie Shute (self), *“Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,”* (Nazarene Publishing House, 2014), p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.36.

world.<sup>23</sup> **By faith Faisal overcame the enemy's attack and impacted Muslims for Christ throughout Africa and the Middle East.**

### **The Somali Church – Breaking Generational Curses and Bringing Light into Darkness**

Sofia's story affords her entry into the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. Although she had not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, she was a sincere seeker and a member of a house church in Somaliland. The security of this house church became compromised. The pastor was the first to be arrested and then the imprisonment of the others followed. Four of them escaped Somaliland and came to Addis Ababa, where we put them in a safe house until it was safe for their return to their home country. It was not long before trouble arose in the safe house. The landlord from whom we rented this house complained about the noise at night, and even threatened to evict our four tenants. Our Somali leaders came to me and said that they believed that Sofia was demon-possessed. She apparently would cry out in pain all night long. *"She was normal much of the time, but in the evenings, she would go into a trance-like state. She would cry out in great pain, hold her stomach, and roll on the ground in agony."*<sup>24</sup> I found her like this, when I arrived at the house with three of our Somali leaders. It was apparent she was demon-possessed.

*"Our leaders had briefed me that Sofia came from an Islamic family that had allowed traditional beliefs to permeate their Islamic faith. In fact, Sofia's mother was a witch doctor, as her grandmother had been. The practice went back as far as the family could remember. Sofia was expected to follow in the footsteps of the women before her; that was her problem."*<sup>25</sup> There was a demonic stronghold on her family. Sofia's life had been destroyed by this stronghold. She was embarrassed and never told her underground church of her condition.

We began to pray and to demand the demon to go out of her in the name of Jesus. My three Somali friends and I continued over some time (which seemed like an eternity) to cast out this demon. It did not go quickly but it did go. After repeated attempts finally Sofia stopped groaning, and with a smile and a clear expression of peace coming over her face, she looked up at me and declared *Jesus is Lord*.<sup>26</sup> *"You might expect that we would break into celebration after such a prolonged struggle, but we didn't. We stood there in silence, knowing that Jesus had been in our midst. There was a holy hush that came upon those in Sofia's room that day. Our hearts were thankful, and we stood in absolute awe of our Jesus."*<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For further information on Faisal's life and ministry, see my book, *"Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,"* pp. 31-38.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.61.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed account of Sofia's story and the casting out this demon, see my book, *"Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,"* pp. 57-63.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

After six months Sofia and her three friends that fled persecution in Hargeisa, returned to Somaliland to continue their ministry for Jesus. For Sofia, she returned home with the generational curse finally broken. **By faith Sofia moved from darkness to light, breaking a generational curse that had destroyed generations of her family.**

### **The Somali Church – Giving Their Lives Willingly and Becoming Martyrs for Christ**

I saved until last the most certain of all entries to the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. Although Mansur's name was not included in Hebrews 11, I am certain that his name has been recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, as a man of faith who carried his cross, which ultimately led to his martyrdom. Mansur "...was a Sufi Muslim in a country with a predominantly Sunni population. As a Sufi, [he] believed that he could draw close to God and that his inner character would become purer through his experience with the divine."<sup>28</sup> While other men his age in Somalia were addicted to drugs and wasting their lives in idleness, Mansur took another road. He pursued righteous living. He was a hard-working man and was thought of very highly in his community. Even at a young age, his community considered him like an elder.

Mansur lived in a small town in Somalia. He did not know anyone who was a Christian, until he met Sahib who became his best friend. Gradually Sahib talked with Mansur about spiritual things, first discussing the teachings of the Qur'an, but finally transitioning into the Bible. Out of this relationship Mansur at the age of 22 became a follower of *Ciise*, and an ardent pursuer of heart purity. Mansur's life, although always outwardly righteous, began to display an inner purity. He became a very strong Christian, day by day being conformed more and more into the image of Christ. His love for others grew steadily, and he sought ways to express this love in tangible ways. He went to work for a compassionate ministries organization and served his people through practical ways to meet their temporal needs. He shared Jesus with others, but did so with an underground strategy to evangelize. For three years he was able to live out his Christian experience without becoming known publicly as a Christian. That came to an end one day when his faith became public knowledge. "*It was for that reason that some men stopped his car one day...*"<sup>29</sup> These men "...wore masks over their faces and dragged him before the villagers in a nearby community."<sup>30</sup> Mansur was given a choice. Over and over again he was given the chance to renounce his faith in Christ. He was told that if he would repent and turn back to Islam, he would live. If he would not turn back to Islam, he would lose his head. Mansur refused to deny Jesus, and there before the horrified villagers assembled as witnesses that day, a cruel knife sawed away until his head broke free from his neck and shoulders. That day Mansur<sup>31</sup> joined Somalis martyred before him

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> I've used Mansur's real name in this paper, since he no longer lives and obviously faces no further security threat.

because of their undying faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> **By faith Mansur faced death victoriously and joined the throng of martyrs for Christ who gave their lives willingly for their Savior Jesus.**

### Conclusion

I have told the stories of only seven Somalis that I believe easily make the Somali *Faith Hall of Fame*. This list is not all inclusive. I could tell you about many more that belong in this *Faith Hall of Fame*. Many are undoubtedly even more deserving than some I have listed herein. The seven are only illustrative of the kind of commitment and faith that I have found in the Somali Church. My life has been impacted more than I could ever say by Somali believers. I hold the Somali Church up as second to none. I love these men and women, who have abandoned their lives completely to follow Jesus. They are examples for Christians in the Western World, not to cause us embarrassment for our own spiritual shortcomings, but as examples to follow. The Apostle Paul said, *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”* (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV). It is my sincere belief that the Somali Church is crying out to the Western World, *follow our example, as we follow Christ*. Such lives of faith deserve to be included in an addendum to Hebrews 11.

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### About the author



Dr. Howie Shute has an engineering background, working as a manufacturing executive for twelve years before God’s calling to full-time ministry. He holds a Master of Divinity Degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary and an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Africa Nazarene University. After his call to ministry and his theological training, Dr. Shute served as a pastor for fourteen years and as a global missionary for fifteen years. He has been involved in several movements of God that have given rise to explosive church growth. Dr. Shute’s broad but distinctly unique experience has made him a popular speaker throughout the world. His preaching and teaching are filled with stories of God working miraculously through ordinary people. He has authored three books on mission, along with various magazine articles and journal papers. Dr. Shute has recently heard God calling him to give his life to intercessory prayer for his family, the Church and the world. The author can be reached at [howieshute@mac.com](mailto:howieshute@mac.com).

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<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed account of Mansur’s story and his beheading, see my book, *“Underground: Stories of the Persecuted Church in Africa,”* pp. 77-86. Also, a low-quality video, taken by one of his persecutors with his cell phone was published on the internet and is available at: *“Mansur Mohamed: SFJ Martyr of the Years (2008).”* Somali For Jesus. January 13, 2009 <https://somalisforjesus.blogspot.com/2009/01/mansur-mohamed-sfj-martyr-of-year-2009.html> (accessed 11 April 2021).

## Socio-cultural Barriers to Evangelical Missions among the Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia<sup>1</sup>

Naol Befkadu Kebede

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### **Abstract:**

This study is an exploration of the cultural barriers against evangelical missionaries working among the Somalis in the Somali region of Ethiopia. This study examines how evangelical missionaries have adapted to the Somali culture and prevailed against the challenges encountered and fulfilled the mission to which they were entrusted. For this study, open-ended questionnaires were sent to missionary respondents who have been working in the Somali region. The procedural approach for the study followed the Delphi method. The results revealed that the socio-cultural barriers significantly affected the missionaries' endeavor and their progress to adapt to the culture and overcome cultural barriers. Of the challenges, high socio-cultural barriers, language, religion, and lack of an adequate financial and contextual training empowerment from the sending churches or organizations were suggested as hindrance to their mission efforts in the Somali region. This was justified by the respondents of the fieldwork which contributed to the lower or lesser success rate in evangelizing the Somali people. This study suggested that learning from this lesser success, the sending churches and organizations need to equip and empower their missionaries with an adequate missiologically informed trainings. The missionaries also need sufficient funding and serious follow-up of their health and ministry to help them fulfill their mission responsibility in the Somali region.

**Key Terms:** Somali, Somali-Muslim, Cultural Barrier, Cultural Distance, Cultural Tightness

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<sup>1</sup> This journal article is a summary of MA thesis submitted to Leadstar Theological College, Ethiopia, on August 2020.

## Introduction

The Somali State is the 5<sup>th</sup> regional state under the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It covers much of the traditional territory of the Ogaden and formed a large part of the pre-1995 province of Hararghe. The population is predominantly Somali and there have been attempts to incorporate the area into a Greater Somalia under Siyad Barre, the socialist ruler of postcolonial Somalia.<sup>2</sup>

Until the first-ever district election in February 2004, Zonal and woreda administrators, and village chairmen were appointed by the Regional government. Previously, senior politicians at the Regional level would nominate their clients to the local government positions. In the 2004 local elections, each woreda elected a council including a spokesman, vice-spokesman, administrator, and vice-administrator. These councils have the responsibility of managing budgets and development activities within their respective districts.

Based on the 2007 census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the Somali Region had a total population of 4,445,219, consisting of 2,472,490 men and 1,972,729 women. From these 623,004 or 14.02% were urban inhabitants and 1,687,858 or 37.97% pastoralists. With an estimated area of 279,252 square kilometers, this region has an estimated density of 15.9 people per square kilometer. For the entire region 685,986 households were counted, which results in an average for the Region of 6.8 persons to a household, with urban households having on average 6 and rural households 6.5 people. Totally the Somalis are about (97.2%). Other people groups, Amhara (0.66%), Oromo (0.46%), foreign-born Somalis (0.20%) and Gurages (0.12%), live in the region. The population was projected to be 5,748,998 in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

## The Culture and Lifestyle of the Somalis

With a long tradition of trading connections to the Arabian Peninsula, the Somalis were converted to Islam at an early date and remained staunch Muslims (Sunnis of the Shafi'i school of law). This is reflected in the traditional practice of tracing descent from illustrious Arab ancestors connected to the family of the Prophet Muhammad. Its modern expression can be seen in Somalia's membership, since 1974, of the Arab League.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Haji Mukhtar Mohamed, 'Islam in Somali History: Fact or Fiction', in *The Invention of Somalia*, ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 132, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/4147920/islam-in-somali-history-fact-and-fiction-center-for-peace-building->.

<sup>3</sup> Andrias Abebe, 'Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Central Statistical Agency Population Projection of Ethiopia for All Regions At Wereda Level from 2014 – 2017', accessed 16 March 2021, [https://www.academia.edu/30252151/Federal\\_Democratic\\_Republic\\_of\\_Ethiopia\\_Central\\_Statistical\\_Agency\\_Population\\_Projection\\_of\\_Ethiopia\\_for\\_All\\_Regions\\_At\\_Wereda\\_Level\\_from\\_2014\\_2017](https://www.academia.edu/30252151/Federal_Democratic_Republic_of_Ethiopia_Central_Statistical_Agency_Population_Projection_of_Ethiopia_for_All_Regions_At_Wereda_Level_from_2014_2017).

<sup>4</sup> I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (London: Longman, 2008), 15.



According to some linguistic criteria, an earlier movement of 'Proto-Somali' speakers brought the Somali language from Ethiopia to the Horn, before the general drift of the Somali population from the north to the South.<sup>5</sup> One of the major routes in this later movement has been from the northeast coast of the Sanaag region, where some of the legendary founders of the main clan groups are believed to be buried. Another principal route, frequently mentioned in the oral tradition of the Somali, is by way of the ancient Islamic citadel of Harar, where tombs venerated as those of the ancestors of other Somali groups lie (Lewis 2008:15). Somali is the working language and predominantly spoken within the region by 95.9% of the inhabitants. Other languages included Afaan Oromoo (2.24%), Amharic (0.92%), and Guragigna (0.033%).

Over a thousand years ago, Arab and Persian trading settlements (where goods came from as far afield as China) had been established at such coastal centers as Zeila in the north (on the route to Harar) and in the south at Mogadishu (where the great mosque dates from the thirteenth century). Further south along the coast Merca and Brava are of similar antiquity. These Muslim centers of commerce, reinforcing the Islamic identity of the Somali people, also appeared to have given an additional impetus to population movements towards the west and south.<sup>6</sup>

As far as documentary evidence is concerned, Somalis first came into secure focus in the written records of the middle ages. Eyewitnesses documented their role in the protracted 'holy wars' (jihads), which raged in the late middle age between Christian Ethiopia and the surrounding Islamic sultanates. At their peak in the sixteenth century, from his base in Harar, the great Islamic leader Ahmad Gurey ('Ahmad the left-handed', known to the Ethiopians as 'Ahmad Gagn') briefly conquered much of the central Abyssinian highlands. The recovery of Christian Ethiopia was decisively helped by the intervention of their Christian allies of the Portuguese.<sup>7</sup> Ali Abdurahman argued that Somalis were entirely Islamized by the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, 98.7%, 0.9% and 0.3% are Muslims, Orthodox Christians followers of other religions from the whole population.

### **Evangelical Missions among the Somali People Particularly in the Somali Region**

Evangelical Christianity has a very brief history among the Somali people in the Horn of Africa. There are scholars who argue in favor of pre-Islamic Judeo-Christian history of the Somali people.<sup>9</sup> According to these scholars archeological and written sources indicate that the Somali people had contact with Christianity before they

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis, 312.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Abdurahman Hersi, 'The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influences in the Somali Peninsula' (Ph.D. Dissertation, Los Angeles, University of California, 1977), 109–41.

<sup>9</sup> Ben I. Aram, 'Somalia's Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey', *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 22, no. 4 (2003).

were Islamized.<sup>10</sup> Other sources also indicate that earlier in the 12<sup>th</sup> century there might have been Christians in Zeila (then 'Socotra'). These Christians had also similar fasting season like the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) which may indicate that the EOC mission had reached the Somalis in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Levine (1974: 71) notes that Seylac was part of the Aksumite Empire in the 900's and fell to the Arabs finally re-conquered it in the early 15th century. The Southward expansion of Christianity to both Eastern Highland Cushitic peoples (Hadiya, Kambata, Sidamo) and Omotic (Wolaitta, Kafa) began in the 13th century with the work of the famous Ethiopian missionary, Takle Haimanot.<sup>11</sup> This southern penetration of Christianity continued in the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>12</sup> Hence, some scholars argue that Christianity cannot be labeled as a recent arrival among the Somalis.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the Somalis were entirely Islamized by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

In the modern era of Christian mission, the first Christian missionaries to work among the Somalis were Catholics who arrived in Somalia around 1881.<sup>15</sup> The Catholics had a significant and effective mission work among the Somali people especially in the area of development. Venanzio Francesco Filippini, the RCC Bishop of Mogadishu, reported in 1940 a membership of 40,000 Somali Catholics in the southern Bantu regions of Juba and Shebelle.<sup>16</sup> They also translated parts of the scriptures into the Somali language although the Somali language had no official script until 1972.<sup>17</sup>

The first Protestant body to arrive among the Somalis was the Swedish Overseas Mission and the Swedish Evangelical Mission (SEM), on their way to reach the Oromos in Ethiopia through the south, stationed at Kismaayo, Jubaland, in 1898.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the SEM succeeded in reaching the Oromos, and opened a station at

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, 16.

<sup>11</sup> E. Paul Balisky, 'Wolaitta Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovations in Southern Ethiopia, 1937-1975' (PhD. Thesis, Scotland, University of Aberdeen, 1997), 36–42.

<sup>12</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 73; Haile Getachew, 'Ethiopian Christian Captives in the Territory of the Arami', in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Sven Rubensen (International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1984), 113.

<sup>13</sup> Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*.

<sup>14</sup> Ulrich Braukamper, 'A Vanishing Socio-Religious System: Fandano of the Hadiya', in *Proceedings of the XIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Fukui Katsuyosi, Shigeta Masayoshi, and Eisei Kurimoto, vol. 2 (XIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Japan, 1997), 31; Hersi, 'The Arab Factor in Somali History', 109–41.

<sup>15</sup> Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William. Bromiley, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Illustrated Edition, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Leiden, Netherlands: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia: Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> B.W Andrzejewski, 'Biblical Translations and Other Christian Writings in Somali: A Survey' (Afrikanistische Arbeitspapier 21, 1090), 105–21.

<sup>18</sup> Andreas Tyrberg, 'Kyrka i Jubaland? EFS Missionsfa Lt i Jubaland 1904-1935' (Missionsvetenskap e-uppsats, Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 2014).

Kismaayo to reach the Somalis living in the British-Kenya.<sup>19</sup> The SEM missionaries were able to plant churches with more than 400 Somali converts with notable ones as Daher Bin Abdi and Musa Yusuf.<sup>20</sup> Per Olsson, an SEM missionary, translated the gospels of Mark and Luke into Somali in 1915 and 1929 respectively with the help of Daher Bin Abdi and Musa Yusuf.<sup>21</sup> The translation works were published by British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). The SEM missionaries, however, were expelled from Somalia when Fascist Italy took control of Somalia.<sup>22</sup>

After Fascist Italy was expelled from Ethiopia and Somalia, the Ogaden region was formally given to Ethiopia under the treaty between Ethiopia and Britain in 1949. The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), the Mennonite Mission under Eastern Mennonite Mission and Mennonite Central Committee started their mission work in the 1950s in different parts of the Ogaden and Somalia.<sup>23</sup> The SIM reached the Somalis in the Ogaden region and planted churches.<sup>24</sup> The Mennonites, which later gave birth to the Meserete Kristos Church, also planted churches in Dire Dawa and were very active in Somalia.<sup>25</sup> The Mennonites had their first martyr in 1962 when a fanatic Muslim man stabbed a 33-year-old Canadian born missionary, Merlin Grove, to death in Mogadishu.<sup>26</sup>

The SIM completed the Somali translation of the New Testament in 1966 and the Old Testament in 1977.<sup>27</sup> The Latin-based script of the Somali language was officialized in 1972 under the Siyad Barre government.<sup>28</sup> In 1974, the military rule of Siyad Barre had expelled many missionaries from Somalia and confiscated their properties.<sup>29</sup> Later on, in 1979 the military junta that ruled Ethiopia known as Derg, did the same by expelling the missionaries.<sup>30</sup> The Christian mission was mostly affected in the Ogaden region (and Somalia) as a result of the Ethio-Somali war (also known as the Ogaden War) of 1977-78. Many Somalis were displaced from the Ogaden region to Somalia and as a result famine ensued in the area.<sup>31</sup> The

<sup>19</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, Illustrated edition (Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Tyrberg, 'Kyrka i Jubaland? EFS Missionsfa Lt i Jubaland 1904-1935'.

<sup>21</sup> Tyrberg.

<sup>22</sup> i detta tecken evangeliska fosterlands-stiftelsen 150 år. 35 ("SEM's 150 years" published in Swedish.

<sup>23</sup> Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement In Somalia*.

<sup>24</sup> Helen M Willmott, *The Doors Were Opened* (London: Sudan Interior Mission, 1950).

<sup>25</sup> 'Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa', in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts* (Intercourse, Pa: Good Books, 2006), 207–10.

<sup>26</sup> Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, 'The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)' (PhD. Thesis, Montreal, Institute of the Islamic Studies, McGill University, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Peter M. Sensenig, *Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Andrzejewski, 'Biblical Translations and Other Christian Writings in Somali: A Survey', 105–21.

<sup>29</sup> David W. Shenk and Ahmed Ali Haile, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Getachew Belete, 'Elohi Ena Haleluya, Ye Kale Hiwot Betekirstian', *Tarik* 1 (1992).

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, 71.

missionary doctor, Tibebe Haileselassie, who upon graduation from Addis Ababa University went to Kebridehar, the Ogaden with his wife, Lishan Agonafer, to serve and reach the Somali people with the Gospel, was taken as a captive by the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF) to Somalia where he served in a Somali prison as a doctor and teacher for 11 years. Dr. Tibebe was a member of the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church, an indigenous Pentecostal church that was established in 1967 in Addis Ababa.<sup>32</sup> Until the downfall of the Derg regime, much of the mission work in the Ogaden area was halted due to the harsh treatment of Protestants especially the Pentecostals by the military government.

After the downfall of the Derg in May 1991, the Somali region became the 5<sup>th</sup> region of the country's new ethnic based regions. Many Ethiopian Evangelical churches which were running their works underground for many years became public.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church (EFGBC) made the first appearance in the Somali region in 1992 by planting the first church in Jijiga. Following EFGBC, Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) planted their denominational churches in the region.

Currently, there are eleven planted denominational churches under the Evangelical Churches' Fellowship of Jijiga alone. From these the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKHC), Ethiopian Guenet Church (EGC), and Ethiopian Assembly of God (EAoG) have planted their churches in many zones and towns of the Somali region of Ethiopia. There is no evangelical church that operates its service in the Somali language in the region.

Para church ministries such as Horn of Africa Evangelical Mission Engagers (HoAEME) and Somali Believers' Fellowship (SBF) also operate in the region through their home missionaries. Even after the declaration of freedom of religion in Ethiopia by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in 1995, the Somali region still remains as among the least evangelized region in the country with 0.06% of evangelical presence almost all of whom are non-Somali residents in the region.<sup>34</sup> The main reason for the low number of conversions is said to be the socio-cultural barriers between missionaries who are sent from different parts of Ethiopia to Somali region and the Somalis who inhabit the region.

### **Culture and Mission**

The importance of studying the relationship of the missionaries' culture and that of their host cultures has been raised by a number of scholars. Finley writes:

Once missiologists start thinking about the factors in the missionary's native culture that should be taken into account in designing their training, the logical

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<sup>32</sup> Lishan Agonafir, Tibebe Yemidrebedaw Eregna, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Belete, 'Elohi Ena Haleluya, Ye Kale Hiwot Betekirstian'.

<sup>34</sup> 2007 National Census.

([http://www.csa.gov.et/index.php?option=com\\_rubberdoc&view=doc&id=274&format=raw&Itemid=52](http://www.csa.gov.et/index.php?option=com_rubberdoc&view=doc&id=274&format=raw&Itemid=52) 1: (accessed 11 April 2020).

next step is to apply those same cultural factors in deciding where in the world missionaries from any given country are likely to be more effective. This could be done by comparing and contrasting characteristics of the missionary's native culture with characteristics of possible host cultures.<sup>35</sup>

Keyes and Pate further assert that there is a greater general cultural proximity between missionaries from the majority world and their host cultures.<sup>36</sup> While ethnographers list religion as one category of culture, I would add two biblical considerations. First, culture, like the human body, is one complex integrated whole. You may dissect a body and analyze its parts; but stub your toe and your whole body reacts. Similarly, although some anthropologists view religion as superstition or magic, they agree that religion affects all of culture.

One of the principal goals of many missionaries is to bring the Gospel to people groups who have yet to respond positively, in line with Matthew. 28:19–20.<sup>37</sup> However, the Gospel is resisted in many cultures and missionaries may find that few people are willing to put their faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup> Recent research in social psychology, cultural psychology, anthropology, and biology concerning cultural tightness-looseness,<sup>39</sup> one of the more well-defined dimensions describing cultures, provides insights into why some cultures are more closed to the Gospel and what missionaries can do to better demonstrate Christ's love to people from such cultures.<sup>40</sup>

Tight cultures have strong expectations concerning adherents to social norms and little tolerance for deviance from them. Loose cultures, in contrast, have fewer expectations for conformity and may even encourage new forms of behavior and social interactions. Cultural tightness is defined as “the strength of social norms and

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<sup>35</sup> Donald K. Finley, 'Contextualized Training for Missionaries: A Brazilian Model' (PhD Dissertation, Asbury, Asbury Theological Seminar, 2005), 250.

<sup>36</sup> Larry E. Keyes and Larry D. Pate, 'Two-Thirds World Missions: The Next 100 Years', *Missiology* 21, no. 2 (1 April 1993): 191, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969302100205>.

<sup>37</sup> Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> G. Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2001), <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/cultures-consequences/book9710>; Harry C. Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior*, First Printing edition (New York: McGraw-Hill College, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Mert Aktas, Michele J. Gelfand, and Paul J. Hanges, 'Cultural Tightness–Looseness and Perceptions of Effective Leadership', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 47, no. 2 (1 February 2016): 294–309, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115606802>; Sandra Carpenter, 'Effects of Cultural Tightness and Collectivism on Self-Concept and Causal Attributions', *Cross-Cultural Research* 34, no. 1 (1 February 2000): 38–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106939710003400103>; Nicolas Geeraert et al., 'A Tight Spot: How Personality Moderates the Impact of Social Norms on Sojourner Adaptation', *Psychological Science* 30, no. 3 (1 March 2019): 333–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618815488>; Alissa J. Mrazek et al., 'The Role of Culture–Gene Coevolution in Morality Judgment: Examining the Interplay between Tightness–Looseness and Allelic Variation of the Serotonin Transporter Gene', *Culture and Brain* 1 (2013): 100–117, <https://doi.org/10.1007/S40167-013-0009-X>.

<sup>40</sup> Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*; Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior*.

degree of sanctioning within societies.”<sup>41</sup> People in tight cultures have less variation in their behavior and are held more accountable for their behavior than people in loose cultures. This tightness spills over into organizations and other institutions, resulting in less variety and innovation within the culture. Tightness-looseness can be viewed as composed of two dimensions: (1) the strength of norms, depending on how clear and pervasive they are in the culture, and (2) the strength of sanctioning, depending on the degree to which deviance attracts negative responses.

Cultural tightness-looseness was first described by Berry and Pelto who classified the Japanese, Hutterites, and Pueblo Indians as tight cultures with strong social norms and with severe sanctions for violation of them.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, the Skolt Lapps of Finland, Thais, and modern western cultures were classified as loose because of their lack of formality and order and their tolerance for deviant behavior. Triandis then described it as one of the three main dimensions of culture (along with collectivism and complexity).<sup>43</sup> More recently, Michelle Gelfand of the University of Maryland and colleagues have been studying cultural tightness-looseness in depth.<sup>44</sup>

David R. Dunaetz indicates that radical Islam tends to flourish in tight cultures. He lists suicide bombing as a manifestation of the cultural tightness seen in radical Islamic cultures.<sup>45</sup> With predominantly Islamic nature of the Somali culture, it is a must to understand whether the Somali culture is tight or not. Understanding the main elements of the Somali culture will help us understand the tightness of the culture to missionary endeavor.

## Method

A qualitative research approach was chosen for the purpose of data collection for this study. The process of research involves empirical work being carried out with the collection of data which can concur, refute or contest theories which in turn allows for understanding and clarification for different observations.<sup>46</sup> Qualitative research involves a process known as induction, whereby data is collected relating to a specific area of study and from this data the researcher constructs different concepts

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<sup>41</sup> Michele Gelfand, Lisa Nishii, and Jana Raver, 'On the Nature and Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness', *The Journal of Applied Psychology* 91 (1 December 2006): 1226, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1225>.

<sup>42</sup> J. W. Berry, 'Independence and Conformity in Subsistence-Level Societies', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 7, no. 4, Pt.1 (1967): 415–18, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025231>; Pertii J. Pelto, 'The Differences between "Tight" and "Loose" Societies', *Trans-Action* 5, no. 5 (1 April 1968): 37–40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03180447>.

<sup>43</sup> Harry C. Triandis, 'The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts', *Psychological Review* 96, no. 3 (1989): 506–20, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.96.3.506>; Triandis, *Culture and Social Behavior*.

<sup>44</sup> Geeraert et al., 'A Tight Spot'; Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver, 'On the Nature and Importance of Cultural Tightness-Looseness'.

<sup>45</sup> David R. Dunaetz, 'Cultural Tightness-Looseness: Its Nature and Missiological Applications', *Missiology* 47, no. 4 (1 October 2019): 410–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829619875940>.

<sup>46</sup> May, *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Research*, 2nd edition (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 1997).

and theories. Thus, a qualitative approach was considered as it allowed greater capacity to gain more in-depth and meaningful data on the missionaries' experiences of the Somali socio-cultural challenge and its impacts on missions than a quantitative approach which is more structured in scale and numerically based data collection.

Moreover, qualitative research approach relates to the perceptions to the social world.<sup>47</sup> The data was collected through the open-ended questions which reveal the way things are.<sup>48</sup> The purpose of the Delphi method is to, "...obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts."<sup>49</sup> The Delphi method is named after the Greek Oracle at Delphi, and has been adapted in studies to allow anonymity; eliminate confrontation, group domination, and geographical barriers; and most importantly, it allows researchers to measure the level of agreement on the issue under consideration.<sup>50</sup> This method illuminates instructional strategies used to promote social presence from an expert perspective. To be considered experts for the purposes of the Delphi in this study, participants meet the criterion described in the procedure below.

In a Delphi study, the researcher sets the criterion and selects the experts who are qualified to answer the questions. The researcher then administers the questions and combines all the responses for data analysis. The respondents are kept anonymous to each other but not to the researcher. The size of the Delphi group does not depend on statistical power; thus, the literature recommends 10 to 18 on a Delphi panel. The Delphi method can ask participants to validate the researcher's interpretation of their responses. "In addition to the richness issues of traditional surveys, Delphi studies inherently provide richer data because of their multiple interactions and their response revision due to feedback. Moreover, in Delphi research method participants are open to the interviewer."<sup>51</sup> The data-gathering was done using open-ended questions that the participants completed at their own pace and had time for reflection. In this method the participants are expected to describe the experience of the challenge of Somali culture and its impacts and how the missionaries have dealt with the issue.

The participants of this study were 10 missionaries working in the Somali context. Before describing the methods of data collection, let me offer a brief description of the participants.

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<sup>47</sup> Max van Manen, 'Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical', *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (1977): 28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1179579>.

<sup>48</sup> M. Gall, Joyce Gall, and Walter Borg, *Educational Research: An Introduction*, 6th edition (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers, 1996).

<sup>49</sup> Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer, 'An Experimental Application of the DELPHI Method to the Use of Experts', *Management Science* 9, no. 3 (1 April 1963): 458, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.9.3.458>.

<sup>50</sup> Dalkey and Helmer, 458.

<sup>51</sup> Chitu Okoli and Suzanne D. Pawlowski, 'The Delphi Method as a Research Tool: An Example, Design Considerations and Applications', *Information & Management* 42, no. 1 (1 December 2004): 15–29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2003.11.002>.

The participants were selected with four criteria: (1) they have to be working in the Somali region. (2) They have to be present in the Somali region at the time this research was being carried out. (3) They should be able to communicate online since there were travel and meeting restrictions due to Covid-19 pandemic. (4) They were willing enough to participate in the research.

Of the ten missionaries, four were women. All of them were present in the region at the time this research was being conducted. Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Jigjiga, Horn of Africa Evangelical Mission Engagers and the mission organization called 10/40 Ministries were interviewed via email and phone calls to provide information about the Somali region mission endeavor. Accordingly, 10 missionaries (six males and four females) were selected who reasonably meet the criteria to participate in the study. The questions which were prepared in English and Amharic were emailed to each participant. To protect the anonymity of the respondents the name of the participant would be carefully kept. The received responses were anonymously combined and would be ready for further analysis.

## Result and Discussion

### Culture Differences and Cultural Distance between the Missionaries and their Host (Somali) Culture

The category 1 of the open-ended questionnaire tried to understand the cultural difference between the missionaries and the Somali culture. As indicated from the data, none of the missionaries were ethnic Somalis; hence, some degree of cultural distance was already presumed. Regarding the degree of cultural distance in relation to evangelism, Engel and Norton described the E1 to E4 principle to help missionaries understand cultural distances between the missionaries and their host culture.<sup>52</sup> E1 is the host culture that is closest to the missionary. E2 is culturally more distant. E3 would be more distant, and E4 very distant. Accordingly, it is more difficult to evangelize E1 than E4.

The questionnaires measured the cultural aspects of race, economics, time, communication, family, relationship, hospitality, and spiritual worldview in both the Somali-Muslim and evangelical missionaries' home contexts. While a study of the relevant literature has been foundational, the theme analysis has been founded on the descriptions of non-Somali transcultural workers (missionaries) at work in the Somali-Muslim context.

It has become evident that there are some definite differences between the cultures of the Somalis and that of the missionaries. These have been most notable in the areas of conflict resolution, time, work, verbal communication, building relationship and marriage pattern. On the other hand, some aspects of Somalis and the missionaries' cultures are rather similar. The strongest areas seem to be hospitality

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<sup>52</sup> James F. Engel and Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong With the Harvest?: A Communication Strategy for the Church and World Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).



and nonverbal communication. It has also become apparent that the missionary from Jijiga (respondent D) culturally seems to be closest to the Somali people. This was especially evident when considering the cultural aspects of economy, time, family, and relationships. In short, as the missionaries have described their experiences, it seems that there is some favorable continuity between the cultures of the missionaries and the Somali-Muslim context in which they serve.

It is undeniable that the result from the questionnaires demonstrates that there was a significant cultural distance between the missionaries and their host (Somali) culture. Majority of the missionaries responded that there was a huge difference between their home cultural understanding of time, work, verbal communication, building relationship and resolving conflict. This informs that the Somali culture is an E4 culture to evangelical missionaries working in the area, and the work needed to evangelize the Somalis is bigger.

Regarding the degree of comfortability, 50% of the respondents were comfortable working in the Somali culture of which all except one were female respondents (40% of the total). Hence, generally speaking, female missionaries were able to adapt to the Somali culture more than the male missionaries although the average experience of the female missionaries was 1-2 years (in contrast to the males 2-4 years). A majority of the missionaries also found the work habit, the loudness of their voice and the marriage (wedding ceremony) tradition of the Somalis generally difficult. Some of the difficulties are not only difficulties but also unadaptable traditions. For example, although a missionary might adapt to the loudness of the voices of the Somalis, it is biblically and morally incorrect to adapt to the polygamous nature of their marriage or that of the "laziness to work" as described by the missionaries.

Those inadaptable traditions, added to the already existing cultural distance between the missionaries and the Somali culture, seem to make a huge cultural barrier to the propagation of the Gospel for salvation in the Somali region. Although the Somali culture, regarded as E4, can be very difficult for evangelization, the ideal culturally adaptable missionary seems female (respondents D, E, H and I) and born in Jijiga (D), which can give a very good cultural exposure and inherently good adaptable nature to the missionary growing up in the region. This does not mean there is generally no trait in the Somali culture to form a spontaneous bridge or communication with foreign culture. In fact, one missionary admired the communication ability of the Somalis. Other respondents (50%) were fond of the Somalis love and support for each other. Some missionaries also liked the dressing style and the modesty of the Somali women (20%). Perhaps such appreciations, accompanied with the motivation to overcome the cultural barriers, can lessen the ethnocentric tendency in the missionaries' mind and help immensely in the evangelization of the Somali people.

### **The Missionaries' Progress at Remaining in the Mission Field**

This category 2 of the open-ended questionnaire asked how the missionaries were responding the cultural, physical and spiritual requirement in the mission field. Therefore, this category was discussed under three fundamental questions: the

missionaries' life, the missionaries' effort and the sending church/organization's effort to overcome the challenges in the mission field.

### **The Missionaries' Life**

This constituted the physical, spiritual and family lives of the missionaries. A majority of the respondents said that they had healthy to very healthy spiritual/physical health. However, two missionaries mentioned that the salty nature of the water in the Somali region has been a threat to their physical health. One missionary (respondent A) specifically indicated that he has suffered from kidney problem due to the water in the Somali region.

The missionaries' health should be given a priority by the senders as well as by the missionary himself. Unless the missionary is safe and alive, he/she could not reach the host culture. Hence, adaptability to the physical environment of the host culture, in order to cope with the environment and stay as a missionary, is a very necessary thing. Regarding the spiritual health, all the missionaries indicated that they have a healthy to very healthy spiritual health. This is more evidenced when we see how they were engaging in spiritual warfare and prayer. Even though not all indicated to have a strategized prayer, they all said they pray. Some (20%) specifically indicated the strategies of their spiritual warfare.

Overall, majority of the missionaries were doing great in their personal lives maintaining very good physical, family and spiritual aspects of their lives. This also indicated the balanced nature of their ministry giving the necessary time and space to respective aspects of their lives which in turn saves the missionaries from burnout.

### **The Missionaries' Effort**

This constituted the language proficiency and ministerial positions of the missionaries. The results of the survey with 10 evangelical missionaries serving in the Somali-Muslim context showed that their main areas of ministry included evangelism (90%), discipleship and teaching (30%), church planting (30%), humanitarian aid (20%), and prayer and spiritual warfare ministry (10%). This shows that most cross-cultural missionaries to the Somalis are engaged in evangelistic activity. This cross-cultural evangelism is, however, accompanied by church planting or discipleship only in 30% of the time. This has to be also understood alongside with the success of the missionaries that only 30% said they were successful in evangelizing. Most were successful in establishing communication with the native Somalis. Evangelism was also the preferred ministry for the short experienced since the average experience of those who said evangelism was their main ministry is 1-2 years, however, those who had more experience had added either church planting or discipleship and teaching.

The nature of evangelism as a communication has helped the missionaries to establish relationship as well as to gain proficiency in the language; however, unless it is accompanied by discipleship or church planting effectiveness, long-lasting mission cannot be established. Regarding the proficiency of the Somali language, 40% said they were doing below average while 50% said they were average and

10% said “poor”. None of the respondents were excellent in their language proficiency. Although the Somali language, with its Arabic influence and different dialects, is difficult to master in short time, even those who had stayed for more than 10 years did not attain an “excellent” proficiency in the Somali language. Generally speaking, Somalis appreciate the efforts of foreigners to master their difficult language.<sup>53</sup>

If missionaries are able to equip themselves with the Somali language, this would provide them a very good opening in their evangelistic endeavor towards the Somalis. The importance of language proficiency should be included in the missionary training. For example, respondent (F) has been serving in the Somali context for more than 5 years; however, he admitted his Somali was poor. He also indicated that he should have had a very good preparation regarding the language beforehand. Ethiopian churches and mission agencies need to train (or fund) beforehand their cross-cultural missionaries to learn the language of the host culture in the mission field.

### **The Sending Church/Organization’s Effort**

Under this part, the care provided to the missionary by sending agency, before and during the mission activity was discussed. Before the missionary came to the Somali region, the care provided by the sending agency (church or organization), had to be in the form of training. Regarding the preparation, 70% of the missionaries said they had an “inadequate” preparation before coming to the Somali region. This should be understood with the fact that all of the missionaries, although working in the tight culture of the Somalis, are from different parts of Ethiopia. After the missionaries arrived in the Somali region the care provided by their senders took different forms starting from prayer ministry to regular encouragement to financial support. Here, 80% of the missionaries said they received inadequate support or care from their senders. Adding to this fact, one missionary (i.e., respondent G) indicated that he was only contacted by his senders during the yearly report. Evidently, the support from the sending church or organization was beneath the average. This has hindered the missionaries’ mission progress by overcoming the socio-cultural barriers in the mission field.

Regarding their current need, 90% of the respondents said they had current lacks in their mission activity. Among the things the missionaries listed: a fund to learn language, financial support, regular phone call or encouragement, training on Muslim evangelism, prayer, and a cover job are listed by the missionaries. This gives a yellow light on Ethiopian churches’ treatments of their cross-cultural missionaries. For example, some missionaries asked to fund to learn the Somali language which has a direct effect on their battle against the cultural barrier to reach the Somali people with the Gospel. Others asked training on Muslim evangelism. Others asked a cover job that connects them directly to the Somali community. All these have a huge impact on the course of the missionaries’ progress to overcome the cultural

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<sup>53</sup> Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia*, 24.

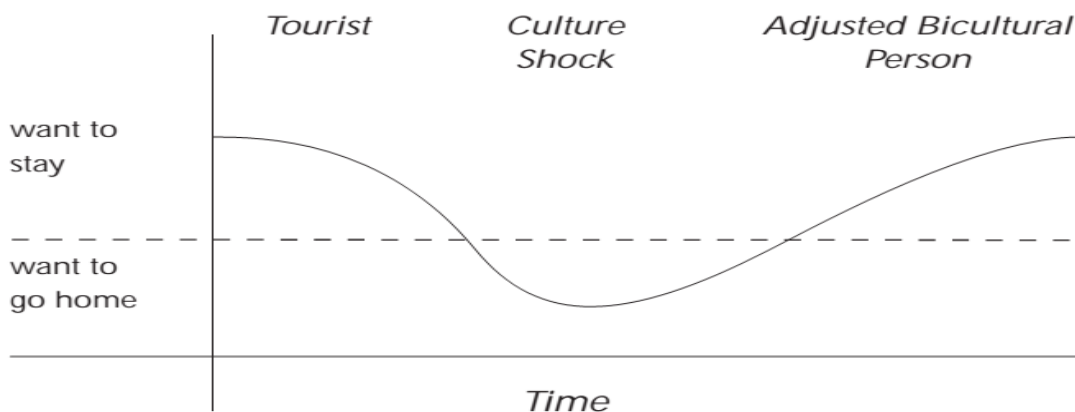
barriers. Nonetheless, sending churches' check up on their missionaries has not been found to be satisfactory and a huge work is needed to be done. This is also further indicated by the missionaries' last comment on the questionnaire where some missionaries said to learn the language and culture before going to cross-cultural missions as mandatory. On the other hand, other missionaries also condemned the report-only culture of sending churches. One missionary frankly said, "They [the churches] do not train missionaries beforehand. After the missionaries come to the Somali region, he/she is expected to send report regardless of the training he had. Hence, the missionary tries to make up fake reports." This needs to stop."

### **The Success and Future Prospects of the Missionaries**

The greatest achievement for most of the missionaries (60%) was to have been able to communicate and form friendship with the Somalis. Only 10% of them said their achievement was evangelism while another 10% said they were "trying" to evangelize. Since success in missions can be measured in many ways including a mere presence in the society (especially as compared to the tightness of the Somali culture), the achievement of the missionaries should not be understated. However, what the missionaries listed as failures illuminates their progress in the battle to overcome the cultural barriers to win Somalis for Christ. Thirty percent of the respondents said they failed to learn the Somali language while 10% of the respondents said they could not immerse themselves into the Somali culture. Twenty percent indicated they failed in church planting and 20% indicated their failure in winning Somalis. At least 50% of the respondents' failures related to the nature of their battle against cultural barriers and the support they need in their future endeavor. Failures frustrate missionaries. That is why 70% of the respondents indicated that they only want to stay as missionaries up to 1-2 years from now. Only 20% said they want to stay for more than 10 years. Missionaries' frustration and burnout can be due to several reasons but it should not be neglected that failing to overcome cultural barriers (linguistic and social) contributes the lion's share. Failing to adapt to the Somali culture also indicates the missionaries' experience of culture shock.

**Figure 1: Level of satisfaction and culture shock**

**Level of Satisfaction**



Culture shock is a sense of cultural disorientation in a different society.

The fact that majority of the missionaries did not project to stay for more than 2 years in the mission field indicates that they were in culture shock (See Fig 5.1). Describing the experience of culture shock by missionaries in contrast to tourists from the U.S, Paul G. Hiebert states:

It is the culture shock everyone experiences when they enter a new culture. Tourists do not really experience it because they return to their American-style hotels after riding around looking at the native scenery. Culture shock is not a reaction to poverty or to the lack of sanitation. For foreigners coming to the U.S. the experience is same. It is the shock in discovering that all the cultural patterns we have learned are now meaningless. We know less about living here than the children, and we must begin again to learn the elementary things of life—how to speak, greet one another, eat, market, travel, and a thousand other things. Culture shock really sets in when we realize that this now is going to be our life and home.<sup>54</sup>

In this way, from what we saw earlier from the missionaries’ response of comfortability in the Somali region, it can be concluded that most of the respondents were in culture shock, and have had it difficult to adapt to the Somali culture. Hiebert states that culture shock occurs in missionaries in problems at three levels, namely at cognitive, affective and evaluative levels. At cognitive level, missionaries misunderstand the host culture, and misunderstandings are based on ignorance of the beliefs, feelings and values of the host culture. Here, from the responses of the missionaries we can see that there was a significant knowledge gap on aspects of

<sup>54</sup> Paul Hiebert, ‘Cultural Differences’, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, Calif: William Carey Library, 2013).

the Somali culture before they arrived in the Somali region. A majority of the missionaries indicated that they did not have a proper preparation regarding the cultural barriers they would face as they work among the Somalis. The misunderstanding has left a majority of the missionaries in culture shock. The solution to this misunderstanding is to learn how the other culture works.<sup>55</sup> In the meantime, although the missionaries were willing to fill this knowledge gap through trainings, the results indicated that they did not get necessary training from their senders.

At affective level, missionaries sometimes suffer from their own ethnocentrism. For example, from the responses the missionaries gave on the aspects of the Somali culture they found difficult, some indicated that the Somalis' food stuff and their marriage ceremony pattern were difficult for them. The missionaries judged those Somali cultural aspects based on their own (the missionaries') home culture. It could be seen that such conclusions are driven from ethnocentric attitude. Hiebert notes that,

When we (American missionaries) first encounter other cultures, we find it hard to see the world through other cultural eyes. We are ethnocentric. The root of ethnocentrism is our human tendency to respond to other people's ways by using our own affective assumptions, and to reinforce these responses with deep feelings of approval or disapproval. When we are confronted by another culture, our own is called into question. Our defense is to avoid the issue by concluding that our culture is better and other people are less civilized.<sup>56</sup>

Such ethnocentric tendencies make cultural adaptation difficult for the missionaries and the solution to such ethnocentrism is empathy.<sup>57</sup> The missionaries need to learn and appreciate others' cultures and their ways.

Finally, at evaluative level, missionaries tend to make a premature judgement about a certain culture. Such premature judgments are not only too quick but also other cultures are perceived as inferior and ignorant without a good analysis of them. Although this was not indicated in the response of the missionaries, the antidote to premature judgment that is cultural relativism has not been seen in the missionaries.<sup>58</sup>

Adopting total cultural relativism is dangerous in itself since missionaries will be forced to believe and accept that all cultures are good and right.<sup>59</sup> This will compromise the absoluteness of God's truth. Hence, missionaries are not forced to accept every aspect of the host culture as "good" and "right". In fact, they may judge the host culture by themselves if they are well informed about the culture. Hiebert

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<sup>55</sup> Hiebert, 377.

<sup>56</sup> Hiebert, 379.

<sup>57</sup> Hiebert, 379.

<sup>58</sup> Hiebert, 380.

<sup>59</sup> Hiebert, 380.

concludes, “Our tendency to make premature judgments is based on ignorance and ethnocentrism.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, as Christians, missionaries claim another basis for evaluation, namely, Biblical norms. Hiebert sums it up:

As divine revelation we stand in judgment of all cultures, affirming the good in human creativity [good part of cultures] and condemning the evil [harmful parts of culture]. To be sure, non-Christians may reject these norms and use their own. We can only present the Gospel in a spirit of redemptive love and let it speak for itself. Truth, in the end, does not depend on what we think or say, but on reality itself. When we bear witness to the Gospel, we do not claim superiority for ourselves, but affirm the truth of divine revelation.<sup>61</sup>

While judging the other culture scripturally, missionaries need to be careful not to impose their culture on the host with their interpretation of scriptural truths in their cultural context. Hence, with the future prospects of the evangelical missionaries working among the Somalis in the Somali region, first they should be given the necessary missiological training preparation on the basics of cultural adaptation. They should also be familiar with the aspects of the Somali culture before they come to the Somali region. Second, they should be given the necessary attention and regular follow up by their senders.

### **Conclusion**

The study found out that evangelical missionaries, working in the Somali region in the Somali context which is one of tightest cultures in the world, face cultural distances (E4) that need a very well organized and cooperative effort, with the senders, to reach the Somalis with the Gospel. The lion’s share of the mission effort to overcome the barriers lies on the care and support provided by the sending church or organization to the missionaries before and after coming to the Somali region to work among the Somalis in the Somali region.

As a recommendation to missionaries and mission organizations, the following points have been stated:

Sending organizations including churches should follow the day to day or regular activities of their missionaries after their arrival in the Somali region.

They should be concerned enough to ask about the overall health of their missionaries which includes their spiritual, mental, physical and social wellbeing.

They must address financial issues faced by the missionaries as much as possible. This affects the missionaries because the Somali culture is a “care-free” culture and not giving at the time of a friends’ need is considered a vice

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<sup>60</sup> Hiebert, 380.

<sup>61</sup> Hiebert, 381.

in the society. Missionaries need also be reminded to spend their money wisely.

They should not take reporting as a priority when the missionary is in a tight culture. The missionary should be given a 'green light' as long as he/she is engaged in serving in the host culture. While regular check is good, it should be in a manner that will not stress the missionary.

Sending organizations should check and recheck evangelistic reports by field missionaries in the Somali region. Reports by missionaries should not be taken at face value. They should be checked in person. This helps the integrity of the mission activity also helping the missionary to not fall in the traps of making up 'facts' in order to satisfy and please the sending church/organization.

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### About the author



Naol Befkadu Kebede was born in Addis Ababa in 1995. He became a born-again Christian at the age of 11 where he started attending at the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Later he was baptized at Berhane Wongel Baptist Church.

Naol began studying theology in 2014 because he had intended to become a missionary among the Somalis in the Somali region of Ethiopia. In the meantime, Naol was also a medical student at Addis Ababa University School of Medicine.

Naol's passion for theology and mission grew and he took 2 years a break from his medical school to pursue his theological study. In 2017 He returned to medical school upon completing his bachelor of theology. Naol continued studying for his masters with a focus on world mission. He thesis is titled "An Exploration of Socio-cultural Barriers to Evangelical Missions: The Case for Missionaries Working among the Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia."

Naol is currently a final year medical student at Addis Ababa University and he is also pursuing his PhD in leadership at Vision International University campus in Addis Ababa. Naol aspires and plans to become a medical missionary among the Somalis in the near future.

## The Kingdom of God and the Caliphate

Pastor Simon Fry

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### Abstract

*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” [Matt 6:9-10]*

So, what exactly is Christ telling Christians to pray for when they seek God for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done, on earth as in heaven? How are Christians supposed to play their part in establishing God’s kingdom here on earth? This paper answers these questions by defining what the Kingdom of God is and then examine how the concept of it has developed in the Old Testament up to Jesus’ time, before moving on to look at some of the problems that occurred through trying to enforce God’s rule on people. Finally, it will look at the Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and as taught in the New Testament, before concluding with when God’s kingdom has come in its fullness and His will is done, on earth as it is in heaven. At appropriate points throughout it will compare and contrast this with the beginning of the Caliphate in Islam and the reality of Muslim Background Believers experiences today.

### Introduction

*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” [Matthew 6:9-10].*

This first part of the Lord’s prayer represents the heartbeat of heaven and the hope of Christianity. It is prayed daily by many Christians around the world and three times a day by those who take the advice given in the Didache. That God would be glorified through His creation as His people, made in His image, represent and rule over the whole earth [*Genesis 1:28, Habakkuk 2:14, Revelation 5:10 & 21:3-5*].

Schreiner says, “The Bible is most fundamentally a narrative, and the Kingdom of God is the thematic framework for the narrative.”<sup>1</sup> Now whilst it may be argued that there are other concepts more fitting to see as the metanarrative of scripture (the glory of God, the temple, the holiness and love of God, etc.), certainly the Kingdom of God is a contender among them. In fact, when you drill down into any of the major themes presented throughout scripture it invariably contains elements of the other key subjects anyway, there is always some overlap.

So, what exactly is Christ telling Christians to pray for when they seek God for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done, on earth as in heaven? How are Christians supposed to play their part in establishing God’s kingdom here on earth?

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2018), 18.

Maybe the best place to start answering these questions is defining what the Kingdom of God is, how the concept of it has developed in the Old Testament up to Jesus' time, before moving on to look at some of the problems that occurred through trying to enforce God's rule on people. Finally, we will look at the Gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and as taught in the New Testament, before concluding with when God's kingdom has come in its fullness and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven. At appropriate points throughout I will compare and contrast this with the beginning of the Caliphate in Islam and the reality of Muslim Background Believers experiences today.

### The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom is mentioned 157 times in the New Testament, 124 of them in the 4 gospels.<sup>2</sup> Matthew's Gospel, written primarily for a Jewish audience, uses the expression Kingdom of Heaven but in the Gospel of Luke's parallel accounts the term Kingdom of God is used, showing that the terms are to be taken synonymously.<sup>3</sup> George Ladd notes about the word Kingdom, "The primary meaning of both the Hebrew word 'malkuth' in the Old Testament and of the Greek word 'basileia' in the New Testament is, the rank, authority and sovereignty exercised by a king."<sup>4</sup> The kingdom of God is His kingship, His rule, His authority."<sup>5</sup> Lloyd-Jones would agree as he says, "The kingdom of God really means the reign of God; it means the law and the rule of God."<sup>6</sup> John Stott sums it up with, "The kingdom of God is his royal rule."<sup>7</sup>

God is the eternal king [1 Timothy 1:17], he universally reigns supreme over everything [Psalm 135:5-6], unequalled in glory and majesty, with none to compare to Him as Isaiah 40 beautifully describes. This is always true about God; however, since the fall of mankind described in Genesis 3, God in His grace did not bring the swift end humanity deserved. Instead, He kicked into motion His eternal plan of salvation [Genesis 3:15, 1 Peter 1:19-21].

God in His sovereignty has allowed humanity to have the freedom to choose to submit to Him or rebel. This is illustrated straight away in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel, with the key verses being the warning from God [Genesis 4: 6-7] which Cain chooses to ignore. The subsequent chapters then describe mankind's totally depraved and rebellious condition before God, summed up in Genesis 6:5, "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 1998), 1226.

<sup>4</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Martino Fine Books, 2011), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1st edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans Pub Co, 2009), 379.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Humanity as a whole chose to reject God’s rule, reign and authority over them.

God in His grace has always enabled some people to call on Him in faith as they try to live to please him. Noah being one of the most famous pre-flood characters; through him mankind was saved from complete destruction [Genesis 6-9]. Then later through Abraham the Father of faith [Romans 11:9-17] God planned through his son, Isaac, and grandson, Jacob, that the people of Israel would be called to live under God’s rule in the promised land. It was through Israel, “according to the flesh,” that Christ came [Romans 9:5] to redeem people from every tribe, tongue and nation to God [Revelations 5:9]. God in His providence according to 2 Peter 3:9, is allowing time before He returns to wrap up history and fully establish His Kingdom reign, for more people all over the world to repent and turn to Jesus; surrendering their life under His rule now.

Therefore, in the sovereign purposes of God, He has allowed a season where people can rebel against His rule and reign, whilst others by grace through faith place themselves under his authority [Ephesians 2:1-10]. In addition, “God allows Satan a limited, but powerful, rule over his universal kingdom to display God’s own spiritual glory through his chosen people [Exodus 6:4].”<sup>8</sup> In the light of this reality, Roberts helpfully sums up the Kingdom of God as, “God’s people, in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Schreiner writes “The kingdom is the King’s power over the King’s people in the King’s place.”<sup>10</sup> Power, People, Place is an easy way to conceptualise and remember the different aspects of what it means by the Kingdom of God.

Below are two helpful tables that sum up Roberts and Schreiners understanding of how the Kingdom of God theme is developed throughout Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Roberts following key events in biblical history and Schreiner following the Hebrew Bible for the Old Testament.

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<sup>8</sup> Morgan and Peterson, *The Kingdom of God*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*, 1st edition. (IVP Books, 2003), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, *God’s Big Picture*, 22; Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 24, 30.

<b>Roberts</b>	<b>Schrenier</b>
<b>The pattern of the Kingdom</b> <i>The Garden of Eden, Genesis 1-2</i>	<b>Establishing the Kingdom</b> <i>Books of the Law – Creation account</i>
<b>The perished Kingdom</b> <i>The Fall through to Abraham</i>	<b>Corrupting the Kingdom</b> <i>Books of the Law – The Fall</i>
<b>The promised Kingdom</b> <i>Shown through Abraham and his descendants</i>	<b>Reviving hope in the Kingdom</b> <i>The rest of the books of the Law</i>
<b>The partial Kingdom</b> <i>God’s law’s given at Sinai, land conquered under Joshua, kingdom established under David and Solomon</i>	<b>Foreshadowing the Kingdom</b> <i>The books of the prophets</i>
<b>The prophesied Kingdom</b> <i>The prophets from Solomon onwards begin to speak of a glorious kingdom to come</i>	<b>The life of the Kingdom</b> <i>The books of the writings</i>
<b>The present Kingdom</b> <i>Inaugurated by Christ</i>	<b>The embodiment of the Kingdom</b> <i>The gospels</i>
<b>The proclaimed Kingdom</b> <i>Church’s role to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom to the whole earth</i>	<b>Kingdom Community</b> <i>Acts and epistles</i>
<b>The perfected Kingdom</b> <i>At the return of Christ</i>	<b>Achieving the Kingdom goal</b> <i>Revelations</i>

### The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament

Beasley-Murray highlights the expression “the kingdom of God” does not occur in the Old Testament. Revealed within its writings however, is that “the ultimate purpose of the future coming of the LORD and the Day of the LORD is the establishment of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>12</sup> Where God’s rule, righteousness and peace are displayed through His people.<sup>13</sup>

In the garden of Eden, God’s rule, righteousness and peace were present realities that Adam and Eve enjoyed (remember – Power People, Place). Through the fall, sin and death entered the world [*Romans 5:12*], plunging the world into the darkness of being under Satan’s control with all the evil and chaos that goes on with that [*Luke 4:6, 1 John 5:19*].

<sup>12</sup> Mr G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1986), 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



However, God kept people for Himself throughout pre-flood times [*Genesis 5*]. After Noah comes out of the Ark and offers God a sacrifice of thanks, God makes a covenant with him, and through him all mankind, never to flood the whole world again and that God would keep the normal seasons of the world going too – **The Noahic Covenant**.

It would appear God still ordained some others to call on him afterwards to, as the mysterious King Melchizedek in *Genesis 14* demonstrates. However, the purposes of God as recorded in scripture focus on the calling of Abram [*Genesis 12*], whom God renames Abraham [*Genesis 17*]. God promises Abraham not only the land of Canaan, but also that he will become a great nation, that God will protect him and that through him all the families on the earth will be blessed – **The Abrahamic Covenant** [*Genesis 12:1-3, 13:14-17, 17:1-8*]. This promise in the purposes of God's election, *Romans 5:6-12* makes clear, passes through his son Isaac (not Ishmael) to his grandson Jacob (not Esau), then through Jacob's 12 sons the people of Israel. Each of these to varying degrees make God their God (most it would appear mainly to a lesser degree – but God is faithful!).

With the coming of Moses, God brought about the deliverance of Israel out of slavery in Egypt after they had moved down there due to famine roughly 400 years earlier [*Genesis 41-50*]. They, as God's people, meet with Him at Sinai [*Exodus 19, 24, Deuteronomy 5:22-27*], received His rules (recorded in *Exodus – Deuteronomy*), for them to live by in the place He was giving them – the promised land. This is known as **the Mosaic Covenant** (or *Sinaitic Covenant*).

After 40 years in the wilderness due to Israel's sin and unbelief, Joshua led the people of God into the promised land and they conquered part of it. God was giving the land to them gradually as they grew and continued in obedience to Him [*Exodus 23:29-32*]. The book of *Judges* honestly and somewhat disturbingly records the reality of Israel's obedience or, more often than not, lack of it. This led to cycles of apostasy where Israel went after other gods, were conquered by other nations, cry out to God for help, then God raises up a judge to deliver them. There is peace for a season which leads to complacency, sin, and rebellion and then the cycle starts again. What is apparent in the *Judges* themselves is that they are flawed human beings and often cause Israel to follow in their sin [*e.g. Judges 8:27*].

Samuel the prophet is the greatest of the judges, and it is at the end of his time that Israel demand a king like the nations. "And the LORD said to Samuel, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them." [*1 Samuel 8:7*]. King Saul is chosen and starts well, but he fears man more than God and wants to please man more than God, so is rejected [*1 Samuel 13 & 15*].

God uses Samuel to anoint a second king David when he is just a boy [*1 Samuel 16*]. David proved to be a man of faith, love and trust in God. God uses David to firmly establish Israel in the promised land under God's rule as prescribed in the

Mosaic Covenant. David loved God, listened to God's laws and prophets and wanted to establish the worship of God at the centre of his kingdom [2 Sam 6&7]. King David seeks to build God a beautiful house (temple) to be worshiped in, and yet God said it is not for him to do this. "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." [2 Samuel 8:12-13]. **The Davidic Covenant.** King David, although seen as the greatest king of Israel with all future Kings of Judah being compared to him, committed some major sins that the Bible does not hide. For all his failures though David handed a prosperous, peaceful, God centred kingdom onto his son, Solomon.

King Solomon, who from birth is loved by God [2 Samuel 12:24-25], is gifted with wisdom from above to rule God's people [1 Kings 3]. Solomon builds a glorious temple for the LORD, which God fills visibly with the cloud of His presence [1 Kings 8:10-11]. Yet even wise and much-loved Solomon is distracted by the pleasures of life, and his heart loved foreign women; who as Moses warned would lead people astray to serve foreign gods, as Solomon did [1 King 11:1-8].

After Solomon's reign the kingdom is divided into Israel and Judah and whilst Judah has some better kings who try to bring about God's rule and reign on the land, this is never done fully. The people still choose to disobey and often the kings led them into this [2 Chronicles 36:15-16]. The people of God, despite being given the land to live in by God, continue to rebel against the rule of God and eventually are taken into captivity. Israel is taken captive by Assyria in 722 BC and Judah later by Babylon between 597-586 BC.

### **The growing expectation of the Kingdom of God**

Israel's unfaithfulness and sin did not spell the end of heaven's plans for God's Kingdom on earth, for God is faithful [1 Corinthians 1:9]. "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation." [Exodus 34:6-7].

The Old Testament clearly shows God is true to these declarations, for despite man's wickedness and Israel's failure to submit to the power of God's rule revealed in the Mosaic Covenant; God stirred the prophets to speak of a New Covenant that would come [Jeremiah 31:31-34]. Where God would put His law in their hearts, thus they would willingly obey Him. The human sin hardened heart would be replaced through the power of the Spirit with a heart of flesh responsive to God [Ezekiel 36:26-27]. God would pour out His Spirit on all His people and they will prophesy and dream dreams and see visions [Joel 2:28-29]. This would come about with the arrival of the anointed one of God from David's line, but He would be greater than David [Is 11:1-3, Ezekiel 34:23-24, Hosea 3:5]. In fact, this anointed king, this Messiah who would rule, was somehow mysteriously linked to God himself [Isaiah

9:6, Micah 5:2, Psalm 110:1, Daniel 7:13]. His rule would be across the whole earth and have no end [Isaiah 9:7, Daniel 7:14, Micah 5:4-6].

The Messiah's reign would take place at a future point, known as the day of the LORD. Beasley-Murray writes, "It is commonly acknowledged that the Day of the LORD in the Old Testament is not a date but an event . . . It forms the boundary between history and the kingdom of God."<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that after the return from Babylon during the turbulent times before the coming of Christ, many of the Jewish writers, "Contrary to the prophets, despaired of history, feeling it was completely dominated by evil."<sup>15</sup> The only hope was when God would visit his people, then the Jewish people would subdue the world and bring 'Pax Jerusalem' instead of 'Pax Romana.'

In the gospels and Acts, this expectation of the Jewish People for the coming Messiah who would deliver them from Roman rule is clear. "During the New Testament period, the sight of Roman standards in Jerusalem was a vivid reminder to every devout Jew that while the Kingdom of God might exist in heaven, the kingdom of Rome ruled on earth."<sup>16</sup> All this would change though once the Christ was revealed, the hope of Israel. Clearly even John the Baptist (the greatest born of a woman), whilst he was languishing in prison began to doubt his earlier proclamation about Jesus, since Christ did not do what was expected of him [Matthew 11:1-15]. So ingrained was this expectation that even after 3 years of Jesus' teaching, and His death and resurrection, the disciples still expected some physical establishing of the Kingdom of God as they asked, "Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" [Acts 1:6].

In the wisdom of God, His Kingdom came and is coming in unexpected way. The coming of the Caliphate under Islam was actually more consistent with how the Jewish people expected the Kingdom of God to come. Historian Tom Holland writes, "The story of Islam had been one of storming military success. . . . The men who had presided over this glorious victory charge, a sequence of leaders known as, 'Caliphs,' or 'Successors' of the prophet."<sup>17</sup> "By the turn of the (7<sup>th</sup>) century, within 80 years of Mohammad's original vision, Islam began to sweep through the middle east. It saw success in North Africa, often through sheer brutality."<sup>18</sup>

The Qur'an labels many Old Testament characters as prophets, it even refers to Adam and David as Caliphs.<sup>19</sup> The linking with key Old Testament characters in

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<sup>14</sup> Mr G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1986), 11.

<sup>15</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 101.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword: The Birth of Islam and the Rise of the Global Arab Empire*, Reprint edition. (New York: Anchor, 2013), 24–25.

<sup>18</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, Joel R. Beeke, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Church History 101: The Highlights of Twenty Centuries* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 32.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Caliphate* (New Orleans: Pelican, 2016), 3.

Islam, along with the Jewish hatred of the Byzantines (known as Rûm) proved appealing to them. Many Jews, in their expectation of the Kingdom, helped fight alongside the Muslims under Umar to clear the Rûm from the Promised Land. When Umar cleared the temple mount, he was called, “a lover of Israel.”<sup>20</sup> Kennedy tells how some Jews were actually calling Umar the Redeemer.<sup>21</sup> Holland notes that amongst the Jews in 634 AD, “People were saying that the prophet had appeared coming with the Saracens.

They say he is proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who is to come.”<sup>22</sup> “Only rebuild the temple, they knew, and much else as well would be fulfilled. . . the coming of the Messiah.”<sup>23</sup>

So, the theocratic expansion of the Caliphate was much more in line with how the Jewish people expected the coming of the Kingdom of God under the Messiah in terms of military success and control over the nations. (Obviously, there are some major theological differences between Judaism and Islam which meant they did not continue to see it as the coming of the Kingdom of God.)

### **The problems enforcing the kingdom of God due to sin**

Thankfully, the way of the Caliphate is not the way that the Almighty decided to establish and extend the Kingdom of God. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” [Isaiah 55:9-9]. The Apostle Paul writes, “For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” [1 Corinthians 1:21-25].

The Bible does not hide the mistakes made by God’s people or His leaders. The bad leaders that arose under the Mosaic Covenant led the people into sinful practices [1 Kings 14:16]. Even under the good leaders and kings, the hearts of the people were only restrained not changed. Now according to Abdur-Rahman, this may not appear a significant issue to a Muslim as the focus of Islam is on religious practice to fall on the mercy of Allah – orthopraxy.<sup>24</sup> Yet in the Old Testament and the New, God is concerned with the heart [Deuteronomy 6:5, Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:18-20, Luke 10:27].

Those who try to please God by their own works and force others to do likewise, only exchange the sin of rebellion before God for the sin of pride. Charles Hodge writes,

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<sup>20</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, 389.

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, *The Caliphate*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, 387.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>24</sup> I. Abdur-Rahman, “Ramadan and Somali Believers,” *Somali Bible Society Journal. Volume I, Issue 1*, (December 2020): 26.

The pagan, the Jew, the Muslim, the nominal Christian have all been exact in the performance of religious services and zealous in the assertion and defence of what they regard as religious truth, even while unrestrained in the indulgence of every evil passion. This arises from looking upon religion as an outward service and God as a being to be feared and propitiated, but not loved and obeyed. According to the Gospel, all moral duties are religious services; and piety is the conformity of the soul to the image and will of God.<sup>25</sup>

The Apostle Paul speaking on orthopraxy of religion without inner transformation writes, “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” [*Colossians 2:23*].

The truth of Colossians 2:23 is something that Islamic history shows again and again. Even under the Orthodox Caliphate (the first 4 Caliphs of Islam), who are most widely accepted as valid by the majority of Muslims, there is fighting over whether Ali (the son in law to the prophet) was robbed of the Caliphate by Abu Bakr. Umar, the second Caliph, who is seen as the Father of the Caliphate and arguably the most respected Caliph (apart from by Shite Muslims), clearly was not protected by God for his slave killed him for personal reasons!<sup>26</sup> This is one of the many differences between the Bible and the Qur’an of what is right and wrong. The Apostle Paul lists enslavers as wrong [*1 Timothy 1:10*]. Slavery, whilst still around, was strongly taught against by Christians but flourished and was promoted under Islam.<sup>27</sup> Maybe if Umar had listened to Paul on this, he would not have been killed!

Uthman, the third Caliph, has a varied reputation among Muslim historians and commentators,<sup>28</sup> with revolt and inner fighting that led to him being killed even whilst he was reading the Qur’an with his blood spilt on it!<sup>29</sup> Finally, the authority of the Caliph passed to Ali the one who some thought it always should have been. Ali led the Caliphate for only 5 years before he was assassinated and much Muslim blood spilled by other Muslims in the name of Allah. Showing as Jesus made clear, “All who take the sword will perish by the sword.” [*Matthew 26:52*]. For brevity’s sake, I have focused on the Caliphs as the representatives; much more atrocities were committed to the ordinary Muslims by other Muslims during this time in the name of Islam.

There have always been followers within Islam who have taken the words of the Qur’an as their motivation for violent jihad. And while there have always been some social, political and economic explanations for the violence, we cannot ignore the theological motivation that has been expressed by

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<sup>25</sup> C. Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries - 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton, Ill.; Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 103.

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy, *The Caliphate*, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, 436.

<sup>28</sup> Kennedy, *The Caliphate*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

generation after generation of Muslims: the desire to follow the original teaching and ethics of the Qur'an and Muhammed.<sup>30</sup>

Right through the centuries there has been fighting within the house of Islam itself; excluding its jihad with those it considers infidels! Showing how right Paul was to write, "These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires." [Colossian 2:23 NLT]. The evil within!

One need look no further than modern Somalia which sees Islam as the glue that holds society together to see the truth of the inability of man to enforce God's rule on a place by his own efforts due to the depravity that is within.<sup>31</sup>

### The Gospel of the Kingdom and the present age

The Lord Jesus Christ came 600 years before Islam but as stated above into a Jewish environment expectant for the Kingdom of God to appear in power. He was preceded by a powerful prophet, John the Baptist, who had the people asking is this the Messiah, or the Prophet or Elijah to come at the end of history and the beginning of the Kingdom of God? [John 1:19-21]. The response of this mighty prophetic voice was most provocative, he was nobody compared to the one he was sent to reveal [John 1:22-27], the Christ! The one whom this mighty prophet testifies is Jesus of Nazareth, with a visible and audible confirmation from God at Christ's baptism [Mark 1:9-11].

After being led by the Spirit for 40 days in the wilderness Jesus came back in the power of the Spirit and began to preach [Luke 4:1]. What was his message, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." [Mark 1:14-15]. It's at hand, one could grab it, it is 'near,' other translations write. The first recorded sermon of Jesus is in Luke 4, Jesus speaks from Isaiah 61 which was widely regarded as applying to the Messiah, Jesus says is fulfilled in him.<sup>32</sup>

The Kingdom of God (or Heaven) is mentioned 124 times in the gospels alone. It is clearly the key message of Jesus ministry. Lloyd-Jones from his studies helpfully shows that, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the same as the Gospel of the kingdom of God. It is in the coming of this person that the kingdom of God has come. . . He is the one who is King, the kingdom comes with the King."<sup>33</sup> Roberts' says, "All the promises of the kingdom of God are fulfilled in Christ; he is God's people, God's place and God's rule."<sup>34</sup>

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40. <sup>30</sup> Frog and Amy Orr-Ewing, *Holy Warriors*, 1st Edition. (Carlisle: Authentic Lifestyle, 2002),

<sup>31</sup> Abdur-Rahman, "Ramadan and Somali Believers," 29.

<sup>32</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary - Luke* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 252.

23. <sup>33</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Kingdom of God*, First Edition. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010),

<sup>34</sup> Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 109.

## Now and not yet

What becomes clear as one looks at the teaching of Jesus is the Kingdom is coming in an unexpected way. The Apostle Paul explains that in God's wisdom, His redemption plan was deliberately a mystery hidden for ages in God, until it was revealed in Jesus and now through His Gospel [*Ephesians 1:9-10, 3:1-13*]. Whilst all the promises of the Kingdom are fulfilled in Christ, or to use the Apostle Paul's words, "For all the promises of God find their yes in *Christ*," [*2 Corinthians 1:20*]; the Kingdom is not yet here in its fullness. The kingdom of God broke into history through Christ and continues to do so through His Church but is not fully established over the earth yet! Grudem writes, "The kingdom manifests itself through the church and thereby the future reign of God breaks into the present (it is already here and not yet fully)."<sup>35</sup>

The following are some of the sayings and parables of Jesus and other New Testament passages that show the kingdom of God is here now with salvation, signs, wonders and power over the demonic: *Matthew 11:11-12, 12:28, Mark 1:15, 4:11-12 Luke 4:16-21, 7:28-30, 11:14-23, 16:16, 17:20-21 Acts 28:23, Romans 14:17, 1 Corinthians 4:19-21, Colossians 1:13, 4:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Hebrews 12:28-29.*

The following are some of the sayings and parables of Jesus and other New Testament passages about the kingdom of God being not fully here yet: *Matthew 5:3-12, 6:9-13, 8:5-13, Mark 9:43-48, 10:23-25, Luke 6:20-23, 12:32-33, 13:22-30, 11:2-4, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 15:24+50-51, Galatians 5:21, Ephesians 5:5, 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 2 Timothy 4:1+18, James 2:5, 2 Peter 1:11.*

I have used many scriptures to emphasise this point that the Kingdom of God is now on earth thanks to Christ and yet is not fully here as this is key to our understanding the present time. Christians need to remember, "While the kingship of Christ has been inaugurated, it has not been consummated yet."<sup>36</sup> The Kingdom is here in that the power of God is breaking out amongst people, setting them free from sin's power [*Romans 8:2*], causing people to be healed [*James 5:14-15*], set free from demons [*Mark 6:7-13, 16:17, Luke 9:49*] and have the sure and certain hope of eternal life [*John 11:25-26*]. Yet people still sin, get sick, die and people are still oppressed by demons.

Mark's summary of the beginning of Jesus' ministry lays a key to understanding why the Kingdom has come in this way. The response to the Kingdom being here now and yet not yet fully here is to repent and believe the Gospel.

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<sup>35</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 864.

<sup>36</sup> Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 114.

### **Spiritual reality breaking into the physical**

The problem of sin is so pervasive all of the human race has gone astray [Isaiah 53:6], no one is or ever can be righteous enough for God [Romans 3:10-11]. "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in God's sight." [Roman 3:20].

"Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." [Romans 8:8]. Thus, all of mankind deserves to be outside the kingdom of God and naturally comes under God's wrath whether they be Jewish, religious or anything else [Romans 1-3, Ephesians 2:1-3]. The Lord Jesus Christ was the only one to live a perfect life [1 Peter 2:2], fully pleasing God [Matthew 3:17, 17:5] and then willingly choose to die on the cross on behalf of the world, so that all who repent and believe in Him can be forgiven [2 Corinthians 5:21], and pass from death to life [John 5:24, 1 John 3:14], from darkness to light [Ephesians 5:8], and from under Satan into the Kingdom of God [Colossians 1:13-14]. Ladd notes "The kingdom of God has come among men; and those who receive it will be prepared to enter into the Kingdom of Glory when Christ comes to finish the good work he has already begun. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom."<sup>37</sup>

Once someone puts their trust in Jesus as their Lord (King) and Saviour, Christ sends His Holy Spirit to live inside of them [Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:9]. The Holy Spirit changes them from the inside out causing them to want to please God and He helps us live for God [Galatians 5:16-25, Philippians 1:6, 2:13]. As Jeremiah prophesied, God puts a new heart in the believer [Jeremiah 31:33], their heart transformed by the Spirit of God [Ezekiel 36:26]. It is not an external earning of God's favour through works [Romans 3:20, Ephesians 2:9], but an internal receiving of the righteousness of Christ in one's heart through faith; that works its way out into one's actions, not the other way around [Romans 1:16-17, Philippians 3:9-11, Romans 8:10-11]. Thus, the Kingdom of God, whilst breaking out into the physical world around, is primarily a spiritual reality giving men and women the ability to receive it through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ [Romans 10:5-13]. The Spirit then makes them ready to be part of the Kingdom of God when it fully comes at Christ's return [2 Corinthians 5:1-5]. That is how the Kingdom of God can be referred to as hidden in leaven [Matthew 11:33] or hidden in a field [Matthew 13:44]. In this season of the Gospel of the Kingdom being proclaimed, Christ is wanting people to respond so that they can be made ready for when the Kingdom fully comes [2 Peter 3:9-10]. Ladd writes, "In order to enter the future realm of the Kingdom, one must submit himself in perfect trust to God's rule here and now."<sup>38</sup>

### **Proclaimed by the church not enforced by law**

The Kingdom of God is a spiritual reality received voluntarily by faith, never by force, indeed as it is a work of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be enforced by men, as that only leads to conformity not faith [John 1:11-12, 3:1-8]. This is different to Islam which is shown by Ibn Hisham, a 9<sup>th</sup> century Islamic writer and compiler of Islamic materials, who wrote, "We are God's helpers and the assistants of his prophet, and will fight

<sup>37</sup> Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



men until they believe in God; and he who believes in God and his prophet has protected his life and property from us; and he who disbelieves we will fight in God unceasingly, and killing him will be a small matter to us”.<sup>39</sup>

The Kingdom of God is preached by the Church and the response is left between the Holy Spirit and the individuals as to whether they receive the message or not [Mark 6:7-13, Luke 10:1-12, Acts 17:22-31]. “The crusading past of the Christian church is one of the greatest tragedies of church history . . . it has rightly been condemned as an aberration of the Christian Gospel.”<sup>40</sup> True Christian voices like Francis of Assisi spoke out about this at the time and went to the front lines and preached the Gospel to both the so-called Christian armies and Muslim armies.<sup>41</sup>

The Kingdom of God is not to be enforced on people by the State. Jesus himself said to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” [John 18:36]. Christ gave the responsibility to proclaim the kingdom of God to the Church [Matthew 28:18-20, Ephesians 3:10]. People’s response to the Gospel is between them and God, the message is for some “a fragrance of death to death, to other a fragrance of life to life.” [2 Corinthians 2:15-17].

The Church and individual Christians are ambassadors for Christ imploring (asking, begging, urging but not forcing) people to be reconciled to God [2 Corinthians 5:18-20]. Jesus himself in Matthew 13:1-23 gives a clear picture of the job of the church to share the Gospel in the parable of the sower; one sows God’s seed but the response to it depends on the soil of one’s heart.

People’s response to the Gospel is what determines their eternal future [John 3:16-18], those who ignore it will be judged and sent out of God’s presence to Hell, and those who receive the Gospel and live for Jesus have the certain hope of eternal life [Mark 16:16, John 3:36, 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10].

The Church is not the State or looking for the State to impose through law or force an obedience that God himself seeks voluntarily. Schaeffer in his book, a Christian Manifesto, writes, “There is no New Testament basis for a linking of church and state until Christ, the King returns. . . We must not confuse the Kingdom of God with our country. To say it another way, we should not wrap Christianity in our national flag.”<sup>42</sup>

This is “in stark contrast to most Islamic thought, the de-politicisation or secularisation of religion has become so ingrained in Western thought that it is often assumed that religion and politics are necessarily a potent mix. Many Muslim

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<sup>39</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, 17.

<sup>40</sup> Orr-Ewing, *Holy Warriors*, 90–91.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2005), 121.

nations, by contrast, take for granted that Islam cannot exist apolitically.”<sup>43</sup> “Actually some Muslim Background Believers claim that Islam without the beheading of apostates would not actually continue to exist”.<sup>44</sup> Whereas the famous Bible translator, John Wycliffe, aptly taught at a time when a politicised Christianity was wanting strong military responses to Islam, that counterfeit Christianity (which by that he meant politicised and militarised Christianity) was more a threat to the true church than Islam. In his opinion both were contrary to true Christianity and the teachings of the Bible.<sup>45</sup> These are wise words from John Wycliffe and something the Church of Jesus Christ today would do well to remember. The Bible is clear that God’s ways are not to be enforced on people through law or by force, unlike the Caliphate these actions do not have the backing of their founder or holy writings. Sadly, this has not stopped some “Christians” from the time of Constantine to the present day trying to use the State to enforce on others the obedience God desires; but as shown, this is actually detrimental to the expansion of the Kingdom of God. The growth of Kingdom is through the power of the Holy Spirit not the fanatic actions of man [Acts 1:8].

### **Ever increasing yet persecuted**

Christianity from the beginning had not been about forcing but preaching and persuading. Secularist historian, Holland, notes, “never before had there been preached a message of personal responsibility quite so radical, so democratic, or so potentially wide-reaching in its appeal”.<sup>46</sup> Since Christians are called to preach the Gospel to the whole world before the end can come [Matthew 24:14], they now need to recognise that this world is no longer their home [John 15:19], the age to come is their homeland [Hebrew 12:13-16, Philippians 3:20], so any country can now be their temporary residence as they try to fulfil Christ’s commission [Matthew 28:18-20]. Throughout history, “Christians, positively gloried in the fact: ‘Any country can be their homeland – and yet their homeland, wheresoever it may be, is to them a foreign place.’”<sup>47</sup>

From the beginning the book of Acts shows Christians have gone out to surrounding areas extending the Kingdom of God by preaching the Gospel of Jesus to all [Mark 16:15-16]. When people respond they planted churches to form discipleship centres and bases from where mission could go out to further. The prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7, Daniel 7:14, Micah 5:4-6 and Jesus parable of the Mustard seed in Matthew 13:31-32 show that God’s Kingdom is an ever-increasing Kingdom that will expand across the whole world. Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 16:18 that not even the gates of hell can prevail against His Church and the mission He has given to it. Praise God.

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<sup>43</sup> Orr-Ewing, *Holy Warriors*, 79.

<sup>44</sup> M. Birik, “The Challenges Facing Somali Muslim Background Believers” (Masters Dissertation, St Paul’s University, 2018), 59.

<sup>45</sup> Orr-Ewing, *Holy Warriors*, 93.

<sup>46</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, 171.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

However, Jesus is clear along with this ever-expanding Kingdom that the Church preaches, in this age, it comes with suffering and persecution. Far from adversity being a sign that the Kingdom is struggling or the Church doing something wrong, it is an indication of blessing and that the Church is doing what it should be. Jesus said, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” [Matthew 5:11-12]. “Behold I am sending you as sheep amongst wolves...Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you. . and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake” [Matthew 10:16-23].

Just as Jesus went to the cross to save His people, in the purposes of God His followers are called to suffer for the sake of the Kingdom [1 Peter 2:20-21, 2 Timothy 3:12]. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let them deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel’s will save it” [Mark 8:34-35]. “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” [Mark 10:29-30].

Sheep amongst wolves, beaten, dragged before the courts, losing family all for the sake of Christ is the story of many Muslim Background Believers today; it certainly is the reality of most of the Somalis who have chosen to follow Christ that I know. Whilst they can give testimony to the validity of Jesus’ words in Mark 10:29; they have received a new family, yet it is with the constant threat of and occasional reality of persecution from the Islamic community, sadly very often members of their own family.

Emboldened with the words and example of Jesus, and the Apostles the early church embraced suffering alongside the proclamation of the Gospel. “Over succeeding generations, many Christians prosecuted by the imperial authorities for insulting the gods who had supposedly made Rome great, had opted to pay the ultimate price – and joyously so. After all, by doing so they could share in the suffering of their Saviour.”<sup>48</sup> Despite the onslaught from Satan and the world to extinguish the light of the Gospel of the Kingdom, they could not overcome Jesus [John 1:5]. What was seemingly the greatest victory for the forces of darkness, the death of Christ on the cross, was in fact the defining moment of their defeat and the enabling once for all act that secured God’s plan of salvation for all mankind for all time [Hebrews 9:26-28].

Schreiner says, “The cross is not contrary to this King and Kingdom, but the centre of it. This King has power, but it is paradoxical power, one of suffering and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 189.

weakness.”<sup>49</sup> Through the seeming weakness and folly of the cross, God’s salvation plan was achieved by Christ, and through the seeming weakness and folly of people God uses to proclaim the Gospel, the Kingdom of God continues to expand [*1 Corinthians 1:18-31*]. History bears witness to this as, “Traditionally the spread of the Christian faith beyond the (Roman) empire had been the achievement of the weak and humble; prisoners of war and women abducted into the beds of barbarian chieftains.”<sup>50</sup> Christian preaching of the Gospel is proving to be more effective than the sword of Islam. For during the rise of the Caliphate and the warmongering of the first 4 Caliphs, “Christians, far from being diminished by the Arab conquest of Iraq, rapidly became the majority. . . Outpacing even the advance of the Arab armies, Christian missionaries had begun to fan out from Iraq, treading the roads that spread eastwards to the fabulous kingdoms of India and China.”<sup>51</sup> The Kingdom of God was growing faster than the Caliphate, within it as well as beyond its borders!

“For no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the LORD” [*Proverbs 21:30*]. God said through Isaiah [*46:11*], “For I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”

### **Fullness of the kingdom and conclusion**

When the Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached to every tribe, tongue, and nation then end will come and Christ will return to judge the living and the dead [*Matthew 24:14-31*]. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord [*Philippians 2:10-11*] whether Christian or not.

There will be no fighting on earth to establish the Kingdom of God. Heaven’s armies will come, the angels will gather all people to face the judgement of God. Those who accepted the Gospel of the kingdom and surrendered to King Jesus, being welcomed into the Kingdom of God; and those who did not accept Jesus being cast out into the place the Bible calls hell [*Matthew 25:31-46, Revelations 20:11-15*].

Then the Kingdom of God will come in all its fullness. God will reward those who have faithfully served him [*1 Corinthians 3:12-15*]. There will be people from every tribe, tongue and nation in the Kingdom [*Revelation 7:9-12*]. The citizens of the Kingdom of God will spend eternity receiving “the immeasurable riches of God’s grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus [*Ephesians 2:7*].” There will be no more

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<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, 140.

<sup>50</sup> Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword*, 276.

<sup>51</sup> Kennedy, *The Caliphate*, 79.

sin, sickness, suffering or death [Revelations 21:4]; but most wonderfully, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” [Revelations 21:3]. Hallelujah, this is the Kingdom of God as revealed in Scripture. It is worth living for, giving your all for, suffering for and even dying for, as its King, Jesus, gave His life for you and He has keys to death and hell. Jesus will raise all who surrender to Him in this life up again to be with Him in His Kingdom for all eternity.

### **Use of the Bible**

*Unless otherwise stated all quotes from the Bible are from the ESV. The Bible is viewed as the authoritative word of God, its veracity untarnished and teachings relevant to all.*

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## The Desert Shepherd: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Tibebu Haileselassie

Naol Befkadu Kebede

### Introduction

Evangelical missions among the Somalis began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century similar to the Catholic mission, and it did not target a specific political region initially. As we will see shortly, evangelical missions to the Somali region of Ethiopia had some similarity to that of evangelical mission to the Oromo and other southern people groups.<sup>1</sup>



Dr. Tibebu Haileselassie  
Photo credit: Hawaay Resources

As we study the historical advancement of evangelical missions in the Somali region in the last century and half, we should understand that many of the documents on evangelical missions among the Somali people are not compiled for easy access. Successive governments in Somalia and the Somali region have not properly safeguarded these important documents. Therefore, our literature highly depends on the works of present-day historians and scholars.

Similar to protestant missions progress in Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa, the greatest factor that affected protestant missions among the Somali people is also the political situation of the country. The period from 1890s to 1950s is known for its political upheaval in the Horn of Africa, especially the challenges the Somali people faced.<sup>2</sup>

In 1884, the scramble for Africa took place, and European countries agreed to divide and colonize Africa. The vast land of the Somalis fell under three main colonial administrations, namely British, French and Italian administrations. British protectorate of Somaliland was established in 1884 through a number of Anglo-Somali Treaties of Protection (Sh. Abdirahman, 1990). In the same way, Italians made their direct claims of Italian Somaliland and its coast in 1889. It was in the Italian occupied Somalia that the first ever protestant mission began through Swedish Lutheran Missions.

In the British protectorate of Somaliland, however, protestant missions were prohibited by request of the Somali clan leaders. Although we do not have a

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<sup>1</sup> The pioneer missionaries that arrived to the Somali and Oromo people were the Swedish Evangelical Mission.

<sup>2</sup> Since the Ogaden became part of Ethiopia after the 1897 treaty, and Ethiopia regained it in the 1952, Ethiopian Somali Evangelical movement during the period 1890s to 1950s should also be studied along the Protestant missions to the Somalia and Somaliland.

document on a mission involvement in the Ethiopian occupied Ogaden during this period, the missionary activity that took place during this era had significant impact in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Brief Discussion of the History of Protestant Mission among the Somalis**

Although my main focus in this paper is to discuss the life and ministry of Dr. Tibebe Haileelassie, I will do a brief review of protestant missions among the Somalis in Ethiopia. For the sake of our study, and because of the nature of the history of the missions, I have divided the protestant missions in the Somali regions into four phases based on the events that took place which highly affected them.

The first phase of protestant missions lasted from the advent of the Swedish Lutheran Mission in Somalia to the 1948. The Ogaden was also officially given to Ethiopia after the fascist Italy was defeated in the Second World War. During this phase there were two prominent evangelical missionary organizations that made it to the Somali people with their Gospel message, namely the Swedish Evangelical Missions (SEM) and the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS).

Phase one of the history of Evangelical missions (1890s to 1950s) towards the Somalis can be considered as a success with the pioneering works by Swedish Evangelical Mission and John Ethelstan Cheese in Kismaayo, Jubaland. However, SEM faced significant challenge from the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa in that period which finally led them to be expelled by the Italian Colonial Authority in 1935. After the expulsion of the SEM from Jubaland, John Ethelstan Cheese continued the mission to reach the Somalis that was started by SEM.

John was not as strong as SEM and he also had to travel to many places, establishing his station in Mombasa and as far as Muscat, Oman, working alone. For this reason, there was a significant gap in the mission field after the SEM left. It is also noteworthy that the Ogaden Somalis on whom this paper mainly focuses on were not reached from 1897 to 1950 as stated earlier.

Phase two was the period between 1950, when the British handed over Somalia to the Italians for ten years of Italian trusteeship under the 1949 U.N decision<sup>3</sup> and 1974 when evangelical churches and mission activities were ordered to halt both in Somalia (socialist government) and in Ethiopia (Derg regime).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in 1952, Britain also signed a treaty with Ethiopia giving Ethiopia back all of the Ogaden

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<sup>3</sup> U.N. Resolution 289 (IVA) adopted by the General Assembly in its 250th Meeting on 21 November 1949 which among other things stated: ' 1 .That Italian Somaliland shall be an independent sovereign state; 2. That this independence shall become effective at the end of ten years from the date of the approval of a Trusteeship Agreement by the General Assembly; 3 .That, during the period mentioned in paragraph 2, Italian Somaliland shall be placed under the International Trusteeship System with Italy as the Administering Authority'. Yearbook of the United Nations 1948-49, p. 276; UN Publications.

<sup>4</sup> In Somalia church properties were nationalized in 1972 and missionaries were expelled totally by 1976 while the Derg regime of Ethiopia had already shutdown churches, especially Pentecostal churches, by 1971.



(Britain had incorporated some part of the Ethiopian Ogaden region (known as Haud) into British Somaliland). Hence, the Ogaden mission can now be studied under the Ethiopian missions.

After the end of World War II, fascist Italy was expelled from Ethiopia with its repressive treatment of missionaries. Emperor Haileselassie I had allowed foreign missionaries to work in the country even though there was a constant anti-missionary threat from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. For this reason, in early 1920s, the Emperor had given order to the missionaries to work on areas where there was no Ethiopian Orthodox Church activity in order to ease the tension and in 1945 a comity agreement was signed; in this arrangement, every mission agency was assigned to minister in a specific non-Abyssinian (non-Orthodox) areas in Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

The main focus of this paper is the history of evangelical missions in the Ethiopian Somali region (Ogaden). Therefore, phase two, three and four deal exclusively with the progress of evangelical missions in the Ogaden/Somali region of Ethiopia. In phase two, we see the activity of mission organizations such as the Mennonite mission (Meserete Kristos Church), Sudan Interior Mission (Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church) and the Ethiopian Mulu Wongel Church mission in the Ogaden areas.

Phase Two (1950s-1974) of the Evangelical mission's history among the Somali people was mostly a pioneering missionary work particularly in the Ogaden. It was also comparatively the golden age for the Somali mission work, not only because of the convenient sociopolitical situations in Somali inhabited areas in Horn of Africa as compared to phase one and three, but also the mission activity in Somalia bore significant fruit.<sup>6</sup>

Foreign missions in the Ogaden had government protection and appreciation for their works during this time while the same was not generally true in Somalia.<sup>7</sup> Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) being the pioneer in the Ogaden, had an enduring affect that is still unmatched by any church or mission organizations to this day.

In phase three, however, things changed. The geopolitics of the Horn of Africa gradually made foreign missions or Christian missions in general difficult every place. In Ethiopia, the Derg regime shut down mission organizations, missionaries were expelled from the country and their properties were nationalized. Meanwhile, Somalia's Siyad Barre socialist government did the same albeit more harshly.

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Partee, *Adventure in Africa: The Story of Don McClure: From Khartoum to Addis Ababa in Five Decades* (Lanham, Md: University Press Of America, 2000), 396.

<sup>6</sup> In the Ogaden the work done by SIM and in Somalia by SIM and Mennonite mission had remarkable significance that Prof. Said Samatar described the mission as "strong". See Ahmed I. Samatar, Interview with Professor Said Sheikh Samatar at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Washington, D.C., *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, Vol 5. (2005). P. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Russell and Patricia Wolford, *Missionaries, Mercenaries and Misfits* (Sarasota, FL: First Edition Design Publishing, 2013), 25–26.

This period was also characterized by a major famine in the Somali inhabited areas following the Ogaden war (1977-78). This conflict was one of the most disastrous wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Africa. The calamity this war brought forth is unparalleled in the Ogaden, Ethiopia, and Somalia. However, it also paved the way for some mission organizations to reenter into Somalia and provide relief work.

Although this period was so difficult for the church to thrive, there were also underground mission works done mostly by individuals and by few organizations. Phase three of the Somali mission was characterized by persecution by the Ethiopian Derg government in the Ogaden and the Siyad Barre communist government in Somalia. Missionaries were expelled both from Ethiopia and Somalia with their properties nationalized. Although there were underground converts, it was also difficult for them to maintain their faith in the area. For example, a possible Somali Muslim convert by the name "Hussein" who saw Don McClure "as a father", used to live in Gode, however, in fear of persecution fled for his life.<sup>8</sup>

The Ethio-Somalia war of 1977-78, which was the result of Siyad Barre's "Greater Somalia" vision aiming to reincorporate the Ogaden into Somalia Republic, elicited a strong reaction from the Ethiopian military regime. The conflict also resulted in a biting famine in the region. The famine caused over the years the migration of close to a million Somalis from the Ogaden into Somalia. Some Ethiopians, including Dr. Tibebe Haileselassie, were taken captive by the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF). However, most of the prisoners were released after 11 years.<sup>9</sup> Hence, due to the political climate and the war during phase three, no fruitful missionary activity took place both in the Ogaden and Somalia (even though some missions were allowed to provide help post-Ogaden war).<sup>10</sup>

In 1991-92 major political events took place both in Ethiopia and Somalia. In Ethiopia, the Marxist Derge was overthrown by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) which ruled Ethiopia as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In Somalia, the Siyad Barre communist regime was overthrown by armed militia groups.<sup>11</sup>

The comparison between Ethiopia's post-military state and that of Somalia displays the tragedy Somalia had to endure for more than 3 decades. While Ethiopia was able to form a transitional charter and solid federal government that ratified a constitution to uphold individual and collective rights including the right to worship and assemble, Somalia does not still have a government that can provide basic services to its people. Hence, religious right and mission activity in Somalia did not

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<sup>8</sup> Partee, *Adventure in Africa*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> See Lishan Agonafir, Tibebe Yemidrebedaw Eregna.

<sup>10</sup> Swedish Evangelical Mission were invited by the Somalia government to restart their mission work in the region following the drastic consequence of the war. See i detta tecken evangeliska fosterlands-stiftelsen 150 år. 35 ("SEM's 150 years" published in Swedish).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 71-76.

show progress when compared to the Siyad era. In fact, some claim that the situation got worse.

The new Ethiopian constitution (ratified in 1995) also made the Somali regional state among one of the nine autonomous regional states in the country. After the fall of the Derg regime in May 1991. In May 1995, a new legislative body, the Council of People's Representatives, was elected with the majority of the seats going to the EPRDF. In August, the Constituent Assembly officially transferred power to the new legislature and the country was renamed the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. A new constitution came into force in August 1995 providing ethnic based federalism for the first time in the country's history. The new constitution includes a provision for self-determination for the nine ethnically based regions (Asnake K., 2009).

Many Somalis who migrated to Somalia from 1960 came back to the Somali region following the collapse of the Derg government in Ethiopia in 1991 (Abdi Samatar, 2008). Consequently, missionaries and mission agencies which were expelled by the Derg regime came back to minister in Ethiopia once again.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, phase four (from 1992 to 2020) has been a period of relative freedom; mission agencies expanded their mission work in the Somali region.

In all the earlier three phases, the Ogaden missions were limited to certain area of the Ogaden region, in this phase four, however, evangelical Christians' presence in every zone of Somali region is evident. Evangelical churches such as Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKHC), Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers' Church (EFGBC), Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), Meserete Kiristos Church, Ethiopian Guenet Church (EGC), Ethiopian Addis Kidan Baptist Church, Assemblies of God Church in Ethiopia, and others have planted churches and engaged in building schools and other development projects in different zones of Somali region during this phase.

### **Ethiopian Mulu Wongel Church and Dr. Tibebe Haileselassie's Mission**

The Ethiopian Mulu Wongel (Full Gospel) Church was founded in 1967 in Addis Ababa. However, it was not legally registered until 1992.<sup>13</sup> With its pentecostal renewal and revival emphasis, Mulu Wongel spread all over the country within few years of its establishment. The revival this church experienced also spread to other mainline Protestant denominations so that to this day, protestants in Ethiopia are called "*Pentey*", short for Pentecostal.<sup>14</sup> However, Mulu Wongel, as the foremost

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<sup>12</sup> Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience*, Reprint edition. (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> See Bekele Woldekidan, "Revival Ethiopia ena yemechereshaw mecheresha" (Amharic) p. 84-87.

<sup>14</sup> Jörg Haustein, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Ethiopia: A Historical Introduction to a Largely Unexplored Movement," in *Multidisciplinary Views on the Horn of Africa*, ed. Hatem Elliese (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe, 2014), 117.

pentecostal church in Ethiopia, endured a great persecution when the Derg seized power in 1974.

The Derg tried to appeal to the Ethiopian people in various ways. One strategy was its choreographed espousal and encouragement of ecumenical relations between various religions. Under the auspices of Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi, the late Libyan President, a meeting of Christians and Muslims was organized in Libya on 30th January to 6th February in 1976. The theme of the conference was "Religion does not divide us." The military rulers applied a double-pronged strategy. On the one hand, they were trying to create a platform from which they could gain influence and control over the leaders of the two great religions in Ethiopia. On the other, they were keenly aware of the need to secure the support of Muslims in the unfolding Ethio-Somalia War (also known as "the Ogaden war") of 1977-1978.<sup>15</sup>

The Derg announced its own version of the Chinese Cultural Revolution on 12th September 1978 when it had already been abandoned by the Chinese government because of its regrettable consequences.<sup>16</sup> The media began to call openly for the eradication of backward practices and the rooting out of alien values associated with foreign influences. This was an allusion to the evangelical faith to which the tagged as "Mete" (literally 'newcomer').<sup>17</sup> For instance, one of the official Amharic language newspapers, Addis Zemen, openly stated that there were some foreign agents who, under the guise of religion, were subverting the Revolution. The newspaper mentioned that the government would not tolerate the hidden schemes of imperialists who sought to derail the Revolution by numbing the minds of the youth through idealistic thoughts.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in June 1979, flagrant denunciations of religion appeared in official newspapers such as Addis Zemen. Dawit Wolde Giorgis, a former authority on the Derg period, noted that the highest echelons of the government had given instructions to the political cadres (party officials and their cohorts) to eliminate religion. By providing a personal witness of his close participation in several high-level meetings, he testified that religious practices had been "disparaged in every

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<sup>15</sup> Tibebe Eshete, "Marxism and Religion: The Paradox of Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1974-1991," *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission 2* (2015): 242–258.

<sup>16</sup> In his speech, Mengistu Haile Mariam, the most prominent officer of the Derg (President of Ethiopia, 1987-1991), stressed the fact that unless the Ethiopian people made successful campaigns on the cultural front to defeat backward cultural practices, the triumph of socialism could hardly be realised. For his full speech, see Addis Zemen, 16th September 1978. The ideas of the Cultural Revolution modelled on China's were more a result of the influence of widespread literature than an outcome of a direct ideological push from Beijing.

<sup>17</sup> As early as 1975, the term *Mete* was beginning to gain currency, at least in the media, to refer to Evangelicals. An article published in Ye Zareitu Ityopia, on 19th January, mentions the word *mete* as the products of a foreign religion, the brainchild of imperialism, preaching other-worldliness and a slovenly attitude detrimental to the progress of the country. It accused the *mete* religion of not only being counterproductive, but of sapping the ardour of the youth to combat social injustice. Ye Zareitu Ityopia, 19th January 1975.

<sup>18</sup> Addis Zemen, 21st May 1978. In fact, the newspaper was very pointed in mentioning the southern provinces and the SIM related Kale Hiwot Church.

manner possible.” Dawit adds that the military rulers began to make sweeping attacks against evangelical Christians of the south and western parts of Ethiopia in the early 1980s with unimaginable hatred.<sup>19</sup>

As Pentecostalism and mainline protestant churches were under attack, the Mulu Wongel mission was decidedly targeted. The Mulu Wongel churches in the countryside were also closed. Other churches in the Ogaden faced the same fate.

According to Gashu Gebreyohanes, a Mulu Wongel pastor in Jijiga, a Mulu Wongel church was shut down in the Ogaden region during this era. It was difficult to proceed with church service or even a house worship services because of the communist spies who would inform the local authorities.<sup>20</sup> This again is seen in the ministry and life of Dr Tibebu Haileselassie, a Mulu Wongel member and a medical doctor, who decided to serve the Somali people living in Kebri Dehar during the Derg era. For convenience, it is more practical to look at the ministry and influence of Dr. Tibebu and Lishan Agonafir along with the Mulu Wongel mission.

### **The Life and Ministry of Dr. Tibebu Haileselassie**

Tibebu Haileselassie (not related to Emperor Haileselassie) was born in Addis Ababa on September 8, 1947. He passed away on August 30, 2012. Tibebu was the son of an Orthodox priest. Growing up, Tibebu was “a brilliant student, excelling in all his studies, winning scholarships to the best schools in Ethiopia, and receiving awards from Emperor Haileselassie for his academic achievements. He was a thoughtful and considerate child to his parents, siblings and friends...”<sup>21</sup> He was too intelligent for this tender age.<sup>22</sup>

Tibebu went to a prestigious high school, General Winget, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This school educated Ethiopia’s brightest. Even from this gifted group of students at General Winget, Tibebu always ranked at the top of his class. After completing his secondary education, he went to Addis Ababa University and continued to excel and graduated from Addis Ababa University’s Medical School with honors in June 1975.<sup>23</sup>

On September 21, 1975, he married Lishan Agonafer at Mulu Wongel Church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Even though the country was facing a civil war in the north and east, Dr. Tibebu chose to serve the people in the east, in the Ogaden region. He was posted in Kebridehar. Dr. Tibebu served in Kebridehar from 1975-1977.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine, and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J: Red Sea Pr, 1988), 121.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Gashu Gebreyohannes, May 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Obituary: Tibebu Haileselassie. Dignity Memoria, 2012.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/denver-co/tibebu-haileselassie-5225054> (accessed 17 April 2021)

<sup>22</sup> Lishan Agonafer, *Tibebu: Yemdrebedaw Eregna*, Addis Ababa: Rohobot Publishing, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

During this time of his service with his wife, Lishan, Dr. Tibebu also witnessed to the local Somalis in addition to the medical service he gave.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Tibebu, Lishan and two of their relatives worshiped in their home in Kebridehar. Non-Somali people eventually came to attend the worship services in Dr. Tibebu's house. Some of these were converted. However, ethnic Somalis did not come to attend the worship services and they did not come to the Lord either.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that there was no evangelical church in Kebridehar in those days; hence, Dr. Tibebu was a pioneer in his mission in the area. The local Somalis loved Dr. Tibebu. During the 1977 Ogaden war, the Somali forces under Siyad Barre invaded the area, the local Somalis protected Dr. Tibebu chanting, "You kill us first before you kill Tibebu. He is our doctor. Do not harm him!"<sup>27</sup> It was during this time of service when he, along with nearly 4000 civilian residents, were taken as civilian prisoners of war into Somalia on July 24, 1977. This was when a full-scale war broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia. In his time in Somalia, Dr. Tibebu served his fellow prisoners as their advocate, doctor, and educator, fighting for their basic rights.

Dr. Tibebu was able to learn the Somali language, translate Somali text books into English and Amharic and establish a K-12 school for the prisoners. He and his fellow prisoners were released from Somalia after 11 years under "prisoner swap supervised by the Geneva-based humanitarian agency..."<sup>28</sup> Shortly after his release from Somalia, he began working with UNICEF, serving the underprivileged in Kenya, Southern Sudan, Somalia, Lesotho, Iraq, Israel/Palestine and New York.<sup>29</sup>

### **Dr. Tibebu as a Prisoner of War**

July 24<sup>th</sup> 1977 was a difficult day for the residents of Kebridehar, Ogaden. On that day, the Ethio-Somalia war broke out. Dr. Tibebu and his friends were at their usual place, at the hospital, when they heard the first missile strike. The residents of the town ran for their lives and most of them took a shelter at the hospital because it was thought hospitals would be spared from attack.

Coincidentally, on this very day, while Dr. Tibebu was fighting for his and others' survival in the war-torn region, his wife, Lishan Agonafir, was giving birth to their second child at a hospital in Adama, about 94 kilometers from Addis Ababa. Not knowing what was happening to her husband, she was waiting for his arrival.

The war ended within half a day. The Somali military conquered the town. Colonel Ali, a military leader of the Somali brigade, told the people who were sheltering

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, and email exchange with Lishan Agonafir, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Email exchange with Lishan Agonafir, June 2020.

<sup>28</sup> "Prisoner Exchange 10 Years After Ethiopia-Somalia War." Associated Press, 02 September 1982.

<https://apnews.com/article/d789e09aeaec4737a74835f678a9a197> (accessed 17 April 2021).

<sup>29</sup> See Lishan Agonafir, Tibebu Yemidrebedaw Eregna.

inside the hospital to leave the hospital; otherwise, Ethiopia would retaliate and the hospital itself would not be spared.

Following Colonel Ali's order, Tibebu was taken to Wabe, a nearby village. There he was met by two Somali physicians, Dr. Muktar and Dr. Nur, and he was told that his job was to treat wounded soldiers. In that desert clinic, Dr. Tibebu received some of his belongings he had left at Kebridehar.

The soldiers saw Dr. Tibebu's Thompson Chain Reference Bible when they delivered him his belongings. He feared perhaps this was the end of his life. Nevertheless, the soldiers did not say anything. They gave his Bible. However, Dr. Muktar asked Dr. Tibebu. "Is this a Bible?" Tibebu answered, "Yes, it is." Dr. Muktar gave the book back to Dr. Tibebu and left.

On that particular day, Tibebu along with other Ethiopian prisoners of war started their journey to Mogadishu. After 30 hours of journey, they arrived at Mogadishu at midnight. They were given food and a place to stay. In the meantime, the news of Dr. Tibebu's disappearance after the war broke out and reached his wife and their family who lived in Adama.

Dr. Tibebu was taken to a prison at Danan. He was introduced to Abdi Abdule, a physician who worked at the prison. Dr. Tibebu was given the responsibility to become the head of the physicians in the prison site at Danan. Tibebu was shocked by their decision but he was confident this was God's providence. He was reminded of Joseph's story from the book of Genesis. Gradually, more prisoners were brought to the Danan prison. It became Dr. Tibebu's job to treat those prisoners of war.

Dr. Tibebu had decided to be frank about his faith to whomever asked. He started a small prayer meeting in his dorm and invited some of the prisoners to join him. Tibebu also did not stop to openly pray before eating his meals. On one occasion, a soldier asked him, "What are you doing?" when he saw him bowing his head for a prayer before eating. Dr. Tibebu answered, "I am praying and thanking my God." "Oh okay! I thought the doctor was sick. If you are praying that is good. Are you a religious person?" "Yes, I am. I believe in Jesus Christ." "Oh! Good person like you should become a Muslim," he responded.

Dr. Tibebu was afraid to respond to the soldier anymore because all the other soldiers were following the conversation. Hence, he kept on thinking how to wisely change the topic. The soldier, however, did not stop the conversation. He continued, "You should believe in Allah and Mohammed as his messenger." Dr. Tibebu couldn't hold it this time. He blurted out, "I believe in Jesus Christ alone." The soldier continued, "You wouldn't have said this in the desert to our soldiers when you were begging for your life. You would have denied Jesus and followed Islam." "I would never deny my Lord Jesus. "Never!" You would rather die, then?" "Yes, I would rather die than deny my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Then none of the soldiers responded to Tibebu. Most of the soldiers were devout Muslims; however, they did not do anything to Dr. Tibebu other than watching him with suspicion.

Dr. Tibebu was interviewed by the Somali national radio station about issues related to medicine and politics. He strictly avoided commenting on politics and limited his comments to the healthcare issues he faced while he was in Ethiopia and after he was taken to Somalia. In his 9 months stay in the Danan prison, Dr. Tibebu served the prisoners and others with utmost ethics.

The prisoners were transferred to Haaway, Lower Shabele, rice production site, for physical labor. Dr. Tibebu served as a physician for the prisoners who were doing the physically demanding work. The most common treated diseases were malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea and other infectious diseases. Many prisoners died due to disease because there was not enough medication for them all. Dr. Tibebu felt so sad looking at the prisoners dying from diseases that could have been treated easily with antibiotics.

In order to stop the diseases, Dr. Tibebu came with an idea of prevention. The prison guards and the prisoners together started to clean the area and keep better personal hygiene. It was said that because of such moves by Dr. Tibebu, they were able to save many people. Dr. Tibebu earned much respect from Colonel Ahmed Hussein, the prison officer.

Dr. Tibebu saw that there were many hundreds of kids at the rice production site who spent most of their days doing nothing. While in prayer, he came up with an idea to start a school for the kids in the prison camp. He presented this idea to Colonel Ahmed Hussein who was already fond of Dr. Tibebu.

Colonel Ahmed welcomed the proposal forwarded by Dr. Tibebu. The school began teaching with six teachers all of whom were prisoners of war. The six teachers and another 30 assistant teachers were exempted from the physical labor and started teaching the kids. They prepared a text book and taught the students. It has been reported that many students from the prison school earned advanced degrees.

Dr. Tibebu served as teacher and a physician to the prisoners and the soldiers for 11 years in row. He was loved by the prisoners and officers alike. They all wanted to be treated by him. He was also fluent in Somali which made communication and relationship smooth with the prison officers.

### **Dr. Tibebu's Legacy**

Dr. Tibebu reunited with his wife in Kenya through the International Red Cross after 11 years. They continued living together until his death in 2012. Dr. Tibebu loved the Somali people even before he started working at Kebridehar. He served them wholeheartedly. The politics of the day did not hinder him from serving the Somali soldiers and prison officers. Many became his lifetime friends.

Although Dr. Tibebu's ministry in Somalia was mainly to fellow prisoners, his lifestyle also affected the Somalis who monitored his activities in the prison camp. Dr. Tibebu's ministry in Kebridehar can also be seen as the fruit of the Mulu Wongel church. Mulu Wongel church was founded mainly by university students of the



1960s. Tibebe was converted at the Swedish Pentecostal mission service in 1967, the same year Mulu Wongel was founded.<sup>30</sup> The influence of this revival in “Giorgis Chapel” (because it was founded in Arada Giorgis, Piassa) on the life Tibebe was well-known.<sup>31</sup> It can be said the Pentecostal mission of the 1960s highly influenced Dr. Tibebe and Lishan Agonafir. Even though Mulu Wongel church did not have an official mission or church in the Somali region during this phase, people like Dr. Tibebe were agents of the persecuted Mulu Wongel church during the Derg era.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 94-97.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 115-116.

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## About the author



Naol Befkadu Kebede was born in Addis Ababa in 1995. He became a born-again Christian at the age of 11 where he started attending at the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus. Later he was baptized at Berhane Wongel Baptist Church.

Naol began studying theology in 2014 because he had intended to become a missionary among the Somalis in the Somali region of Ethiopia. In the meantime, Naol was also a medical student at Addis Ababa University School of Medicine. Naol's passion for theology and mission grew and he took 2 years a break from his medical school to pursue his theological study. In 2017 He returned to medical school upon completing his bachelor of theology. Naol continued studying for his

masters with a focus on world mission. His thesis is titled "An Exploration of Socio-cultural Barriers to Evangelical Missions: The Case for Missionaries Working among the Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia."

Naol is currently a final year medical student at Addis Ababa University and he is also pursuing his PhD in leadership at Vision International University campus in Addis Ababa. Naol aspires and plans to become a medical missionary among the Somalis in the near future.

## The Kingdom of God and the Glory That God Will Reveal to Us: An Epistle to the Somali Church

Júlio Lopes

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Dear Somali Christians,

In the past few months, my heart has been in pain for those brothers and sisters who were arrested and facing horrific persecution. The Apostles have spent a good amount of time telling us that our sufferings will NOT be in vain. Do you believe them?

For instance, did you know that when Jesus establishes his kingdom, we, his faithful servants, will reign with Him? Did you know that the faithful Somali believers will probably reign with Jesus in the regions of Somalia? John said in Rev. 1:6 that Christ has “made us kings and priests unto God” and “we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

Why don't we study the Word of God and find out what He has in store for us?

Jesus said: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. **Your kingdom come;** Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:9-10). Jesus taught us to pray for the coming of His Kingdom. How many of us have really thought about the implications of Jesus' words today?

The Bible tells us that “Yahweh will reign as king forever and ever.” (Ex. 15:18). The Word of Yahweh took on human flesh and one day the King of Kings will come physically to this world to establish his eternal kingdom. To understand the context of what Jesus and Moses were talking about, we must have a look in the prophecies of Daniel.

In his vision, Daniel saw a divine figure coming on the clouds. His appearance was like a “son of man”. Then he received the everlasting kingdom which belongs to God Almighty. Daniel says: “**And to him (son of man) was given dominion and glory and kingship** that all the peoples, the nations, and languages would serve him; his dominion is a dominion without end that will not cease, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14).

Daniel revealed by the Holy Spirit that the “Son of Man” would receive dominion and glory. Jesus clearly identified himself as the Son of Man of Daniel's prophecy: “Then Jesus came to them and said, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me**” (Matt. 28:18).

But what is interesting in Daniel's prophecy is that the Kingdom will ALSO be given to the "HOLY ONES of the Most High." One of the divine beings who was talking to Daniel explains the vision to him: "But the **holy ones** of the Most High will **receive the kingdom**, and they will take possession of the kingdom forever, forever and ever" (Dan. 7:18).

Therefore, we learn that the Yahweh will give his kingdom to two recipients: 1) the Son of Man and 2) the holy ones of the Most High. But WHO are these Holy Ones? We will answer that later.

Daniel was puzzled and wanted to know more: "I continued watching, and this **horn** made **war** with the **holy ones** and it prevailed over them, until the **Ancient of Days** came and gave judgment to the **holy ones** of the Most High; and the time arrived and the **holy ones** took **possession** of the kingdom" (Dan. 7:21–22).

Daniel was told that the "horns" are symbols of earthy kings and kingdoms. The **Ancient of Days** is another name for the Almighty God. This prophecy clearly shows that the Holy Ones will go through a time of persecution. There will be war against the Holy Ones and they will be defeated for a time. But the Almighty God will come to fight for them; He will establish justice on earth and finally the Holy Ones will "take possession of the kingdom". No wonder Daniel was so perplexed.

Many theologians have tried to determine the identity of this evil "horn" who will make war against the Holy Ones of the Most High. I might be wrong but I believe that the religion of the persecutors fits this description: "And he will speak words against the Most High, and he will **oppress** the holy ones of the Most High, and he will attempt to change times and law, and they will be given into his hand for a time and two times and half a time" (Dan. 7:25).

One day I might write about the meaning of "then the court will sit" (v. 26). This topic is related to the "**Divine Council of God**" in Heaven.

Now Daniel includes the word **NATION** as another recipient of the Kingdom: "And the **kingdom** and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven **will be given to the nation of the holy ones** of the Most High; his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27).

There are now three candidates for the kingdom: The Son of man, the Holy ones of the Most High, and the Nation of the Holy ones of the Most High. Could the Holy Ones and the Nation of the Holy Ones be the same people? Yes, it could, but I am not sure. Then who are these Holy Ones or the Nation of the Holy Ones? In short, they are God's family in heaven and on earth. The idea here is that God has a heavenly and earthly **FAMILY**. Both of them will rule together with Jesus in the everlasting kingdom of Yahweh.

God's desire from the beginning of Creation was to live among his children, and for them to rule the creation with him. God's original intention for humanity was that we rule and reign with him as his earthly family. His plans have not changed.

One day I will write about how Satan took possession of the nations and how God is restoring the nations back to himself. What is important now is to see that prophecies point to the end of the **rule of darkness**. The END of the kingdom of darkness is approaching; the power of evil spirits, demons and false gods will soon finish. The Messiah's **repossession** of the nations will soon be a reality. This includes the regions where false gods reign over the persecutors.

Jesus is the Son of Man prophesized by Daniel. The eternal kingdom belongs to Him. Jesus will share with his family (the Holy Ones of Yahweh) to rule the nations. But it is not enough just to be a believer in Christ.

To reign with Christ the believer must be found faithful: "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Matt. 25:21).

We must ENDURE persecution, without denying Him. Now it makes sense what Paul said to Timothy: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Perseverance and endurance are closely related to the idea of "reigning" with Jesus. Those who deny Jesus, the Almighty King, will also be denied by Him in his Kingdom.

Therefore, the Holy Ones, according to the teachings of the New Testament, are **the faithful believers**. They are the family of God and they inherited the promises given to Abraham: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus... And if you are Christ's, then you are descendants of Abraham, **heirs** according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26, 29). Therefore, we are sons and heirs of God.

There is a very interesting prophecy in Zechariah: "And Yahweh my God will come, and all the **holy ones** with him" (Zech. 14:5). Yahweh doesn't have a body, but it says here that the Almighty God will come in a physical body to take possession of the nations, which are now under the dominion of evil spirits. The only one who is able to fulfill this prophecy is Yahweh in human flesh: "For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that **I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory**" (Isa. 66:18).

The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated with the coming of Jesus. The Word became flesh (John 1:13). We are just waiting for the conclusion of time, when "God in Flesh" will show his Glory to all the nations and tongues.

When this happens, WE will REIGN together with Jesus in his Kingdom. Paul explains it in this way: "the Gentiles are **fellow heirs**, and **fellow members** of the body, and **fellow sharers** of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (Eph.

3:6). The Apostle Paul identified three aspects of our new identity: 1) We are fellow heirs, 2) fellow members of God's family, Christ's body and 3) fellow sharers of the promises.

Paul uses the language of inheritance. In Africa, the concept of inheritance is well developed, so there is no reason to explain. The Old Testament clearly teaches that human beings were meant to be God's family. This is the reason when Luke mentioned Adam in the genealogy of Jesus, Luke called Adam "son of God." "Kenan was the son of Enoch. Enoch was the son of Seth. Seth was the son of Adam. **Adam was the son of God**" (Luke 3:38).

Salvation means being a part of Yahweh's family. If a person doesn't belong to God's family, this person is not saved. No wonder the Biblical writers used words like "adoption," "heir," and "inheritance" to describe the Church.

Satan, God's enemy, has convinced persecutors that they should be happy in being **slaves of a false god**. So, persecutors refuse the idea that God can be their Father and that He wants them to become part of His heavenly and earthly family.

Therefore, we become children of God through the new spiritual birth. "Dear friends, now we are **children** of God..." (1 John 3: 2). "so that you are **no longer a slave but a son**, and if a son, also **an heir** through God (Gal 4: 7). "The Spirit himself confirms to our spirit that **we are children of God**" (Rom 8:16).

John 1:12 highlights the idea that God wants to create a new family: "But as many as **received** him—to those who **believe** in his name—he **gave to them authority to become children of God.**"

In Romans, Paul presented the idea of being GLORIFIED together with Jesus. "... if indeed we **suffer** together with him so that we may also be **glorified** together with him" (Rom 8:17). Our glorification is connected with our sufferings with Jesus. Suffering is one of the best church purifiers.

What is God planning for us? As part of God's family, we will inherit the kingdom and have authority over the nations. The faithful Somali believers will probably become the new governors of Somalia when Jesus returns and establishes his reign.

Someone might say "but it will take too long ... I will probably be dead". This is what the Apostle Paul has to say to you: "And if our hope in Christ is **only for this life**, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world" (1 Cor. 15:19). If we only hope for this life, we deserve to be pitied.

As "sons of God" we will be members of God's governing rule. We have a divine calling to spread the kingdom rule of God so that we, humanity, can enjoy the love of God, our Father: "and made them a **kingdom and priests** to our God, and **they will reign on the earth**" (Rev 5:10).

The Apostle Paul prays for us, so that we “**may know** what is the **hope** of his calling, what are the **riches** of the glory of his inheritance among the saints (ἅγιος, **hagioi**, holy ones), and what is the **surpassing greatness** of his power toward us who believe” (Eph 1:18-19).

Paul again described our inheritance in **Colossians 1:12–13**. He prays that his readers will give “**thanks to the Father** who has qualified you for a **share of the inheritance** of the saints [holy ones] in light, who has **rescued us** from the **domain of darkness** and **transferred us** to the kingdom of the Son he loves.”

Therefore, we should always THANK our Lord for rescuing us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son.

God will take the nations back to himself, because the nations belong to Him: “Rise up, O God, judge the earth, **for all the nations are your inheritance**” (Ps. 82:8). Once the nations are **restored** to Yahweh through the PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, the faithful believers will **displace** the demons who presently influence all the nations and rule in their place as Children of God.

Paul reminds the Corinthian Church that we will have a very important responsibility in the future kingdom of God: “do you not know that **the saints will judge the world?**... Do you not know that **we will judge angels?**” (1 Cor. 6:3). We will judge the world and we will judge the angels who sinned. What a tremendous privilege and responsibility! Somali believers will be the future judges and rulers of Somalia.

The Apostle John affirms in Revelation 2:26, “And the one who **conquers** and who keeps my works until the end, **I will give him authority over the nations.**” Therefore, our God will not only save us, but also make us his children and heirs of his kingdom. Our ruling and reigning with Him is directly related to our faithfulness.

Satan has deceived the persecutors to believe that being “slaves to a false god” is the best thing that could happen to them. Therefore, the persecutors are missing the greatest privilege a human being could have, to be called a child of God. John said, “See how great a love the Father has given us, that we would be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). Therefore, they refuse to come to Jesus, be adopted in God’s family and become heirs of Abraham’s promises.

Prophet David prophesized about Jesus, “Ask from me and **I will make the nations your heritage**, and your possession the end of the earth” (Ps. 2:8). Jesus, the Messiah, will inherit his everlasting kingdom and **then he will share his Kingdom with his children**, those who stay faithful, overcome or conquer, until his return.

The same John speaks about it in Revelation 3:21, “The one who conquers, I will grant to him **to sit down with me on my throne**, as I also have conquered and have sat down with my Father on his throne.” Our destiny as believers in Christ is not only a place in God’s family, but also a place in his kingdom with Jesus (Eph. 1:18).

I am so sorry for those Somali believers who have abandoned Christ and behaved like Esau. They reject the high position offered by Jesus and **“sell their inheritance”** for a bowl of soup. The author of Hebrews makes the same comparison with us, **“See that NO ONE is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son”** (Heb. 12:16).

I encourage Somali believers to read these words and guard them in their hearts, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us”** (Rom. 8:18). Our glory is too great to even compare with the present sufferings.

The glory that waits for us is much greater than the brief sufferings that we might encounter in prison, being abused and mistreated by our families, as we await the manifestation of the Son of God, **“For our light and momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal glory that is far beyond comparison”** (2 Cor. 4:17).

I really pray and hope that Somali Christians will **“consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter trials of many kinds”** (James 1:2) after realizing what Jesus has prepared for his faithful servants. The New Testament writers are trying to convey to us the immense value of being faithful to God during our **“present sufferings”** and **“momentary afflictions”** in this world. We will reign with Jesus in his kingdom.

I finish this epistle with this verse, **“That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him”** (1 Cor. 2:9). The glory is too great to be described with words. Just be faithful and wait. God will not disappoint us. He never did.

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## About the author



Julio Lopes holds a Master's degree in Global Studies from Columbia International University (CIU). His family moved to Kenya in 2000 in obedience to God's calling to reach the Somalis for Christ. They have also worked in Kibera and recently started working as a Church Mobilizer, encouraging the African Church to reach the remaining unreached people groups. The author can be reached at [mb-eke.er@aimint.org](mailto:mb-eke.er@aimint.org)



## An Ex-Muslim Christian in Secular Canada: A Personal Reflection

Quule M. Egal

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### Introduction

Before I moved to Canada in 2004, I served as an elder and evangelist among Somali Christians and seekers in the Horn of Africa for over a decade. After I moved to Canada, I was expecting to continue, in some capacity, to serve as a Somali evangelist and missionary among the Somali Muslims in Canada. However, I have faced some unforeseen challenges and obstacles and below I will briefly highlight a summary of the biggest challenges I encountered. First, I will highlight the practical, day-to-day challenges I faced in Canada and later, I will summarize the ideological, spiritual and social challenges I faced here as a Christian evangelist/missionary.

### Practical Challenges

Life in Canada is very different from the laid back, leisurely life in Africa and I already knew that difference somewhat but I was unaware just how that dissimilarity is wide and deep. One of the first things I noticed in my new home in Canada is the early morning movement of a very large number of people carrying their coffee cups while walking hurriedly to their various jobs and businesses. Therefore, the first challenge I faced was this fast-paced life in Canada, which made it very difficult for me to continue my role as an evangelist in my new country. The problem was that the very people I wanted to visit and evangelize were very busy with their work and studies and I, myself, became preoccupied with the same things. I learned that life in Canada is busy and most people go to work or school here and unlike Africa, have very little time for a chat or a friendly conversation. There are a few people who still hang out in coffee shops or on park benches but most are people with addictions or with mental problems, or seniors. Some others are Muslim extremists who don't want to be seen with a *kafir*, a Somali ex-Muslim, who abandoned Islam to follow Christ.

The Somalis in Ethiopia, Kenya or other parts of East Africa were mostly refugees from the civil war in Somalia. These displaced Somalis had questions and were open for discussions on many issues, including dialogs about religious topics. In comparison to that, the Somalis in Canada or Western Europe, are not refugees anymore. They are settled and became citizens or have permanent residences and are not facing the uncertain, existential issues that the Somalis in the Horn of Africa face. It is true that trials, uncertainties and tribulations of life can lead most humans to ask deeper religious and philosophical questions. However, in the absence of trials and ordeals, people do not ask hard, existential questions and are comfortable within their own traditions and religious systems. This is the situation in which we find Somalis in Canada today.

## Transportation

Another obstacle that hampered my call to serve as an evangelist in Canada was the issue of transportation. In the Horn of Africa, the cities are smaller and even big cities are not expanded but are densely populated. In these cities, you could reach your destination fairly quickly by taking a taxi or a mini-bus or even by walking because the traffic is less than it is in Canada. Here there is a constant traffic jam, large high ways that could not be crossed by walking and very long distances in expanding and industrial cities. I remember over two decades ago that walking or riding a bus from one side of Addis Ababa to another was not a big problem. In Toronto where I now live, walking long distances is not practical due to the long distances, industrialized quarters, impassable highways and other obstacles such as parks or urban forests. Owning a vehicle and using it was the best option in those circumstances but I don't like owning and operating a vehicle or even a cell phone.

## Religious & Ideological Challenges

Another unpleasant surprise for me was that I noticed most Somalis in Canada are actually more fundamentalist in their Islamic faith than the Somalis in the Horn of Africa. I noticed more men are bearded and almost all Somali women, including very young girls, wore the *hijab*. Many of the young women wore *niqabs* or Islamic face-masks that made their eyes the only visible part of their body. It is a very familiar sight in Canada to see Somali women wearing huge black *hijabs* walking around in groups or riding public transport systems.

There are many Islamic *madrassas* and mosques where radical religious leaders instruct Somali Muslim kids and adults to even be stricter in the Islamic religion, to stay away from the infidels and to observe more stringent dress codes and *halal* diet. For the first time in my life, I learned that there are *halal* and *haram* chewing gums, biscuits, juices and even candies. I never heard such things in the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, there are publicly funded Somali community centers in all major cities in Canada. Local and federal governments fund those community centers so that local Somali communities, including Somali newcomers, can have good and facilitated access to government services like training, documentation, settlement and employment opportunities.

When I first learned the existence of those publicly funded Somali community centers, I was excited thinking that they would be places where I could mingle and share my Christian faith with any Somali Muslim willing to learn about the salvific Gospel of Jesus Christ. I even volunteered for a while in one of those centers to help immigrants and create opportunities for those Muslims who may want to know about Jesus. I was, however, disappointed when I learned that Somali Muslims who were working in those community centers were mostly intolerant religious fundamentalists who were not prepared to see a Christian Somali visiting or volunteering in those centers. Those publicly funded community centers have Muslim prayer rooms designated as mosques. The youth that visited those centers in the afternoons would not just play some sports and exercise but also would get some strict religious instructions from radical *imams* and other religious folks in the community.

My volunteering in one of those community centers did not last more than two months. I am sure it was because I am a Christian Somali and especially the Christian cross I wore offended many Somali Muslims in the center. They didn't expect to see a Somali Christian. Some asked me if I was born Christian or if I abandoned Islam and converted to Christianity. When I told a few of them that I converted to Christianity, they became visibly angry. There was only one elderly man who tolerated me and was friendly to me. However, others gave me dirty looks and cold shoulders so much so that I stopped volunteering there after a couple of months. There was a young man who did not like to even see me and he would scream the phrase "*Allahu Akbar*" (Allah is the greatest) whenever he saw me in the center. It was after this time that I learned how difficult it would be to do one-to-one evangelism among Somali Muslims in Toronto and I became more interested in street preaching instead and I started praying about it.

### **Postmodernist, Devilish and Secularist Challenges**

Finally, apart from the above-mentioned practical, religious and social obstacles, which were all obvious handicaps to the continuation of my evangelistic vision in Canada, other unforeseen and largely abstract and subtle difficulties confronted me. However, before I highlight the nature of those abstract challenges, I have to mention the general status of Christianity in the first quarter of the 21st century in the Western World. By Western World, I mean the United States of America, Canada and Western Europe.

Christianity in the form of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism was the dominant religion in the Western world over many centuries. However, over the past one hundred years, that status started changing rapidly and that change accelerated over the past fifty years and in this current state of affairs, it is predictable that in the next fifty years, Christian worldview and ethics will completely disappear in the Western world. First in Western Europe and next in Canada and then the US, Christian values could vanish. Today, both in Canada and in Western Europe, Christianity as a worldview, has largely disappeared from the public square and was replaced by fanatical secularism, aggressive Islamism, multiculturalism, aggressive promoters of sexual immorality, and radical feminist worldview.

In the Western world today, in all secular public schools, colleges and universities, Christianity is portrayed as a colonialist, white man's religion which promoted slavery, colonialism and the extermination of native peoples of the Americas. The secularist academics who propagate these views about Christianity in the West have no idea that most people in Africa today are Christians and that Christianity entered Ethiopia, an African country, at the beginning of the first century, as recorded in the book of Acts 8:26-40. This means Christianity arrived in Africa centuries before it took roots in Western Europe.

Today, Christianity in the Western world is demonized and condemned by the multiculturalist political elites who run the West. There are a number of things that really shocked me in my first few years in Canada; one of them was that a decade and half ago when we first arrived, there was a debate of whether to allow the

Muslims in Ontario to govern themselves with the Sharia Law especially in the areas of family life.<sup>1</sup> There were huge demonstrations and big debates for it and against it in the streets and in the media. Finally, due to large demonstrations by Middle Eastern and Pakistani Christians, the No Sharia camp and their supporters in the legislator won the vote not to adopt Sharia Law in Ontario.<sup>2</sup>

Another incident that left me dismayed was the late outspoken Christian minister, Mark Harding, who later became a close friend of mine was trying to highlight the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world, especially in Pakistan in his street preaching and in his church. This Christian minister who was a white Canadian from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada used to hand out tracts and pamphlets documenting the severe persecution against Christians in Pakistan. Rev. Mark did this along with some Pakistani Christians. Some Muslim organizations in Toronto area learned about his ministry and accused him of “Islamophobia.” The poor minister was then arrested by the police and was forced to take Islamic lessons from a Muslim imam in Mississauga, a town adjacent to Toronto, or else he would be sent to jail.<sup>3</sup> He agreed to take the Islamic lessons from the Muslim imam who mocked him and told him that he had the power to send him to jail if he did not show respect to Islam.

Rev. Mark objected to some of the Islamic lessons he was forced to take from the said imam. As a result of the poor treatments from the imam and authorities, Rev. Mark had a heart attack but survived. He eventually developed serious health issues related to the heart attack.<sup>4</sup> I went out with Rev. Mark a number of times in his street ministry and we stayed in touch until he died in 2015 due to heart complications.<sup>5</sup> I was shocked and dismayed by the way the Canadian authorities treated Rev. Mark even though the only thing he did was to raise awareness about the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world, especially in Pakistan. By the way, this happens to any Christian who tries to highlight the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world.

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<sup>1</sup> James Sturcke, “Sharia Law in Canada, Almost: A 2004 Report Recommending That Muslim Faith-Based Tribunals Be Allowed in Ontario, Canada, Triggered Huge Controversy.” The Guardian. 08 February 2008.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2008/feb/08/sharialawincanadaalmost> (accessed 19 March 2021).

<sup>2</sup> “Ontario Premier Rejects Use Of Shariah Law. CBC News, 09 September 2005.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ontario-premier-rejects-use-of-shariah-law-1.523122> (accessed 19 March 2021).

<sup>3</sup> “Mark Harding, Christian Pastor Who Was Convicted Of Hate Crime For Speaking Out Against Islam, On Paltalk.” The Gary Baumgarten Report. 14 July 2008.  
<https://garybaumgarten.blogspot.com/2008/07/mark-harding-christian-pastor-who-was.html> (accessed 19 March 2021).

<sup>4</sup> “Mark Harding -The Last Canadian Standing,” Blogwrath. 02 July 2011  
<http://www.blogwrath.com/canada-islam/mark-harding-the-last-canadian-standing/1442/> (accessed 19 March 2021).

<sup>5</sup> “Friends Remember Mark Harding,” Blogwrath. 25 April 2015  
<http://www.blogwrath.com/christianity/friends-remember-mark-harding/7139/> (accessed 19 March 2021).

Such a person would be called Islamophobic and would be dragged through the courts by the authorities.

While Rev. Mark was being persecuted, the Canadian government gave 22 million dollars to two Canadian Islamist Arabs; one is a convicted al-Qaeda terrorist; the other is a Muslim Brotherhood operative who claimed to have been tortured in Syria.<sup>6</sup> Having experienced severe persecution in the hands of Somali Muslims, I always had the nagging question ringing in my head as to why the Western governments ignore the persecution of Christians while rewarding the very Islamists who are persecuting Christians. I observed Western countries sending armies to protect Muslims in faraway lands and would even arm, support and train the very Islamic jihadists who are persecuting and murdering Christians in places like Libya, Syria, Kosovo, Bosnia and other places in the Muslim world.<sup>7</sup>

I couldn't believe that the US and its Western allies instigated tens of thousands of Islamic jihadists against Qaddafi and his Libyan government and bombed Qaddafi's forces in support of the jihadists until Qaddafi and his sons were brutally executed in the streets of that country.<sup>8</sup> The US and its allies, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, also trained and armed Islamic jihadists against the secular government of Syria.<sup>9</sup> The pro-jihadi project failed this time but sadly half a million Syrians lost their lives in this brutal war.<sup>10</sup>

I also observed that anti-Christian, pro-Islamist mentality is dominant in Western schools, media and institutions of higher learning. The question I keep asking is why are things this way? Why is America and its allies backing, funding, arming and serving as the Air Force of the murderous Islamic jihadists that attacked them on 9/11 and killed three thousand of their people? Why is the Western world supporting murderous jihadist while ridiculing, demonizing and even persecuting Christians in their own countries?

I once witnessed in downtown Toronto a large group of LGBTQ and Islamist demonstrators harassing a Christian street preacher. Some of the Muslims in the

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<sup>6</sup> The first was (Maher Arar) a Canadian Muslim of Arab descent who got 11 million dollars from the Canadian government after he claimed the Syrian government tortured him in Syria. The second was Omar Khadar, a Canadian Arab who is also a convicted Al-Qaeda operative who killed an American soldier and wounded another in Afghanistan. He also got around 11 million dollars from the Canadian government.

<sup>7</sup> US, Nato supported radical Jihadists in Libya.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gnZvYkcKP8>

<sup>8</sup> US, Nato supported Jihadists against Qaddafi:  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/these-libyan-ex-militiamen-were-once-linked-to-al-qaeda-now-they-wield-power-in-a-new-order/2017/09/27/8356abf8-97dd-11e7-af6a-6555caae8b8dc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/these-libyan-ex-militiamen-were-once-linked-to-al-qaeda-now-they-wield-power-in-a-new-order/2017/09/27/8356abf8-97dd-11e7-af6a-6555caae8b8dc_story.html)

<sup>9</sup> US and allies train Islamists to depose Assad:  
<https://thenelsondaily.com/news/nato-proxies-using-wmds-syria-23785>

<sup>10</sup> Half a million Syrians died in the war:  
Factbox: More than half a million dead as Syria's war enters eighth year.

crowd were screaming “Allahu Akbar” at him to silence and intimidate him. Moreover, the police were present and yet they did not do anything to protect the Christian preacher. In fact, to the loud cheers of the mob, they finally arrested the peaceful Christian preacher.<sup>11</sup> The preacher had all the legal grounds to be there and even had the permit to preach right there. At that moment, I questioned my desire to do some street preaching of my own but I continued praying to see if God really wanted me to do that.

I learned portions of the scriptures, especially those on sexual immorality which is treated as “hate speech” in Canada. However, it is okay to preach similar teachings in the Quran.<sup>12</sup> It is not illegal to organize huge public nude and semi-nude parades in the streets with millions of children watching.<sup>13</sup> However, I noticed on numerous occasions Christian street preachers being harassed, arrested or manhandled by the authorities.<sup>14</sup> Christian street preachers are also sometimes harassed by Islamists, fanatical atheists and others who promote gross sexual immorality. It was during this time that somehow, instead of doing street preaching, I decided to carry crosses (including a large one) and icons in the streets like a silent witness. I also carried copies of the New Testament Bibles to give them to anyone who asked for one.

I have been doing this silent witness ministry twice a week for many years now. I found it to be a small way I could continue my evangelism ministry and hit back at the ungodly system in my own little ways. While doing this ministry, I also wear a unique and distinct clerical attire and hairstyle with facial hair. These choices set me apart and help me focus on the spiritual work I do. I don't talk to people and I don't preach but I just walk and walk for hours and I pray and sometimes I sing hymns as I walk. When people see me in the streets and in the malls, they stare at me and most are curious but some are shocked to see me. Many of them think I am crazy and some say it to my face. Whenever someone says I am crazy, I say to them, “for Christ.” The two groups that occasionally shout insults at me are Muslim radicals and promoters of sexual immorality. Some “Christians” occasionally join these two groups. Some of these “Christians” yell at me and call me demon-possessed. I just walk away knowing they even called the Master the same things. When some Bible believing Christians approach me, they politely tell me that all the crosses, the icons, my clerical robes and my hairstyle are not really necessary and that all I need is to be born again!

These sincere Christians preach to me assuming I am not born again. Sometimes I tell these people to leave me alone and preach to all the lost people who do not know the Lord. I cannot understand why Christians in Canada do not make Christ-

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<sup>11</sup> Christian street preacher arrested in Toronto. Gays and Muslims demonstrate against him: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS6AIYBnnIM>.

<sup>12</sup> Bible verses are seen as hate speech: <https://answersingenesis.org/religious-freedom/canada-forces-government-speech-and-bans-Bible-verses/>

<sup>13</sup> Public nudity in Canada, demonstrations: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-naked-men-at-the-pride-festival-in-toronto-canada-113830084.html>

<sup>14</sup> Christian street preacher arrested in Toronto. Gays and Muslims demonstrate against him: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS6AIYBnnIM>.

like disciples. Canada is a mission field. Over the years, as I prayer-walked in the streets, I noticed Hindu people (God bless them) show me a very high respect; some even venerate me as a *sadhu* or saint and give me alms! While alms are appreciated, the main reason I prayer walk is to peacefully protest against the mistreatments of Bible believing Christians in Canada. I understand when Muslims persecute me because their faith instructs them to do so but I cannot understand why some LGBTQ members target me whenever they see me prayer walking. I pray for all who target me because of my Christian faith; the Bible teaches me to do so, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” Matthew 5:44.

### Dark Politics

I will recap and say a word about the profound anti-Christ, materialistic and ungodly mindset that I witnessed in Canada are distressing. As a Christian missionary that left Islam three decades ago, I am appalled and dismayed by the disrespectful and blasphemous attitudes in which Western culture treats Christianity and its symbols like the cross. Western nations, institutions, media, academia and governments give deep respect and support to Muslims including radical ones who support the persecution of Christians. Western governments give billions of dollars to armed jihadists who are waging brutal wars in places like Libya, Syria and Kosovo. Most Western churches and Christian non-governmental organizations are silent about this. Western media and governments talk constantly about the rights of Muslims in places like Russia, China, Myanmar and other places but will rarely mention the barbaric and savage persecution that Christians in Somalia and in other Islamic countries go through daily.

Western governments, including the US and Canada, receive hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees from the Islamic world annually but forcibly repatriate and deny asylum to Christian refugees fleeing from persecution in the Islamic world. I personally have documented this over the past few years. In the same way, hypocritical Western countries fanatically create, promote, encourage, fund and advocate for abortion and moral degeneracy in sub-Saharan Africa and other places. These governments turn a blind eye to the extreme religious apartheid and the savagery that exists in places like Saudi Arabia. Recently, I was shocked and appalled after watching Hollywood, the morally corrupt and anti-Christ organization that currently dictates Western moral values, giving an “Oscar” to an Al-Qaeda-affiliated group from Syria calling them a “human rights organization.”<sup>15</sup>

President Trump praised the same group and authorized them to receive another grant of several million dollars.<sup>16</sup> The profoundly materialistic, morally relativized,

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<sup>15</sup> Al Qaeda affiliated group receives Oscar:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D\\_MZKRG3frQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D_MZKRG3frQ)

<sup>16</sup> Trump approves a grant for al Qaeda affiliated group:  
<https://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/trump-sends-us45-million-in-aid-to-syrias-white-helmets>

spiritual bankrupted and abjectly uninformed, ignorant westerners have no idea of what they are watching on their propaganda-filled Hollywoodized TV stations.

Very expensive and prestigious colleges and universities are open everywhere in the West but they produce the most ignorant and most obtuse creatures the world has ever seen. There are immature and extremely naïve elites who wrongly assume that everybody in the world thinks and behaves like an American or Canadian; that all religions are equal and that Jesus, Mohamed and Satan are the same. These are the same people, who are the leaders of the “developed” Western world, the same people who unfortunately the rest of the majority world are trying to imitate.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, my desire to continue my Christian ministry in Canada has faced several challenges that were practical and ideological in nature. Those challenges forced me to change my original strategy of one-to-one evangelism to Muslims to street preaching for anyone and finally to carrying the Cross silently, walking and praying and becoming a visible grace of Christ in the streets of this deeply secularized society. I was expecting to face practical challenges such as transportation challenges but I was not fully prepared for the hidden, subtle and the more powerful anti-Christ, demonic, psychological and societal challenges that I encountered here. I looked deep and wide to know the real sources of those subtle, negative spiritual and anti-Christ challenges that exist in the West. I am surprised to find out that they are actually coming from the same source.

I found out the spirit that motivates Islamic jihadists in the Islamic world and beyond is the same spirit that is fueling and energizing the atheistic, fanatical, secularist and postmodernist West. It is the same spirit that is persuading the West to believe that all religions are the same, that there is no male or female, no morality, no truth, that Mohamed, Jesus and Satan are the same and that the goal of human life is materialism, physical pleasure and promiscuous sex. In short, I learned that the atheistic secular humanism, which is the ruling ideology of the Western world today and Islamic radicalism are the two sides of the same satanic coin. Both of those ideologies are profoundly corrupt and deeply anti-Christ and they are connected at same root. Islamic radicalism kills your body; secular humanism kills your soul, your morals, your spirit and eventually your body as well. I learned the complex nature of these similar spiritual forces of darkness we are witnessing in the world today. These are the same spiritual forces of darkness that Saint Paul wrote in the New Testament thousands of years ago, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Eph. 6:12.



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### **About the author**

Quule M. Egal is unapologetically devout Christian whose faith in Jesus Christ informs all his deeds and thoughts. Quule studied theology at the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; he is a long-time minister of the Gospel in the Horn of Africa and Canada. The author can be reached at [quuleus@yahoo.com](mailto:quuleus@yahoo.com)

## Cawaale and Waris

Brother Albert

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### **Middle East Concern - Defending Religious Freedom of Christians**

**Middle East Concern was founded in 1991, in response to needs expressed by Christian leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.**

These national and expatriate Christian leaders recognised that the growth of God's Kingdom in the MENA region, including the Greater Somali region, would be influenced by the church's preparation for and response to increasing persecution. The growing persecution affects converts from Islam and those churches and individuals engaged in reaching out to Muslims.

MEC, now an association of about 80-member organizations and individuals, includes mission groups and indigenous church leaders from throughout the MENA region in its membership. MEC cooperates with organizations worldwide that stand alongside and work to support Christians facing discrimination and persecution. MEC's activities are primarily through:

1. Assisting victims in specific cases of persecution: providing advice and practical support, mobilising prayer through public or confidential networks, and initiating advocacy through politicians and governments willing to petition MENA authorities
2. Challenging laws and policies and unhealthy responses that undergird persecution, campaigning for the civil rights of converts from Islam, and promoting alternatives to allow converts to remain in their home country.
3. Equipping Christians in the MENA region to prepare for and respond appropriately to persecution. MEC provides training on biblical perspectives, on human rights in national and international law, and on practical issues such as IT security, crisis management and handling interrogation.

Over the years, MEC has built extensive networks and trust within the MENA region, which, combined with access to worldwide networks, provide effective and practical support for persecuted believers.

### **Somali region**

MEC works with Somali church leaders and ministries focusing on the Somali region. MEC knows that strong relationships and trust are vital for fruitful and effective collaboration, especially in sensitive persecution situations. For this reason, MEC staff travels to the region to meet with and broaden our contacts.

Somali Christians experience intense persecution, as was highlighted by Aweis Ali in the December 2020 SBS Journal.<sup>1</sup> As every Somali is assumed to be Muslim, it is extremely difficult for those who choose to follow Christ; when such faith decisions become known, there can be severe consequences. In these difficult situations, MEC comes alongside and provides support.

In Somalia, pressure and persecution come mostly from family, clan or wider society and, to a lesser extent, the state. Imprisonment and/or prosecution of Christians in Somalia and Somaliland is infrequent.

However, in September 2020 the Christian community was shaken by the arrest of a Christian couple in Somaliland. The arrest occurred during a period of growth in the Somali (underground) Church. Christians were feeling increased opportunity to meet, even if their Christian faith could only be professed in private.

On 19 September 2020, the police arrested Cawaale. Eleven days later, they arrested his wife, Waris. The arrests were due to “suspicious activities” taking place in their house. While detaining Cawaale and Waris, the police confiscated Christian materials.

At a press conference held on 05 October 2020, a Somaliland police colonel confirmed the reason for the detention:

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. This press conference is about how the police apprehended the past week two individuals who were apostates and evangelists spreading Christianity. The accused man has memorized the Holy Quran as well the *Fiqh*. We charge these two detainees of apostasy and evangelism; they were spreading Christianity. Whoever dares to spread Christianity in this region should be fully aware of the fact they would not escape from the hand of the law enforcement officers. The spread of Christianity will not be allowed and is considered blasphemy. The case of the detainees has been forwarded to the relevant court and authorities. We strongly warn the Somaliland public to be watchful of such actions. Any suspicious activities should immediately be reported to the Police.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aweis A. Ali, Thriving Under the Sword: How the Somali Church Overcomes the Challenges of Persecution. Somali Bible Society Journal. Volume I, Issue 1, December 2020, 1-9  
<https://www.somalibiblesociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SBSJ-DEC-V2-2020.pdf>  
(accessed 03 March 2021).

<sup>2</sup> “Masiixiyiin Lagu Xiray Hargeisa” [Christians Arrested in Hargeisa]. Somali Bible Society. 24 November 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8xakGv00m8> (accessed 19 April 2021).

## The Response

A taskforce of Somali church elders and leaders was formed to ensure the couple would be provided with centralized and well-coordinated support, to avoid duplication and streamline information sharing.

Middle East Concern was asked to initiate “advocacy,” meaning that outside governments and/or politicians with influence in Somaliland were asked to contact Somaliland authorities requesting the couple’s release. Cases MEC is asked to be involved in are shared with contacts in our (member) network who in turn can share with their networks. This was also done in the case of Cawaale and Warris. Besides conducting advocacy work, MEC was also asked to mobilise prayers across MEC’s prayer networks.

Credibility is important when sharing information with government officials and politicians and asking them to intervene. MEC seeks to ensure the information shared in advocacy and prayer networks is correct. Therefore, collecting and verifying information needs to be done in a thorough way. MEC collaborates with well trusted contacts/partners, preferably the victims themselves or those who are close to them. In the case of Cawaale and Waris, MEC had access to first-hand information.

It is important to emphasize that MEC will not intervene in situations where the victims – or church leadership on their behalf - have not authorised MEC to do so. In this instance, MEC obtained approval from both the detainees and the church leadership to be involved in the case.

While mobilizing initial prayer and advocacy, we update our contacts on the situation as new information emerges. Our request in this case was: please contact the Somaliland government and ask them to release the detained Christians. In this situation, intervention by other countries and concerted prayer resulted in the release of Cawaale and Waris. They were deported from Somaliland to Somalia by order of the Marodijeh Regional Court in Hargeisa on 1 November 2020.

This is just one example of the hundreds of situations Middle East Concern is involved in each year. For more information about our work, please visit: [www.meconcern.org](http://www.meconcern.org).

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## About the author

Brother Albert is a Middle East Concern (MEC) staff member who is passionate about defending the rights of Somali Christians most of whom are from a Muslim background. Albert oversees MEC’s work in the Somali region. He can be reached at [Albert@rtws.info](mailto:Albert@rtws.info)

## A Tribute to Russ and Pat Wolford: The Perspective of a Son

Rev. Ryan Wolford

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”<sup>1</sup>

### Michigan, USA: 21 FEB 2016

I was on the ice, playing hockey with a group of my friends, when I noticed my wife, Melissa, by the player’s bench waving at me to get my attention. I skated over to her, and she uttered these fateful words, “Ryan, your dad had what appears to be a heart attack and he’s not breathing.” I immediately got off the ice, went home and packed up our bags, and my family and I drove from Michigan to Columbus, Ohio, to check on the status of my dad. It was the longest 5-hour drive of my life. The whole time I was praying, “Lord Jesus, help my dad – heal my dad, please.” When I reached my dad’s hospital room, my heart sank as I saw him hooked up to life-support and clearly in a dire situation. It took 3 days for the inevitable to occur, and my dad went home to be with the Lord on 24 Feb 2016.



Russ Wolford, a humanitarian worker, missionary and world traveler

Until his dying day, he continued his fondness for dreaming of a better future. He was a dreamer – a planner – a prisoner of hope and optimism. Life was difficult for him. He did not have it easy. Yet, he always had that spark of excitement for what was going to happen in the new day tomorrow. He had a positivity that was, to put it plainly, enjoyable to be around. Whenever guests would enter our home, he was quick to offer them some tea or something to drink. Once seated, the conversation ensued and before we knew it, we were off discussing theology, politics, history, and global

affairs. All the topics people say to shy away from, were his favorites to discuss. To his credit, he always kept the discussion light-hearted and fun. He never carried any politician, ideology, or party’s water. Instead, he was interested in a stimulating discussion and good laugh with friends.

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 6:9, NIV 2011

I have described my dad as my biggest cheerleader. Whenever he watched me preach a sermon, he would say to me afterwards, “How did you come up with all that?” I was not very profound, but he made me feel like it. He was much more generous to me than I am of myself, and I am curious to know what he thinks of me now. When he died, I was serving as a pastor of a local Nazarene church in Michigan. Since then, I have made the journey from pastoral ministry to chaplaincy and currently serve in the US Army, stationed in Korea. My job is to provide religious support to soldiers from all walks of life and belief systems. It seems that my dad prepared me to serve in this capacity better than I would have ever expected.

### **Nairobi, Kenya: 1993**

Now, the story would not be nearly as full if I did not also bring in my dad’s better half – my mom, Patricia. She, in many ways, is the hero of the story of my life. She was the first person I told when I felt God calling me to preach. She was instrumental in developing my faith by taking me to Bible Study fellowships every week after school. When I did not want to go to church on Sunday mornings, she made sure that we all made it there to worship God. She was the one who invested in my education and saw to it that I was being challenged academically. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that my mom steered the direction of my life toward wholeness and fulfilling God’s call in my life more than anyone else.

I will never forget the day when we were living in Nairobi, Kenya, and my mom’s call became clear to her. We were driving in our car along the busy streets of the city, and my mom put her elbow along the window, when suddenly, a little boy came by and tried to steal the watch off her wrist. The boy did not successfully steal the watch. He did leave behind a scratch, a calling for my mom to help these children who were so desperate.

She decided to start a ministry of feeding the “street boys” who lived in the slums of Nairobi. The way she did it was so simple, it was beautiful. I say this because we often allow the technicalities and unseen details of things to stop us from doing much good in the world. We do not have to feed every single person to do good in the world. Let us instead simply begin by helping a few and watch in wonder as other people join alongside to help in the good that is happening in the world through our efforts.

So, we began by making stew and potatoes on our stove top. We would then take the (what seemed to my little boy’s mind) gigantic pots of stew and potatoes to a local park and distribute it to any young child who came in need. My mom was also very strategic in the places she chose. She would set up her feeding stations in highly visible places so that all would be public, and word would spread. We met in parks, along busy streets, in the middle of round-abouts. Word certainly did spread!

Pretty soon, my mom was not only considered a motherly figure to the street children who lived in the area, but she was also their advocate. I think of the scripture which Jesus preached during his first recorded sermon in Nazareth, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has

sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."<sup>2</sup> Jesus has shown us that humanity longs for release and freedom from not only personal sins, but also (just as importantly if not more so) oppressively sinful systems of governance and economic disparity.

To accomplish societal change and justice is not easy! It is far easier to stay in one's lane, to mind one's own business, to throw up one's hands and say, "Well, I cannot fix this broken system so what's the use?" Yet, this defeated mentality could not be further from the spirit of Christ. Jesus calls the Church Universal (of all times, places, ethnicities, and political persuasions) to answer the call of Christ to compassionately care for, "the least of these brothers and sisters."<sup>3</sup> I will never forget the sights and smells I encountered from being in such close proximity of these homeless children. They rummaged through trash, wore soiled clothing, and ate leftovers from the dumpster. We must see the suffering all around us and allow the Spirit of God to move our hearts and energize our hands to act in love.

I thank God that my mom modeled for me incarnational love that embraces the suffering and pain of humanity. I do not dare guess the varied atonement theories that are held by the readers of this publication. I would like to offer this simple suggestion – in the cross of Christ, we find not the wrathful vengeance of God the Father being thrust upon the Son, but rather we behold the solidarity of God's Self as God embraces the pain and suffering of the world. God became flesh, dwelt among us, and took the sins of the world upon himself in the body of Jesus on the cross. So, when I look at the cross, I see the love of God exemplified for both the street children of Nairobi and all of us who long for the wrongs of the world to be set right. The Christian's life mission, however varied and situational that may be, is to live out this cruciform lifestyle of self-emptying love.

### **Columbus, Ohio USA: 1995-2005**

We spent the summer of 1995 back home in the States, visiting family and expecting to return to Kenya. That all changed when my dad received word that the project for which he was going to be the director was abruptly cancelled. To put it bluntly, he was out of a job and we had no place to go.

So, we went to live with my dad's mom and dad until we could get things sorted out and move back to Africa. When I say this was a shock to the system, I mean it. All our things were still back in Nairobi. We lived out of our suitcases we had been planning to load onto planes. Just as our laundry was all discombobulated and a mess, so also our emotional states were, too. I remember telling my dad, "I really want to eat the Kenyan stew again!" Believe it or not, he attempted to make Kenyan food. It was not quite the same, but I appreciated the fact he tried. Have you ever felt so depressed that life was not going the way you had expected or hoped? That is

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:18-19, NRSV.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:31-46, The Parable of the Sheep and Goats

where we were for quite some time. Looking back, I see God’s Spirit at work redeeming that which was broken.

One of the biggest surprises we encountered was the US government began placing Somali and Ethiopian refugees in Columbus, Ohio – Columbus of all places! Who could have orchestrated that? It was almost as if God allowed us to suffer the loss of not being in Africa to place us in a position of ministry for God’s children in the States. I tell my wife that I try to live my life with a loose grasp on my plans and dreams, because the future is truly mysterious to us. I would rather go through life viewing it as a response to God’s movement of the Spirit than frustratingly force my own way. She laughs at me when I say this, but I think life as a Woford has taught me to do this.

My dad started a non-profit organization to help with cultural adjustment and job placement for these refugees and immigrants. Part of this was teaching English as a foreign language. So, I would help by being a conversation partner with them. I had it easy! I got to speak English. They could not speak their native language. It was not only a fun cultural experience for me, but I also made friends. This was not only about teaching a people from a different culture the language. This was about building the bonds of humanity that span across all ethnic and cultural divides.

One of my favorite things we did together was play basketball. My parents would borrow vans from the church, pick up Somali teens from the neighborhood, and bring them to our church where we had a full-sized gym. We would then play basketball for



Russ and Patricia Woford

hours! I was never that good; short, thanks to my genetic inheritance from Mom and Dad and never mastered the finesse needed to be a good jump-shooter. None of that really mattered because I had the fitness and stamina of a hockey player, so I could run and play defense. In the end, we were all together having a great time. We did this once or twice a week for years, and I would say that is one of the fondest memories of my high school experience. I would sometimes arrive late because of hockey practice, put down my hockey bag, and have a great time with the Somalis. We became friends.

In the summer of 2005, my dad’s decade-long dream finally came true. He was given the opportunity to work with a humanitarian aid organization in Sudan. He took the opportunity and missed my high school graduation and first year of college, but I did not mind that in the slightest. He was finally able to be back in Africa and do what he has always loved, and that made me so proud.

Yet, things did not turn out as we had hoped. Because of political instability in the region where he was stationed, public utilities were shut off and bottled water became unavailable. Despite his best efforts to purify his drinking water, he contracted giardia. One thing led to another and he ended up back in the States to



receive quadruple heart bypass surgery. The surgery went well, and he recovered to full health.

### **Wheaton College. Wheaton, Illinois USA: 2005-2008**

Yet, my spirit was changed within me. I no longer wanted to rush headlong into the future that God might have for me. “If this is how God takes care of one of his servants, then I don’t want to do his work,” I said to myself. For a period of time, I ran away from God and decided I was going to make a life of my own choosing. I asked one of my friends what he thought I should choose to study for a career, and he gave me a simple response, “Go pray about it.”

Even though God and I were not on the best of terms, I decided to do just that. So, that night before dinner I went to the Gold Star Chapel on campus at Wheaton and asked God what he thought I should do. While I was praying, I noticed a painting of a man being held by Jesus. The look of peace on that man’s face was absent in my life. So, I went over to look at it more closely. In that moment of reflection, my heart was filled with the love of God as God showered me with the Spirit’s peace. I (literally) fell to my knees and cried out to God, “I want that peace in my life,” and in an instant gave my life entirely into God’s hands – regardless of the outcome. It was one of the most freeing experiences in my life. From that point on, I chose to focus on preparation for the ministry and have served in various ministerial roles for over decade.

### **Camp Humphreys, Korea: JAN 2021**

I began this tribute to my parents with a quote from Galatians that encourages us to persevere in the good we are doing, because those who do not give up will reap a harvest. “What was the harvest your mom and dad have reaped?” you may ask. That is a great question, and I can only answer it by saying I would have it no other way.

We had a great life, and I had an upbringing that I would not trade for normalcy and security. I enjoyed growing up overseas and being a part of their ministry to refugees and immigrants back in the States. None of my peers can say that they played basketball with Somalis every Sunday, had *samosas* for a snack, and know where the best place in town is to get *chai*. How much are those experiences worth? They broadened our minds and made us into holistic beings who have learned how to love our neighbors who may look different, speak another language, or eat foreign foods.

Even now, as I minister among U.S. soldiers in South Korea, I look forward to the opportunity of raising my own children outside the Continental United States. I want to give my children a similar upbringing as my parents gave me; a life where they are the minority for a change. I wonder how experiencing that will change them. Will it make them more compassionate to others? Will they listen better to the cries of those marginalized? I certainly hope so.

One day my own children will mourn the loss of their dad. It is hard to think about it, but I hope they will have fond memories of me as I have of my own mom and dad. I hope that they grow up into adults who are grateful for the life my wife and I provided

them: a life filled with experiences that are truly unique and shape them into adults who yearn for the kingdom of God to become a reality in our world.

For more information about my parents, please read their book:

Russell and Patricia Wolford. *Missionaries, Mercenaries and Misfits* (Sarasota, FL. First Edition, Design Publishing), 2013.

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### About the author



Rev. Ryan Wolford with his family

Rev. Ryan Wolford is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene and endorsed by the Church of the Nazarene to serve in military chaplaincy. He has earned a Bachelor's degree from Wheaton College and Master of Divinity from Nazarene Theological Seminary. CH Wolford is on deployment in South Korea while his wife and three children reside in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The thoughts expressed in this piece are the author's alone and do not represent the US military or the US government. The author can be reached at: [ryanawolford@gmail.com](mailto:ryanawolford@gmail.com)

## Tribute/Life Story: Harold E. Reed: 1934-2017

Barbara K. Reed

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Harold Elias Reed was born on June 10, 1934, in Petoskey, Michigan, USA, the eldest of seven children, to Christian parents. Economic survival was difficult in northern Michigan, where they had to clear-cut the land (from virgin forest) to start farming. The winters were long and severe, that when Harold was five the family moved to eastern Lancaster County, in southeast Pennsylvania - the area of his mother's birthplace and her early years.

At the age of 11 Harold chose to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, was baptized and sought to follow Jesus throughout life. In pursuit of this, Proverbs 3:5-6 became



Harold E. Reed 1934-2017

a life motto: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." When he was 15 his mother became ill and died, even though hospitalized. Understandably, this was a very difficult loss. His father's later second marriage was a great blessing to the family, and Harold showed great love and respect for the one he now called mother.

While studying at Eastern Mennonite College<sup>1</sup> in Harrisonburg, Virginia, Harold was convicted of past wrong attitudes and "having his way" in opposition to siblings, so he wrote home and asked for forgiveness – an example of the humility which characterized him in adult life.

In 1955, at the early age of 21, Harold was called by the church and was ordained as a pastor to give leadership to mission efforts in Chester, Pennsylvania. He had already participated there in distributing Gospel literature and by teaching a summer Bible School class where he had the great privilege of leading one of his students to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. It was this evidence of the Holy Spirit at work which had influenced leaders of the sending church to look for a pastor. Harold's

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<sup>1</sup> Now Eastern Mennonite University.

ordination delayed completion of his academic studies for several years, but he graduated in 1961 with a Bachelor's degree in Bible and Philosophy.

While still young, Harold had sensed a calling to share God's good news of love and redemption through Jesus Christ beyond national borders, and his future wife had the same conviction. Several years into their marriage, he and Barbara Keener Reed were asked to serve with Somalia Mennonite Mission; having much to learn and with their preschool son and daughter, they arrived in Mogadishu, Somalia in October, 1961.<sup>2</sup>

Harold's work was initially in education: first as a teacher in the Mogadishu adult school, then as the first headmaster at Shebelle Intermediate School, and then for a year at the mission school at Jamama. Following a year's furlough and study at Princeton Theological Seminary (1965-1966), he again taught English language for adult evening students in Mogadishu. His studies at Princeton included work in Islamics and in 1970, during the next home leave in the United States, he graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Christian Education.



Harold at Shebelle Intermediate School (later Secondary School), Jowhar, ca. 1963-1964.

Over the years, he taught Bible lessons to a number of persons who requested them - how many received the Lord because of this ministry only God knows, but changed lives have definitely resulted, including one person who years earlier had seriously threatened Harold's life. What a particular joy to see the change in this former student, influenced as he was by "the missionaries' joy and compassion" and that "Harold didn't get angry" when threatened.

In his 14 years in Somalia, Harold followed in the example of other men and women of God, older colleagues such as Wilbert Lind, Fae Miller, Merlin Grove, Mary Gehman, Carl Wesselhoeft, Victor Dorsch and Bertha Beachy.<sup>3</sup> Following Merlin's martyrdom, others needed to assume additional responsibilities, and Harold rose to the challenge, depending on the Lord and giving his best to the demands at hand. With many others not already named, as a team in a Muslim setting the missionaries adhered to what came to be known as a "theology of presence."

<sup>2</sup> In 1963 and 1968 two more daughters joined the family; and Harold delighted in each of his children.

<sup>3</sup> Except for Merlin Grove, Wilbert Lind and Fae Miller, all those named are still living, several nearing 100 years of age.

While typical means of evangelism utilized in less restrictive societies were not allowed in Somalia, one could always bear and display the grace and fruit of the Holy Spirit. A key Scripture for such a ministry of presence was 1 Peter 3:15: "In your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence." Argument or criticism of Islam was not in the least condoned. The *modus operandi* was to live so much like Jesus that one would be asked, "What makes you 'tick'?" or "What is your secret?" Then the door would open to give more direct, verbal testimony.<sup>4</sup>

By 1967 Harold was appointed to be the Director of Somalia Mennonite Mission, a responsibility he carried until his departure on November 14, 1974. Monday noon of that last week he was called to appear at the Immigration Office, where he was told all non-teaching mission staff were ordered to leave the country by Thursday on the 08:00am flight, and without any reason being given (all health and other staff were already gone, that this only affected the Reed family and a secretary/bookkeeper). This was indeed difficult news, but he complied and helped an already busy teacher assume the administrative responsibilities he had carried, all the while praying earnestly for those soon to be left behind.

Returning to the United States when Somalia closed to his presence, Harold primarily served in various capacities at the home office of Eastern Mennonite Mission (EMM) in Pennsylvania, including administering the programs and personnel in the countries of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia, then also Kenya, Tanzania, Swaziland and South Africa. In that capacity, he returned to Africa annually, eventually including Somalia where, for a short while, a few missionaries were again on site.

In the early years of Somalia's civil war, the mission briefly seconded two nurses to serve in Mogadishu with World Concern. For one year, beginning in March, 1992, Harold and Barbara were briefly resident in Nairobi, and they had the opportunity to visit Mogadishu to encourage both the nurses and any Somali believers they might be privileged to see. Barbara especially remembers two brothers who had come to faith some time before, and who so eagerly plied them with questions about Scripture. Within a few years, both these Christians had paid the ultimate price for

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<sup>4</sup> Following Merlin Grove's death, it was legally clarified that Christians could respond to individual, personal inquiries, but it had to be at their initiative, and they had to be adults.

their Christian profession – they had been martyred, but not without leaving a strong testimony for Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

During the years back in the US, in addition to other responsibilities Harold also pastored two congregations in Pennsylvania, and later had administrative and spiritual oversight for ten Lancaster city churches there.

Colleague David Shenk remembers Harold as an extraordinary expository preacher and a wise man endowed with the gift of patience. Calling him a pioneer leader, David says Harold set the tone for Muslim ministries in ways that were reassuring for teams in Somalia and East Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Ken and Elizabeth Nissley, missionary colleagues of Harold, knew him as a detailed and careful administrator, a church man, and a friend who helped them navigate cross-cultural questions and differences while providing a safe, wise ear and counsel. They say his leadership in the church's mission serves as a model of faithfulness to God's call on his life and has been a challenge and support to many.<sup>7</sup>



The family, on their one collective return to East Africa (after Harold's death)

In retirement, Harold was a much-loved pastor/chaplain for senior citizens in a local retirement community until Alzheimer's Disease curtailed his active ministry. Even then, his godly character shined brightly.

This last decade of his life held an unwanted, personal challenge due to the onset of Alzheimer's Disease, robbing him of memory, comprehension and physical abilities. In a moment of great personal distress due to the illness, he prayed, not for himself but for Barbara, that God would help her to do what she needed to do (i.e. since she would no longer have his assistance, because of

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<sup>5</sup> One was Liibaan Ibrahim Hassan, and the other, as best the author remembers, was "Xaaji" Mohammed Hussein Ahmed. Their stories, respectively, are at: <https://www.gkreed.com/somalisliibaan> and <https://www.gkreed.com/somalis-xaaji-moxammed>, or in Somali at: <https://www.noloshacusub.net/Literature/History/LIX.aspx> and <https://www.noloshacusub.net/Literature/History/XMX.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> As reported in the May/June, 2018, issue of Missionary Messenger, the official bimonthly publication of Eastern Mennonite Missions, Lancaster, PA, USA (formerly Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities of Salunga, PA). Pg. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

his decline), and that God would give her joy.<sup>8</sup> His distress notwithstanding, in his closing years until he was no longer able, he would often sing, “Praise to God, immortal praise, for the love that crowns our days; bounteous source of every joy, let thy praise our tongues employ.”<sup>9</sup>

As Harold had lived, he died peacefully on December 13, 2017, at the age of 83 years, with loving family by his side. Harold, devoted servant of God, loving father and dedicated missionary-churchman, was a calm, steady presence during uncertain times, an excellent listener and always a man of integrity. But for any good accomplished while on earth, he would surely say “*Alhamdulillah!*”<sup>10</sup>

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### About the author



Harold & Barbara, 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, 2005

Barbara Keener Reed is a graduate of the School of Nursing of Lancaster General Hospital.<sup>11</sup> Appointed by Eastern Mennonite Missions<sup>12</sup> in 1961, she served 14 years in Somalia with her husband, Harold E. Reed and family, and later an additional year in Kenya. Besides supporting Harold, she taught first aid, typing, English language and provided hospitality for many guests, both colleagues and Somalis. In retrospect, she believes God led her to Somalia not, first and foremost, to change Somalis, but to change and grow *her!*

Missing Somalia and cross-cultural interactions on return to Pennsylvania in 1975, she asked God to give her “a ministry on the cutting edge.” God answered by sending one very distraught woman whom she mentored, as well as others in emotional and/or spiritual distress. After studying marriage and family systems at a local

seminary, she also counseled couples, many in preparation for marriage.

Before retirement, she had a lengthy employment in psychiatric and mental health nursing at Philhaven Hospital<sup>13</sup> in Mt. Gretna, Pennsylvania.

By the fall of 2021 she expects the release of *Standing on Holy Ground – and Some Not So Holy: A Memoir*. Beyond early life, conversion to Jesus Christ and a call to overseas

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara gives testimony that Harold’s prayer was answered. Though supporting Harold and grieving his physical decline and suffering, she experienced the joy of the Lord and a settled peace.

<sup>9</sup> For full text, see: <https://hymnary.org/hymn/CP1998/263>.

<sup>10</sup> Somali/Arabic, for “Give God all glory!”

<sup>11</sup> Now Pennsylvania College of Health Sciences, and both of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA.

<sup>12</sup> Formerly of Salunga, Pennsylvania, and now of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA.

<sup>13</sup> Now Wellspan Philhaven.

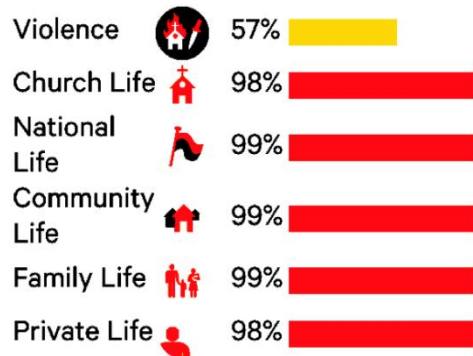
mission, her book will recount many formative experiences in Somalia, including a particularly distressing time, emotionally, and the confession which brought her to freedom, a new understanding of the Holy Spirit, and obedience to God. She is loved by four children, a son-in-law, a granddaughter's family – including two great granddaughters – and lives among many friends at Landis Homes, a retirement community in the beautiful countryside near Lititz, Pennsylvania. The author can be reached at [hereed80@gmail.com](mailto:hereed80@gmail.com).



## Somalia: 2020 Persecution Report

SBS Peace Bureau

### Somalia: Profile of Persecution



Source: OpenDoors®

While the Somali Church is not a stranger to persecution, the pain and suffering inflicted on the community of faith still hurts very deeply. According to Open Door's World Watch List, the Somali Church has been for decades the second or the third most persecuted church in the world.<sup>1</sup> This Church has therefore produced too many martyrs given her small size in Islamic Somalia.

Martyrs enjoy a special place of honor in the Bible and Church tradition. The tears and the blood of the persecuted Christians must not be

forgotten or swept under the rug.

Somalia adopted a Sharia-compliant constitution in 2012, which discriminates against local Christians. Article 2 of this Provisional Somali Constitution stipulates:

1. Islam is the religion of the State.
2. No religion other than Islam can be propagated in the country.
3. No law can be enacted that is not compliant with the general principles and objectives of Shari'a.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the persecution, the Somali Church faces, it has for decades shown a resilience that is second to none. Following are five 2020 persecution reports the *Somali Bible Society Journal* received:

1. Seven Somali Muslims attacked three Somali Christians in June 2020. The attack took place in Isiolo, the Somali inhabited region of northeast Kenya. A 19-year-old sister suffered broken teeth, and her 18-year-old brother sustained grave injuries; their 21-year-old sister lost consciousness because of the beatings. The assault has been reported to the local police, but Muslim relatives of the victims are pressuring them to drop the charges. *Morning Star*

<sup>1</sup> "The World Watch List: The Top 50 Countries Where it is Most Difficult to Follow Jesus." Open Doors, 2021. <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/> (accessed 24 April 2021).

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Republic of Somalia. Provisional Constitution, Adopted on 01 August 2012. <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf> (accessed 17 December 2020).

News first reported this story.

2. The Somaliland Police in Hargeisa arrested a Somali Christian couple in September 2020 and accused them of abandoning Islam. The spokesperson for the police force said in a press conference that the couple of propagating their Christian faith in Somaliland. The press conference was filled with threats against local Christians, according to an incident report by the Somali Bible Society (SBS). The SBS wrote a letter to the President of Somaliland requesting the couples' release. The Christian couple was eventually expelled from Somaliland. Seven other Somali Christians who have also fled from Hargeisa found refuge in Ethiopia. *Middle East Concern* first reported this story.
3. Somali Muslim teenagers attacked a 7-year-old Christian boy whose father is known in the area as a longtime Christian. The boy was stabbed and punched repeatedly in November 2020. He was later treated in the local hospital and released after a few days. Some details of this report have been left out for security reasons. Morning Star News first reported this story.
4. A Somali Christian family was attacked in November 2020 in the Somali area of a neighboring country. The Muslim attackers included two close family members of the husband and another man the Christian couple did not recognize. Two assailants were armed with handguns. The Muslim attackers arrived at the couple's home uninvited and demanded to examine their laptops and smartphones; they refused to comply. The Muslim assailants denigrated the couple's Christian faith and their popular social media ministry.

Sensing an escape route, the couple, with their baby daughter, ran to their bedroom and locked themselves inside. The attackers kicked in the bedroom door and assaulted the family. Shortly before leaving, the attackers destroyed the couple's laptops and smartphones after failing to access their contents; they were password protected.

The Christian couple and their baby daughter are now safe but worry about a repeat of what had happened. Please pray for the Christian family and their ministry.

5. Somali Christian families in southern Somalia reported to the Somali Bible Society Journal in December 2020 that their Muslim neighbors are pressuring them to "sell" their farms at a throw-away price. One Christian farmer said, "our farms are not for sale, but the Muslim neighbors said they would take our farms by force if we do not 'sell' them willingly". The Somali government is too weak to protect the Christian farmers who are from a minority clan.

Please continue praying for the Somali Christians in the Somali peninsula. The Somali Christians have a long history of resilience. Despite the intense persecution,

*Operation World* has recently described the Somali Church as the 7th fastest growing evangelical church in the world.<sup>3</sup>

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### About the SBS Peace Bureau

The *Somali Bible Society* (SBS) Peace Bureau documents the persecution inflicted on Somali Christians because of their faith in Jesus Christ. The Bureau also advocates for the persecuted Christians, raises awareness and aids the persecuted members of the community of faith. The Peace Bureau can be reached at [info@SomaliBibleSociety.org](mailto:info@SomaliBibleSociety.org)

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<sup>3</sup> “Evangelical Growth,” *Operation World*, 2021.  
<https://www.operationworld.org/hidden/evangelical-growth> (accessed 29 March 2021).

## Ila Goco Groves

### Reminisce about the Groves with me (A Poem)

Aweis A. Ali



A 1960 portrait of Merlin Grove and family. Left to right: David, Merlin, Bruce, Dorothy, Pauline. Photo credit: Omar Eby/  
A Whisper in a Dry Land

The purpose of this Somali poem is to immortalize the memory of a beloved Mennonite missionary to the Somalis. Merlin paid the ultimate price as a minister of the Gospel. The Groves came to Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1960 with the Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM). They lived in Mahaddaay before moving back to Mogadishu in 1961. The following year, in 1962, a radicalized Muslim man attacked the Groves with a dagger while registering students for English classes. Merlin died on the spot, and

Dorothy sustained stab wounds. Merlin was 33 when he was martyred. Dorothy died in 2010 at the age of 84. The schools the Groves pioneered in southern Somalia produced some of the finest Somali intellectuals and educators. Despite their brief ministry time in Somalia, the Groves left behind an everlasting legacy. Many Somali Muslims came to the Lord in Somalia through the ministry of the EMM. This success was realized during the heydays of their ministry from the 1950s to 1980s.

The following Somali poem (with its English translation) was composed in memory of Merlin Grove. May his witness continue to be a source of strength for the Somali Church.

<b><i>Ila Goco Groves</i></b>	<b><i>Reminisce about the Groves with me</i></b>
<p><i>Merlin Guulihii</i>  <i>Ka badnaadshay geeri</i>  <i>Isaga gurboodoo</i>  <i>Gugu laba u buuxsamin</i>  <i>Beerkaa xanuun galay</i>  <i>Saddex sano asoon gelin</i>  <i>Waxaa jiray gaari</i>  <i>Awowgii Grove waday</i>  <i>Markuu galay iskuulkana</i>  <i>Kelyihii xanuun gaar</i></p>	<p><i>God protected Merlin before</i>  <i>He saved him from death</i>  <i>When he was a baby</i>  <i>Before he was two</i>  <i>He developed empyema</i>  <i>Before he turned three</i>  <i>Grandpa Grove's car</i>  <i>Had run him over</i>  <i>In his first grade</i>  <i>He had kidney issues</i></p>
<p><i>Gabagabee dugsigi sare</i>  <i>Shil kale ayuu galay</i>  <i>Walax uu garaacay</i>  <i>Uusan garan waxay tahay</i>  <i>Gugac qaraxa daysoo</i>  <i>Gacantiisi bidix baa</i>  <i>Saddex farood ayaa go'ay</i>  <i>Dhakhtar baa la geeyoo</i>  <i>Inkastuu dhib badan galay</i>  <i>Guullaa badbaadshay</i></p>	<p><i>After high school</i>  <i>He had an accident</i>  <i>Strange thing he found</i>  <i>He hit it with a hummer</i>  <i>It had exploded</i>  <i>He lost three fingers</i>  <i>In his left hand</i>  <i>A doctor treated him</i>  <i>Merlin suffered a lot</i>  <i>But God protected him</i></p>
<p><i>Merlin garasho dheerihii</i>  <i>Guule yuu jeclaayoo</i>  <i>Soomaali gebigeed</i>  <i>Guudkuuba saartoo</i>  <i>Gibilkiisi sidaan nahay</i>  <i>Gaalib noogu yimidoo</i>  <i>Guri iyo gesiinba</i>  <i>Cilmi gaan ahoo sugan</i>  <i>Waxay gacani goyso</i>  <i>Gobanimo innoo soor</i></p>	<p><i>Merlin was farsighted</i>  <i>He loved God</i>  <i>He cherished Somalis</i>  <i>And that is all of them</i>  <i>Like we were his flesh</i>  <i>He ran to us to help</i>  <i>Shelter and food</i>  <i>Useful knowledge</i>  <i>Everything he could</i>  <i>He gave us freely</i></p>
<p><i>Dorothy-dii gobta ahay</i>  <i>Ee gargaarka caafimaad</i>  <i>Geyigeena keentay</i>  <i>Guulle nala wadaagtay</i>  <i>Gaari bay ahaydoo</i>  <i>Ilmaheena gaanka ah</i>  <i>Gaarrax bay u diiddoo</i>  <i>Way wada gargaartay</i>  <i>Gaasabbaxeenoo</i></p>	<p><i>Dorothy, the noble lady</i>  <i>She brought to Somalia</i>  <i>Much needed healthcare</i>  <i>She taught us about God</i>  <i>She was a super woman</i>  <i>Our numerous kids</i>  <i>Were not urchins anymore</i>  <i>She helped them all</i>  <i>They prospered</i></p>

<p><i>Gaarsiisay horumar</i></p> <p><i>Gudcur kuwa ku daaloo Aan Masiixa garanayn Bugto kuwa gabraartoo Waa gibil madoobaad Iyagaa gargaaroo Ganbo aan ka qaadan Gaarsiyyay Injiilka Dawo gaara siiyoo Guudka iyo ruuxaba Guushaas bal eega!</i></p> <p><i>Doqon gaatamaayo Garashadiiba laga xaday Gaalleef af badanbuu Guntigiisa soo geli Soo gabeeyay shaydaan Xerti Guullaheennuu Inuu ruuxa gooyaa Garaadkiisi geliyay Inuu gallad Eebbe Uu ku gaari karaba</i></p> <p><i>Merlin geeriyoodoo Waxaa gaaray Dorothy Golxob dhaawaceedii Dhibka gaaray reerkaas Eebbe uun ayaa garan Rabbow gabanadoodii Faracooda gebigood Gacalkaagi weeyoo Gargaarkaagaa siiyoo Garabkooda noqo uun</i></p> <p><i>Cafis gobanimo ayay Gaarsiisay Dorothy Gabgablihii la sirayee Dhiigooda galay gebi Gacaliyaheedi dilayee Carmalnimada geliyee Agoomeeyay gabanadi Geesinimo dhaba oo Guulle uga timidoo Heerkaa ku gaadhay</i></p>	<p><i>They achieved so much</i></p> <p><i>Those living in the dark Not knowing the Messiah The sickly and the weak Who were visibly ill The Groves helped them And they did it for free They preached the Gospel They healed holistically They distributed medicines Look at that success!</i></p> <p><i>A deluded nincompoop Who was brainwashed He hid in his undergarment A deadly dagger Satan was leading him He thought that killing The disciples of God Would please his god To earn divine blessings He believed in that</i></p> <p><i>Merlin passed away Dorothy was not spared She was stabbed Only God knows The pain of the Groves O Lord, their children All their descendants They are all yours Give them your help Be on their side</i></p> <p><i>Dorothy forgave well The deceived murderer What a forgiveness He shed their blood He killed her husband He made her a widow He orphaned her kids She was strong She was courageous A bravery from God</i></p>
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<p><i>Ila goco Groves Dal nabaddu gaan tahay Geed geed u garanoo Gacalkoodu tuban yahay Ka guureen dhammaantiis Gacan qabashadayneey U galeen Banaadir Mahaddaay u guureen Tacliin ay u geeyeen Guullow abaal mari</i></p> <p><i>Omar Eby-na geeddigi Ay galeen Groves Gaarsiintii Injiilkiyo Dugsiyadii gabanadu Tacliintay guranayeen Goobo caafimaad iyo Wanaaggay gingimayeen Ku guuriyay buuggii Uu ka qoray Groves Gallad baan u haynaa</i></p>	<p><i>Reminisce about the Groves Their country was peaceful A country they knew well Their loved ones were there Yet they moved to Somalia Just to help us They resided in Benadir They lived in Mahaddaay They opened schools O God, reward them</i></p> <p><i>Omar Eby wrote about them Their lives and ministry The Gospel they preached The boarding schools The education they brought The healthcare centers The blessings they shared He recorded them in that book The book about the Groves We are grateful to him</i></p>
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## About the author

Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist, a poet, and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. Aweis was a co-pastor of a house church in Mogadishu, Somalia, in mid 1990s when 12 of its 14 members were martyred for their faith.<sup>1</sup> Aweis, an ordained elder, has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a B.Th. degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an M.Div. degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled, "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." Aweis is the author, editor or translator of 8 books and a dozen articles. He is the founder and the Series Editor of the annual *Maansada Masiixa* (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry.) Dr. Aweis can be reached at [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup> The names of the martyred believers from the Medina House-Church are: Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan, Ahmed Ayntow Gobe, Saleban Mohamed Saleban, Isma'el Yusuf Mukhtar, Mohamed Aba Nur, Ali Kusow Mataan, Mohamed Abdullahi Yusuf, Nurani Madey Madka, Khalif Dayah Guled, Bashir Mo'alim Mohamud, Prof. Haji Mohamed Hussein, and Mohamed Sheikdon Jama.

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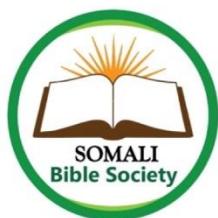


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ISSN: 4562-3988

Somali Bible Society Journal  
Volume II, Issue 1, June 2021  
Published by the Somali Bible Society  
Mogadishu, Somalia  
[www.somalibiblesociety.org/sbs-journal/](http://www.somalibiblesociety.org/sbs-journal/)  
[Info@SomaliBibleSociety.org](mailto:Info@SomaliBibleSociety.org)

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