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## Table of Contents

1. Thriving Under the Sword: How the Somali Church Overcomes the Challenges of Persecution Aweis A. Ali .....	1
2. One Bible, Two Messages Dennis Dyvig .....	10
3. Understanding the Bible in Context Stephen Thompson .....	19
4. Ramadan and Somali Believers Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman .....	26
5. A Personal Testimony and a Challenge to the Global Church Dr. Howie F. Shute .....	32
6. The Miracle of the Emerging Somali Church Simon Fry .....	43
7. First Generation Believers' Impact on Frontier Missions Abdi-K Mahmoud .....	54
8. Courage in Our Conviction: A Conversation with Pastor Shafi'i Aweis A. Ali .....	55
9. Have You Heard of the Modrickers? (A Poem) Aweis A. Ali .....	64
10. A Call for Papers (CFP) .....	67
11. Advertise in SBSJ .....	68
12. Disclaimer .....	68

## Thriving Under the Sword How the Somali Church Overcomes the Challenges of Persecution

Aweis A. Ali

### Abstract

Open Doors describes the church in Somalia as the 3<sup>rd</sup> most persecuted church in the world after North Korea and Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> While the persecution against the Somali church has been on the rise since 1991, the church has proven its resilience by thriving during intense persecutions including dispossessions, shootings, beatings, poisonings, and beheadings.<sup>2</sup> Christians being targeted for their faith is as old as the faith itself. Christians in Somalia meet in house-churches and keep a low profile because of the hostile environment in which they live. While these Christians are wise, diligent, and resilient, they sometimes lose lives and properties because of their faith. Somali Islamists have in the past confiscated Christian farms.<sup>3</sup> Al-Shabab Islamist group discovered and destroyed an underground Christian library which the church also used as a Bible school.<sup>4</sup> In a homily he preached in 2014, Pope Francis reiterated that “[t]he Church grows thanks to the blood of the martyrs. This is the beauty of martyrdom. It begins with witness, day after day, and it can end like Jesus, the first martyr, the first witness, the faithful witness: with blood.”<sup>5</sup> There is ever-increasing evidence that the Somali Church is growing despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges of persecution it regularly faces. The oppression Somali Christians endure necessitates theological, missional and ecclesiastical reflection. Disciples of Christ suffering because of righteousness is ingrained in the Scriptures (Matthew 5:10). Biblically speaking, persecution is the rule and not the exception in the lives of Christ-like Christians (2 Timothy 3:12). The Bible considers a blessing when the Disciples of Christ are persecuted for their faith (Luke 6:22). Early Christians praised and thanked God for considering them worthy to be persecuted because of Christ (Acts 5:41). Peter calls commendable when Christians suffer unjustly because they are mindful of God (1 Peter 2:19). God enables Christians to endure and sometimes thrive in the persecution because of His grace. The intimate relationship between the martyr and God is best illustrated by St. Ignatius when he wrote, “[y]et he that is near to the sword is nearer to God.”<sup>6</sup> A proper theology of persecution, therefore, helps the targeted Somali Christians, not only survive but, flourish during severe persecutions. This may explain why the Church often grows in world areas, like Iran, Afghanistan and China, where persecution against Christians is the norm.

**Keywords:** Somali church, persecution, resilience, challenges, Islam

## Introduction

This work intends to examine how the persecuted church in Islamic Somalia overcomes the challenges of persecution and thrives in the face of unspeakable atrocities perpetrated by Muslims, both radicals and moderates. Radical Islam is the driving force behind the killings of Christians in Somalia. The most potent Islamist group in Somalia is the al-Qaeda affiliated al Shabab militant group which claimed the killings of so many Christians in Somalia. While al Shabab is a force for evil all the time, when it comes to their treatment of the Somali Christians, the Somali clan system is often beneficial to the church. Somali Christians who hail from major clans often receive the traditional clan protection bestowed upon all members in their home turf whether they are saints or sinners.

Radical Islamists in Somalia often target the leaders of the church with the assumption that once the leadership is eliminated, the church would collapse. Despite the enhanced persecution risks Somali Church leaders face, they continue serving the church with divine diligence. In John 10:11, Jesus is described as the good Shepherd because a shepherd never abandons his sheep. In Psalm 23, God is portrayed as a Shepherd who protects His people. The persecuted Somali Church leaders have consistently proven they are reliable shepherds for the community of faith. While shepherds are often the first ones to be targeted when persecution breaks out, the sheep are not spared either. Despite the calculated tactics radical Islamists employ, the Somali Church continues growing. While exegeting Acts 8:1–8, John Piper states, “that God rules over the sufferings of the church and causes them to spread spiritual power and the joy of faith in a lost world.”<sup>7</sup> The violence persecutors assume would eradicate the church is often its lifeline.

Islam, a monotheistic 7<sup>th</sup>-century religion, adapted much of its sacred scriptures from the Judeo-Christian faith. However, radical Muslims shed the blood of so many innocent Christians in the name of Allah. The Sharia law is derived from multiple Islamic sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, *ijma* (consensus), *qiyas* (analogy based on legal reasoning). Islamic law directly derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith are considered the most reliable. Sharia laws are divided into five categories: *Fard* (something *required*), *Mandub* (something *recommended*), *Mubah* (something *permissible*), *Makruh* (something *despised*), and *Haram* (something *forbidden*)<sup>8</sup> Sharia covers worship, dietary laws, slaughtering of animals, family life, crime and punishment. The Sharia law, in its totality, inflicts so much harm on Christians whether they were born to Christian or Muslim parents. The *murtad*, an apostate who left Islam, is seen to have committed treason and the Sharia law prescribes severe punishment for such a person.

## Persecution of Christians in the Muslim World

The survival of an Islamic state and its application of Sharia law depends on its subjects remaining Muslims; otherwise, such a state is never viable. Islam divides apostates into two categories: *Murtad fitri*: an apostate who was born to Muslim parents and *Murtad milli*: an apostate who was born to non-Muslim parents but later embraced Islam. In Shia Islam, the first is not given a chance to return to Islam but is executed on the spot.<sup>9</sup> However, the second is offered only one opportunity to re-

embrace Islam; if he accepts, he lives, if he rejects, he dies by the sword.<sup>10</sup> Generally speaking, in Sunni Islam, *murtad fitri* and *murtad milli* are not distinguished; they are both executed if their apostasy is confirmed. None of these would be given a chance to return to the fold of Islam. Female apostates, whether *fitri* or *milli*; face the same judgment, dying by the sword and without an invitation to return to Islam. Abu Hanifah, however, rejects the killing of a female apostate (whether *fitri* or *milli*) opting for imprisonment until she re-embraces Islam.<sup>11</sup>

When Prophet Muhammad conquered Mecca in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra, he extended general amnesty to all the non-Muslims in the city except 7-11 persons whom the prophet named and shamed by saying all “should be killed even if they are found holding on to the cover of the Ka’bah!”<sup>12</sup> One of the people marked by the prophet to be executed is a *murtad milli* (former convert to Islam who later abandoned it) named Abdullah bin Sa’d bin Abi Sarah. Abdullah was the prophet’s Qur’an scribe and a foster brother of Uthman bin Affan, the son-in-law of the prophet and the third Caliph of the Muslim community.<sup>13</sup> Abdullah visited the prophet in Medina, embraced Islam and then returned to Mecca and deserted the young fledging religion. However, Uthman defied the prophet’s order and sheltered his foster brother. Uthman later took Abdullah to the prophet and interceded for him. The prophet kept silent expecting one of his companions would strike Abdullah dead; when no one carried out his previous execution order, the prophet pardoned Abdullah and scolded the companions with him:

Was there not among you any intelligent man who, when he saw me not accepting his pledge, would get up and kill him? They said: “O Messenger of Allah, we do not know what is in your mind; why did you not hint to us with (a movement of) your eyes?” He said: “It is not appropriate for a Prophet to have treacherous eyes.”<sup>14</sup>

This hadith describes the fate of a *murtad milli*. One would be hard-pressed to find an example of an adult *murtad fitri* during the prophet’s lifetime. Almost all adult Muslims during the prophet’s lifetime were from a non-Muslim background. Therefore, the vast majority of those born to Muslim parents would be minors at the conquest of Mecca or very young adults around the prophet’s death. If Islam treats the *murtad milli* in such a violent fashion, imagine the fate of the *murtad fitri*. Almost all adult Somali Christians are from a Muslim background and fall under the despised Islamic category of the *murtad fitri*.

### **Tertullian Was Right**

The most well-known of Tertullian’s works is the *Apologeticus* containing apologetic and polemic oratory to defend Christians from the religious persecution they were facing. This treatise was written in AD 197 and contained the most famous quote of Tertullian “The more we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed” or its poetic adaptation, “the blood of Christians is the seed of the Church.”<sup>15</sup>

Some of the most publicised martyrdoms of the Somali Christians include the gruesome decapitation of Mansur Mohamed in 2008, a local church evangelist and humanitarian worker.<sup>16</sup> Mansur was paraded before militants' cameras, his hands tied behind his back. One of the militants read from the Qur'an to justify the impending repugnant murder. After a lengthy Islamic sermon, the innocent Christian was slowly beheaded with a small blunt knife, perhaps to make the pain last a little bit longer. One of the militants mockingly sharpens the knife on Mansur's head. The martyrdom video clip of this young man is still online.<sup>17</sup>

The Islamists distributed Mansur's martyrdom video clip in much of southern Somalia for propaganda purposes. The cruelty of the martyrdom shook the community of faith. There is no evidence that many believers or seekers wavered in their resolve, contrary to what the Islamists anticipated. Scrutinising the real impact this graphic martyrdom had on the Church is difficult now for security reasons. However, initial reports indicate that the community of faith experienced significant numerical growth in the first two years after the martyrdom.<sup>18</sup> This growth reportedly took place within 5 square kilometres radius of the martyr's house-church in southern Somalia. The church in that area has never before experienced this kind of reported growth.

The same Islamist group beheaded four Somali Christian orphanage workers in 2009 after they refused to return to Islam.<sup>19</sup> Another beheading martyr of the Islamist group is Guled Jama Muktar who was decapitated in 2011 because of his Christian faith.<sup>20</sup> These are merely a few of the many Christians the Somali church lost in the hands of Islamists and their sympathisers. Giulio Albanese, Director at Catholic News Agency, reiterates, "[b]ut there is no doubt that the land where Christians have experienced the greatest suffering is Somalia."<sup>21</sup> However, the Somali Church has shown consistent numerical growth in all areas in Somalia where the martyrdoms took place since 1994.

### **Overcoming the Challenges of Persecution**

The adage, necessity is the mother of invention, holds true here. The persecuted Somali community of faith often forsakes traditional church buildings for residential houses where Christians meet discreetly, thus the concept of house-churches. These house-churches are sometimes labelled as "underground" because they are hard to be found by the enemy. The number of Christians meeting in any house-church is also small as not to attract unnecessary attention. In the Somali church, for example, leadership development is taken very seriously. Despite radical Islamists killing so many Somali church leaders, there was never a shortage of church leaders in Somalia. Many of these persecuted Christians also go all digital when it comes to Bible study materials and other church resources. Owning a physical Bible is both illegal and dangerous in Somalia, but many Somali Christians carry around passcode-protected smartphones loaded with Christian materials, including Bibles. Many of the phones have a security feature that deletes all the contents if the wrong passcode is put in one too many times.

Somali Christians are often denied employment opportunities because of their faith. In response to this discrimination, some Somali Christians own their businesses and employ fellow Christians. Some Somali Christians have access to safe houses within

Somalia. Somali Christians are also known for their locally developed theology of persecution often expressed in hymns. These hymns nourish the souls of the persecuted Christians.

### **Using the Challenges to Grow the Church**

The relationship between persecution and church growth is codified in church history, starting with the early church to the present day. Pope Francis' declaration in 2014 that "Church grows from the blood of the martyrs" has historical precedence.<sup>22</sup> "The more Christians are persecuted, the more they increase in number" was a theme well known as early as the second century. The martyrdom of Stephen and the ten apostles did not dent the church growth but propelled it to a spectacular growth by the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Tertullian believed that a martyr's willingness to die for Christ leads others to become disciples of Christ. The courage of martyrs and the pens of apologists have both given the Church historical and theological perspective that persecution helps with church growth.

The 1994 martyrdom of Pastor Liibaan Ibrahim Hassan set the stage for the bloodiest chapter the Somali Church has ever known. The Mogadishu-based legendary Somali church leader co-pastored a house-church of 14 members when 12 of them were martyred. When the dust settled, only two members survived the Islamist assassinations bankrolled by al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) Arabic: الاتحاد الإسلامي, literally, 'The Islamic Union'). Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former army colonel and avowed Islamist, was at the time the AIAI leader. The two surviving members of the targeted house-church overcame the persecution challenges and, by 1999, started a new house-church in the same general neighborhood where the old one had been meeting. This new house-church led the effort to plant more house-churches within five years in Mogadishu and its environs.

Tertullian's conviction that the persecution of Christians contributes to the numerical growth of the church has been confirmed true in the Somali capital and beyond. It is noteworthy that no record exists of a Somali Christian ever killed for their faith in northern Somalia (present-day Somaliland). All the killings of Somali Christians took place in southern Somalia. Tertullian's belief again holds true here. More Somali Muslims come to the Lord in the south than in the north of Somalia.

### **Conclusion**

This study illuminates the fact that the Church in Somalia is indeed growing while it is still facing intense persecution that includes martyrdoms. Persecution does not seem to be abating anytime soon since the Somali Christians belong to the two-thirds of Christians who live in hostile environments where they belong to minority groups.<sup>23</sup> Given this fact, the Somali Church growth will most likely continue peaking despite the antagonistic context in which it finds itself. It is a biblical principle that the persecution suffered by some Christians spurs others to be bolder in their faith and

witness; this divine courage helps the community of faith to make Christ-like disciples in their communities and beyond more than they did before the persecution. Apostle Paul illustrates this fact that chains advance the Gospel in Philippians 1:12-14.

The early Church was birthed in a context of persecution and never ceased growing despite the hostilities it was facing. The persecution and church growth went hand in hand until the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, understanding how the Somali Church thrives under the sword could inspire other persecuted Christians all over the world. The characteristics that persecuted Christians demonstrate include resilience, resourcefulness, and street savviness. Survival tactics these persecuted Christians adopt include churches meeting in residential houses, developing a network of safe houses, and extensive use of technologies for communication, teaching, training, and studying. Persecuted Somali Christians build extensive digital libraries, and teach, and train their members in the safest way possible. Such strategies help the church defy the adverse effects of persecution and continue growing with minimum disruptions.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jayson Casper, "The 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Follow Jesus," ChristianityToday.Com, last modified January 15, 2020, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/january/top-christian-persecution-open-doors-2020-world-watch-list.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Hill, No Redress: Somalia's Forgotten Minorities (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2010), <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-912-Click-here-to-download-full-report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer LeClaire, "Islamic Somali Militants Confiscate Christian Farms," Charisma News, last modified March 2, 2011, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.charismanews.com/world/36348-islamic-somali-militants-confiscate-christian-farms>.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan J. Bos, "Somalia Militants Destroy Largest Christian Library, Bible College," BosNewsLife Africa Service, January 6, 2011, online edition, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.bosnewslife.com/2011/01/06/somalia-militants-destroy-largest-christian-library-bible-college/>.

<sup>5</sup> Elise Harris, "Pope Francis: Church Grows from the Blood of the Martyrs," Catholic News Agency, last modified June 30, 2014, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-church-grows-with-the-blood-of-the-martyrs-45498>.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Kirby, "St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans," Early Christian Writings, last modified 2020, accessed November 17, 2020, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-smyrnaeans-longer.html>.



<sup>7</sup> John Piper, "Spreading Power through Persecution," *Desiring God*, last modified May 5, 1991, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/spreading-power-through-persecution>.

<sup>8</sup> "Islam Question & Answer: Categories of Deeds and Examples Thereof," last modified July 9, 2015, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/180341/categories-of-deeds-and-examples-thereof>.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Sarwar, trans., *Al-Kafi*, e-book., vol. 7, *Fru' al-Kafi* (New York: Islamic Seminary Publications, 2014), 257, [http://www.al-murtaza.org/Books/AL-KAFI%20VOLUME%207%20\(English\).pdf](http://www.al-murtaza.org/Books/AL-KAFI%20VOLUME%207%20(English).pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Abdullah Saeed, "Ridda and the Case for Decriminalization of Apostasy," ed. Oliver Learman, *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2006), 551.

<sup>12</sup> Abu Dawud Sunan, "Book of Battles (Kitab Al-Malahim)," last modified 2008, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/39>.

<sup>13</sup> Maulana-Wahiduddin Khan, *Muhammad a Prophet for All Humanity* (New Delhi: SOS Free Stock, 2016), 327.

<sup>14</sup> Sunan, "Book of Battles (Kitab Al-Malahim)."

<sup>15</sup> A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., "Tertullian's Apology," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, American Edition.*, vol. 3 (Albany, Oregon: Books for the Ages, 1997), 102, [http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF\\_0\\_03.PDF](http://media.sabda.org/alkitab-8/LIBRARY/ECF_0_03.PDF).

<sup>16</sup> CBN News and The Voice of the Martyrs, "Somalia: Terror Group Wants To Rid Country of Christians," *Voice of the Martyrs Canada (VOMC)*, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.vomcanada.com/malaysia-videos/video/somalia-rid-christians>.

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<sup>22</sup> Harris, "Pope Francis."

<sup>23</sup> Pew Research Centre, "The Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," Pew Research Centre's Religion & Public Life Project, December 19, 2011, accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

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## About the author

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## One Bible, Two Messages

Dennis Dyvig

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Does the Bible contradict itself? Enemies of the Gospel of Jesus Christ often say it does. Some who say they are honest seekers of truth also think the Bible contradicts itself. How do you answer that? I say in some ways; the Bible **DOES seem** to contradict itself. But wait a minute! I am not against the Bible in any way. In fact, at age 72 and having been studying the Bible seriously since 1971 (49 years), I believe the Bible **DOES** have contradictions, but it is impossible for God to contradict Himself. The seeming contradictions of the Bible are **purposeful** and **helpful**. By God's will, I hope to explain that in this paper.

I believe it is God's intent that the Bible does appear to contradict itself. The contradiction is, in fact, the contradiction between **how MAN thinks** and **how GOD thinks**. Both ways of thinking are well documented in the Bible. But both ways do not work. Both ways are not acceptable to God. One way is the truth. The other way is a lie (or THE lie). But both are in the Bible because God wanted both in the Bible. We decide, with God's help, which of the two messages we **BELIEVE** to be true. We decide which of the two messages we **BELIEVE** to be from God. We decide which of these two messages we **BELIEVE** will work and will get us to heaven. These two messages seem to contradict because man is in rebellion against God, until he is born again and receives the mind of Christ. Before the new birth, man's thinking (as recorded in the Bible) and God's truth **DO** contradict! But this should strengthen your confidence in the God of the Bible rather than weaken it. God knows and records in His Bible the differences between God's and man's way of thinking. These are the two messages in His one Bible.

All of us believe one or the other of these two "biblical" messages, or a confusing mixture of the two. That is why we are saved by faith and not by works. Being saved by faith means **IF** we have learned and accepted as true, if we **BELIEVE** the right message, the message that works and will always work, God's message and not man's message, then we are truly saved and will spend eternity in heaven, as well as have God's provision and protection while living out our life of faith here on earth. All of us are born believing the human way, the human message. That is one of the two messages in the Bible. Our cultures and schools and human nature, and unfortunately religion (see my definition below), teach us to believe the human way. All of us have faith. All of us are believers. But only some believe the truth, God's truth. We are not saved by believing. We are not saved by faith. We are saved by accepting the truth, by believing the truth, by faith in the truth—that is the Gospel. That means all of us must come to a point in our lives where our first-learned, human way of thinking (our human belief) is challenged and our belief changes (hopefully) to God's truth. That is evangelism. Evangelism is (by God's grace) helping others to see that their first-believed human ideas are not God's ideas, not God's truth.

Evangelism is convincing someone, by God's power alone, that their previous belief is not true and bringing them to understand and accept what God says is true—the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

God wrote the Bible through humans. In the process, I believe, He chose to allow a lot of “humanity” to enter into the pages of His Book, to help us understand ourselves, to know what we humans really are like, and what God is really like. Man has been in rebellion to and in ignorance of God and His ways since Adam and Hawa (Eve) believed Satan's lie and ate the fruit. Since then, there has been an enormous difference between how man thinks about God and what is true about God. That is the contradiction that IS in the Bible! But it isn't really a contradiction in what God says. It is a contradiction between how man thinks and what God thinks and clearly says is true.

From the start, Satan has sought to cause confusion and doubt about what God has said. I believe the essence or foundation of the first sin happened before Hawa took a bite of the fruit. The first sin was a belief sin—Satan said, “Has God said?” When Satan convinced Hawa to doubt what God had said and accept a different belief, which came from Satan, it seemed that Satan had won the day. The visible, **practical sin** of eating the fruit followed the **belief sin** when Satan convinced Hawa to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, based on her doubting what God had said. Since then, people have been judging and deciding for themselves what is good and evil, and what is God like and how do you know and connect to God?

How we can be saved is the real issue. People, however, do not know enough to determine for themselves what is the truth. The world is filled with religions because man is incapable on his own of finding the truth in this world of darkness. God has to show us what is the truth, or we will never know the truth. The whole world lies in the Evil One, (the Evil One is Satan) 1John 5:19 (NASB). Since <Satan> is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44 NASB), we will never know the truth apart from God revealing it to us by His Spirit, teaching us from His Word—the Bible. This is different from today's so-called prophecy. This is reading and understanding the **written** word of God—God's revelation—the Bible. This is teaching the Bible accurately. This is understanding that the two messages in the Bible ARE different, even the opposite! One message is God showing He knows full well how man thinks about God and gaining His approval, His blessing, and salvation. The other message is what God says is true about gaining His approval, blessing, and His GIFT of salvation. Yes, salvation is always and only a GIFT from God.

Did you get that salvation is always and only a free gift from God? A salvation that is purchased or earned by man's efforts is not salvation. It is Satan's religious counterfeit of salvation but is NOT salvation. Jesus said we must know (learn and then decide to accept) that eternal life is a GIFT from God (If you knew the gift of God . . . John 4:10 NASB). Paul told the Galatians any different gospel is not the Gospel (. . . are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all . . . Galatians 1:6-7 NIV). But since the time that Hawa ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, people think they know what the true knowledge of God is, but God

says we people are wrong unless we accept what HE says is the truth! These are the two messages in the one Bible.

We can summarize all human beliefs about God and how to gain His approval under the term: **religion**. There are perhaps two general definitions of religion: One definition means anything about God and eternity and how to reach God and heaven and know what God's definitions of morality are.

The other definition of religion is preferable to me, and it is the other definition I use in this paper. Religion is **what man thinks** of God and spiritual and eternal matters. Religion is **what man does** to TRY to reach God and heaven. The Gospel, NOT religion, is **what God thinks**. The Gospel is called "the word of truth." The Gospel is not another way to think about God. The Gospel is the ONLY TRUE WAY to think about God. There is no Gospel apart from Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross. We could say that Jesus Himself is the truth (John 14:6) and we could say that the Gospel is what He did to make it possible for us to connect to the true God and truly gain forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. Jesus is the truth and the Gospel is The Truth, in action, to save us.

Before man is willing to accept what God says is true about Himself and His requirements, man needs to be brought to a certain openness (humility, teachableness) to thinking in a different way than he grew up and was taught by his family, his culture, and his initial religion(s). Only God can bring about that change of belief that is required of all people. No human is born knowing the truth, God's truth, which is the only truth! In John 16:8-11 (summary) Jesus said when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth came, **He would prove the world wrong** about sin, righteousness, and judgment (NRSV). Until by God's Spirit and the Bible we are changed from our original beliefs, **all people are wrong** about sin, righteousness, and judgment.

### Lab test? Or the medicine?

When we get sick, we might go to the hospital. Often the hospital will prescribe a lab test to reveal what our problem is, what is our sickness? The lab might say, "The test shows you have malaria." You don't say, "Thank you!" then go home—to eventually die (which I almost did in Juba in 1983 because the needed **medicine** was not there). The lab test without the medicine is useless. From the lab you go to the pharmacy and get the medicine. After taking the medicine you will be ok!

You need to know two things:

1. What is wrong with me?
2. What is the cure, the remedy, the solution, the treatment, the medicine—how will I be saved from malaria?

Those are also the two messages in the Bible?

1. What is wrong with me? *Answer:* I am a sinner and weak and lost and helpless and I can't save myself.
2. What is the cure, the medicine? How will I be saved from sin, death, Satan, and hell? *Answer:* Jesus and the Gospel!

If I do **not believe** the lab test is right, I will **not buy** the **medicine**. If I do **not believe** in the **medicine**, I will not take it and I will not be cured. Thus, salvation really is all about faith—what do I believe is true? What do I ACCEPT as being true? There are many different ideas about what man is like and what man is capable of doing. ALL **religions** (by my above definition) teach that man is capable of saving himself, or at least helping to save himself. The Gospel says, “NO! You are NOT capable of saving yourself, nor are you even capable of HELPING Jesus to save you!” Besides, Jesus NEVER needs our help!

Religion believes in man’s ability to save himself or help to save himself. Common beliefs of religion are:

If I pray, I can get salvation.

No, prayer will not save you.

If I confess my sins I will be forgiven.

No, confession will not save.

If I repent of my sins I will be saved.  
repentance.

No, that is a wrong understanding of

If I am baptized, I will be cleansed and saved.

No, water will not save you. It will only make you a wet sinner.

If I tithe, I might be saved.

No, no amount of money can buy your salvation—certainly not a measly **10%** of your money! Jesus gave **100%** of Himself to save you. Do you think **10%** of your money will buy your eternal salvation? NO!

If I accept Jesus **and** live a good life I might be saved.

No, then you are believing that Jesus is one Savior, but you are also a savior and in the end, what you do cancels or supplements or supersedes what Jesus did as Savior.

In John 4:10, Jesus' first requirement of the woman at the well was to know (and accept) "the gift of God." (NASB) In my experience in evangelism, this is the biggest stumbling block in accepting the Gospel, and thus in being truly saved. We are all proud and we want to think we can help get our own salvation. We do not like to accept that we are totally lost, totally helpless, and totally hopeless apart from what Jesus did for us by His death on the Cross. Paul calls this the **stumbling block** of the Cross or the **offense** of the Cross. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) that salvation is a gift, without works, "SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST!" Religion teaches that man must do something! Why? So that we may indeed boast! But the Gospel is about Jesus doing EVERYTHING! Then there is no room for man to boast. Paul says in Gal. 6:14 (NASB) "may it never be that I would boast, except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."

When Satan deceived Hawa he said, "God knows you will be like God." That is a lie, but all people believe that to some degree. The Bible says there is one Savior, but we all tend to believe we have to help, or we have to save ourselves. No, that is Satan's lie and we proud humans are all too quick to believe that lie—to seek to enhance our glory.

One of the two messages in the Bible is the lab test to show us what is wrong with us. That lab test is Moses' law, the Old Covenant, the Old Testament (*covenant* and *testament* are both translations of the same word in the original languages of the Bible). The cure, the **medicine**, is the New Covenant! The New Covenant is Jesus' death on the Cross— Luke 22:20--And in the same way, He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you **is the new covenant** in My blood . . . (NASB)

Satan and man are inherently religious, but Jesus said Satan is a liar and the father of lies—perhaps all lies. The most serious lies are not about, "Who ate all the sweets? My brother did it!" The most serious lies are about what God is like and about His requirements if we are to reconnect with Him and spend eternity in happiness in heaven.

To establish that the two messages in the Bible are DIFFERENT, I want to close with these verses:

**Jeremiah 31:31** "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a **new** covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, Jer. 31:32 **not like** the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that **they broke**, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. Jer. 31:33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel **after** those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law **within** them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jer. 31:34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will **forgive** their iniquity, and I will **remember** their sin **no more.**" (ESV)



This is the classic passage in showing that the two messages in the Bible are **NOT ALIKE!** This passage is quoted almost entirely in Hebrews 8. This affirms that the location of the teaching in the Bible is NOT what tells us whether it is Old Covenant or New Covenant? These exact words are located in the Old Covenant portion of the Bible AND in the New Covenant portion of the Bible. It is not the location that makes a certain passage Old or New Covenant/Testament. It is rather the nature of the teaching.

My life and ministry were radically changed when God made those two words, **NOT LIKE**, jump off His page and hit me square in my head! There are two messages in one Bible and those two messages are **NOT LIKE each other**. They are two different messages.

**Romans 5:20**—The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more . . . (NIV84)

Isn't that surprising? Religion (by my definition above) uses laws to TRY to **reduce sin**. It is clear that God says the law **increases sin!** Why? To prove that we all need to change our belief to the New Covenant! The law is the lab test. The Gospel is the medicine.

**Rom. 8:3** For what **the Law could not do**, weak as it was through the flesh, **God did**: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and **as an offering for sin**, He condemned sin in the flesh . . . (NASB)

Here Paul points out the inadequacy of the law (of any religious law). Although God included Moses' law in the Bible, the same Bible says there are things that religious laws **cannot** do, but Jesus did!

**Galatians 2:21**—I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (NIV84)

Can you imagine that God would make the colossal mistake of sending His Son to die on the Cross for no reason? And yet if we emphasize the Old Covenant, or mix the Old Covenant with the New Covenant, we are doing just that. We are saying that Christ died for nothing! This is done by religious people who don't know or haven't accepted that there are two DIFFERENT messages in the one Bible. One is only the lab test. The other is the only medicine that works!

**Gal. 5:11** But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision (*my note: which represented ALL Old Testament laws*), why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the **offense** of the **Cross** has been removed. (ESV)

What is the offense of the Cross? It is the fact that the Cross proves that we humans are all totally lost and totally unable to save ourselves. Jesus' death on the Cross was not a mistake! It was necessary because we can never save nor help save

ourselves. The Cross is offensive to proud humans who can't accept that they are totally unable to save themselves.

**Gal. 3:10** For **all** who **rely on** works of the **law** are under a **curse**; for it is written, "Cursed be **everyone** who does not abide by **all** things written in the Book of the Law and **do** them." (ESV)

Religion thinks that religious laws can save or help save sinners (or keep them saved). This verse says EVERYONE who chooses religious law does not get salvation, but a curse instead. The only score that God accepts from anyone who chooses to believe in religious laws (including the laws in the Bible) is 100%! No one achieves 100% obedience to God's laws. Therefore, he gets a curse instead of a blessing. Galatians 3:13 says Jesus removes that curse for us by becoming a curse for us by His death on the Cross.

**John 3:17** For God did not send his Son into the world to **condemn** the world, but in order that the world might be **saved** through him.

John 3:18 **Whoever believes** in him is **not condemned**, but whoever does not believe is **condemned already, because** he has **not believed** in the name of the only Son of God. (ESV)

Many people have memorized John 3:16, but most have not memorized John 3:17-18. Religion seems to like to condemn and reject sinners, but Jesus came NOT to condemn sinners but to save them. Bible teaching that focuses on judging, condemning, rejecting or punishing sinners has missed the point of the Gospel.

**Phil. 3:9** and may be found in Him, **not** having a **righteousness of my own** derived from the Law, but that which is through **faith in Christ**, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (NASB)

Paul used to believe the Old Covenant, law message of the Bible, until he met Jesus and was saved. THEN he learned that there are two DIFFERENT messages in the one Bible. Only one of the two could save Paul. Only one would give Paul acceptable righteousness. That one acceptable and successful message was the Gospel and NOT the law.

**Rom. 10:1** Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them <Israel> is for their salvation. Rom. 10:2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, **but not** in accordance with **knowledge**. Rom. 10:3 For **not knowing** about **God's righteousness** and seeking to establish **their own**, they **did not subject** themselves to the righteousness **of God**.

Rom. 10:4 For **Christ** is the **end** of the **law for righteousness** to everyone who believes. (NASB)

Here Paul shows that people can be very religious and very serious about God but be ignorant of God's ways. Israel was the perfect example. Israel was passionately zealous about God but had **not submitted** to God's righteousness. Perhaps there is

a clue here that the Gospel requires a degree of humble submission to God's righteousness rather than proudly seeking to make our own righteousness.

### Conclusions:

I believe there is no perfect translation of the Bible. It is impossible for the translator to completely set aside his personal beliefs as he translates the Bible. When the translator reads the source text, it goes into his mind. Before he can translate into the target language, his own mind must decide what **he thinks** the source text **means**. If the translator does not understand well that there is One Bible, Two Messages, his mind will automatically tend to convert the source text into a law version, then inaccurately translate/insert a law meaning into his target language. Then the Gospel is partly, if not totally lost, and those who read **that** Bible will be strongly biased toward the religious message that is compatible with human thinking, but which cannot save anyone.

Even a perfectly translated Bible will have reduced value and impact if those who **teach** the Bible do not understand and explain clearly that there are two messages in the one Bible. Because they are not the same message, they will not both save you nor anyone else. The two messages **must not be mixed or combined**. The two messages are different, but they complement, not contradict each other.

May God use the Somali Bible and accurate translation and correct teaching to bring many Somalis to salvation through Jesus Christ and **His sacrificial death on the Cross**. That message alone will save people.

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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. Dennis says, “Most of them are very good kids!” Dennis quit flying in 2013 and God led them into full-time evangelism and discipleship ministry. Before COVID hit, he was privileged to teach eight or more Bible studies per week and occasionally speak at relatively large evangelism outreaches. Dennis and Susan both count it a privilege to have spent most of their adult lives in Africa. The author can be reached at [ddyvig@gmail.com](mailto:ddyvig@gmail.com).

## Understanding the Bible in Context

Stephen Thompson

In 1984 when I first travelled to Africa as a global partner,<sup>1</sup> I went to Mombasa to learn Somali with the help of a senior cross-cultural worker, JM.<sup>2</sup> As I had studied a language learning method called LAMP<sup>3</sup>, my main method of learning Somali in Mombasa, and later in NEP<sup>4</sup>, was to use LAMP. JM was quite happy to let me alone to use this approach; his main input into my life was to teach me about Islam. In my language learning, I hardly used the KQA.<sup>5</sup> Once or twice in NEP I tried, but for them it was like reading *Rendille*.<sup>6</sup> For me, especially the New Testament was like reading English because KQA is very much a literal translation of the Bible as were KJV and RSV, the English versions I grew up with. Very early on I was critical of the use of *Rabbi*<sup>7</sup> for Lord as in the Lord Jesus Christ. I was convinced that the Somali Muslim would read this as a pronouncement of the deity of Jesus, a concept they rejected. Now years on and when debating with Somalis I like to stress the divine nature of Jesus. However, I have noticed that believers still prefer *Sayid* (master) when talking or praying to Jesus. Another word which quickly raised the alarm bells for me was *xaasid* (meaning spiteful or envious and not jealous) when it came to improve KQA (not a full translation revision) we used *masayr*.<sup>8</sup> Even this did not satisfy the Somalis who were helping us. For them, God was not jealous like a first wife when her husband took a second wife! We could only use this word with a footnote. Later in my career, I had the privilege of contributing to improvements of the KQA. With the help of Somali believers, we inserted passage headings in the Old Testament. These we translated from the English NIV.<sup>9</sup>

In this paper, my main aim is to discuss the main types of literature in the Bible and their historical context as I believe it is essential if one wants to understand the Bible and its application today. It is also important in debating with Muslims and other non-believers as in attacking the Bible they often take verses out of context. For example, the Bible might have an ordinary person speaking and they take it as God's word. Or the poetic language of the Psalms is taken literally. They expect to find a book like the Qur'an or the Torah given to Moses or the Gospel given to Jesus. When they miss it they say, "See there we know the Torah and the Gospel have been corrupted."

<sup>1</sup> Cross-culture worker or missionary.

<sup>2</sup> I'll refer to people by their initials.

<sup>3</sup> E T Brewster and E S Brewster, Language Acquisition Made Practical. Lingua House, Colorado Springs, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> NEP – North East Province of Kenya.

<sup>5</sup> *Kitaabka Qudduuska Ah*, the Bible translated into Somali.

<sup>6</sup> A closely related language group in NEP.

<sup>7</sup> For most Somalis, Rabbi, an Arabic word, means God.

<sup>8</sup> *Waa inaanad iyaga u sujuudin, ama u adeegin, waayo, aniga oo ah Rabbiga Ilaahaaga ah waxaan ahay Ilaah masayr ah, oo xumaantii awowayaasha waxaan soo gaadhsiinayaa carruurtooda tan iyo farcanka saddexaad iyo kan afraad oo kuwa i neceb, Footnotes 20.5 Ilaah aan aqbalayn in ilaah kale lala caabudo.*

<sup>9</sup> New International Version. Note, passage headings and even verse and chapter numbers are not part of the divinely inspired text.

The Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament we have in our Protestant Bibles is the same as the approved scriptures of the Jews or the TANAKH. It is based on the Hebrew Old Testament.<sup>10</sup> The Catholic canon<sup>11</sup> includes some books found in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Old Testament made around 200 BC because many Jews were using Greek and losing their knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic. From early on these “extra” books have been of suspect authority. Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant movement, regarded these books as having value but not as Scripture. They are of value because they help us understand the period between the Testaments and understand the religious and political situation in the New Testament. Early Protestant Bible translations (or versions) put them together in a group between the testaments and called them the Apocrypha.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps at some stage, they should be translated into Somali to be available to Somali scholars of the Bible.

Our Old Testament is the same as the Jewish TANAKH. These letters stand for: T = Torah (law), N=*Nevi'im* (prophets) and K=*Kethuvim* (Writings). The Lord Jesus said “that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44 ESV) The books of the Torah are the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Western scholars often refer to these books as the Pentateuch (a Greek word meaning five books). In the Hebrew, the Torah is one book on five scrolls. The name of each scroll relates to the first few words of the scroll. The Torah is generally ascribed to Moses and some Christians insist it was all written by Moses (including the part at the end about his death!).

There is no evidence that Moses or David or Jesus or for that matter, Muhammad received their books as direct recitations from God. The Torah may have been mostly compiled while Moses was alive with a few edits from within the community of faith.<sup>13</sup> Different chapters in the Torah use slightly different language; most of us can distinguish this best in that a different name for God is used. Some parts use the Hebrew name *Elohim* (God in our English translations) and other parts use the name *Yahweh* (the LORD in modern English translations). Some passages do include both. The traditional names given to these four parts or compilers are J (*Jahwist* or *Yahwist*) E (*Elohist*) D (*Deuteronomist*) and P (*Priestly*). This is known as the *Documentary Hypothesis*. “However, this view is not supported by conclusive evidence, and intensive archaeological and literary research has tended to undercut many of the arguments used to challenge Mosaic authorship.”<sup>14</sup> Apart from the ten commandments written on stone by God (Exodus 31:18), clearly, God commanded Moses to write down the things he was being told (Exodus 34:27) and some parts

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<sup>10</sup> Some passages in Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic, a similar language to Hebrew and Arabic.

<sup>11</sup> “Canon” is the word for the books approved as divinely inspired.

<sup>12</sup> The word *Apocrypha* meant secret (Gk) or sacred originally but came to mean books of questionable origin.

<sup>13</sup> More liberal scholars believe that that much of it was written many years after Moses. They attribute much of it to the priest Ezra.

<sup>14</sup> Intro to Genesis. NIV Study Bible

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-genesis/>. Accessed 01 October 2020

are recorded as direct quotes from God (especially noticeable in the book of Leviticus).

The Torah is important as it introduces us to God and the importance of sin to God. The first three chapters of Genesis are a kind of seed plot to the whole Bible. The Torah begins with a poem about God's creation of the world. At the end of the passage, we read "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31 ESV). After creation everything was perfect. The creation was over six days or time periods and then God rests on the seventh day. God does not need to rest (Isaiah 20:28) but the rest here signifies completion or the moving to another part in the purposes of God and his relationship to his creation and especially humankind.<sup>15</sup> Genesis 2 and 3 are also important as they introduce us to the idea of God in relationship with humanity and the affect that sin had on that relationship and all of creation. After this "fall" sin continues to abound until all creation is destroyed except for Noah and his family in the ark (Genesis 6-9). With Abraham from the end of chapter 11 onwards we have a new beginning. God promises to bless all of humanity through Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:3).

With Abraham, we are introduced to the idea of covenant or solemn promise. Some covenants have conditions and others are covenants of grace. The covenant with Moses and the people of Israel is one of a subservient kingdom to a greater king.<sup>16</sup> The pattern follows the covenants of that time. It is a covenant of works; there are conditions the children of Israel need to fulfil to be in the right relationship with God. Old Testament or Old Covenant primarily refers to this covenant God made with Moses and the people of Israel. Israel was chosen to be a kingdom of priests to the nations (Exodus 19:4-6), hence the high standards they were to obtain according to the Torah.<sup>17</sup> Important in the Book of Deuteronomy (meaning "repetition of the law")<sup>18</sup> are the choosing of a place where worship would be centred (chapter 12, fulfilled in the choosing of Jerusalem), the warnings of what a king will demand of the people (chapter 17) and the blessings and curses (many of the curses fell on the children of Israel as they failed to fulfil the conditions of the covenant with Moses).

The books of the prophets (*Nevi'im*) in the Hebrew Old Testament are divided into the former prophets and the later prophets. The former prophets are: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (one book in the Hebrew Old Testament) and Kings (one book not two). The later prophets include: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor prophets.<sup>19</sup> The books of the former prophets are mainly books of history; they tell

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<sup>15</sup> For further study on Genesis 1, consider John Walton's ideas, for example, his book, [Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology](#). It does not need to be about science versus creation. (Available on Amazon)

<sup>16</sup> The Lion Handbook to the Bible (Lion Publishing plc 1973) by Gordon Wenham pp 198-199.

<sup>17</sup> Genesis and Exodus are very important books in understanding the whole Bible. Consider especially the introductions in the NIV study Bible, available online:

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/>. Accessed 18 September 2020.

<sup>18</sup> Intro to Deuteronomy. NIV Study Bible

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-deuteronomy/>. Accessed 16 October 2020

<sup>19</sup> *Nevi'im*. Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nevi'im>. Accessed 11 October 2020

the story of the failure of the children of Israel to live up to the covenant conditions and God's judgement on them. Amongst these stories we find the stories of major prophets such as Samuel, Elijah (Ilyas in the Qur'an) and Elisha (Arabic: اليسع Al-Yasa' in Islam). Important kings are David and his son Solomon (prophets in Islam). In relation to David, of major importance is the eternal covenant God made with David (2 Samuel 7). The covenant was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Solomon is important for his wisdom and some of the wisdom he wrote is retained for us in the Bible (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon). Neither David nor Solomon are perfect in the books of the former prophets. The books of the former prophets include the dispersion of the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17) and the exile of the people of Judah to Babylon (2 Kings 24 and 25). The dispersion of the 10 tribes and resettlement of their lands with foreigners, taught by Israelite priests, led to the establishment of Samaria.

The later prophets include: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve Minor Prophets. These books are significant in that they rebuke the children of Israel for not living up to their covenant conditions. They go after the false gods of the surrounding nations. God likens this to adultery and prostitution (remember he is a jealous God). So the people will be exiled. Isaiah<sup>20</sup> was written before the dispersion of the northern kingdom of Israel (around 700 BC) and Jeremiah and Ezekiel were written around the time Judah was exiled to Babylon (around 600 BC). The prophets were also concerned about the judgement on the nations surrounding the Promised Land. God was not just the God of the children of Israel. The prophets also predicted a future hope based around Jerusalem and the kingship of a descendent of David.

In Isaiah, we have the important passage predicting the suffering servant (Isaiah 53), the New Testament writers clearly see this fulfilled in the person of Jesus, the Messiah. The Minor Prophets are scattered through these periods of pre-exile, exile and some are even post-exile. Especially Isaiah and Jeremiah are poetic books and so often the meaning is hard to follow. Some of the imagery is beyond what we might consider acceptable today. For example, Isaiah has God using the nations as a razor to shave the private hairs of the children of Israel (Isaiah 7:20 NIV)! The prophets' own families and lives were sometimes used as pictures to the people (Isaiah, Ezekiel and Hosea).

In the third section of the Hebrew scriptures, the writings (*Kethuvim*) we have: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs (also called Song of Solomon), Lamentations, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (two books in our Bible).<sup>21</sup> Some of these books are regarded as Wisdom literature; other books are history books included for a purpose. The book of Daniel is both historical and prophetic. Chronicles are a repeat of the history of the children of Israel written from the point of view of a priest<sup>22</sup>. The two main themes the author is interested in are

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<sup>20</sup> Many scholars think Isaiah was written by Isaiah and the second part from chapter 40 by his disciples.

<sup>21</sup> NB the order is different from our Bibles.

<sup>22</sup> Jewish tradition has Ezra the priest as the author

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-1-chronicles/>. Accessed 17 October 2020



true worship and true kingship in Israel; after the division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms, he follows the kings of David's line.<sup>23</sup>

Books of wisdom literature are: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Job is written in very ancient Hebrew and translations can vary quite a bit<sup>24</sup>. Job's friends offer quite reasonable arguments for Job's suffering but it is wrong to quote them verbatim as God speaking. Psalms are written in poetic language and sometimes the language is quite down to earth and can even seem quite coarse to Muslims or us. For example, "Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a warrior wakes from the stupor of wine" (NIV Psalm 78:65). It just means that God was slow to respond to the needs of his people at that time.

In the New Testament, we do not find a book called "the Gospel." The Lord Jesus was not given a gospel. He came with a message. The message was that the kingdom of God was near (Mark 1:15). The message in many ways was his life and death. Through his death for the sins of humanity, people could come into God's kingdom, which is His reign in their hearts and lives. The four books we have are all "according to." The gospel authors did not sign their names on their works. They were writing accounts of the events that took place amongst them and they wrote with a purpose. Matthew's purpose is to show his Jewish readers that the Lord Jesus really is their Messiah and he does this by showing how his life fulfilled the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup> Mark, according to early church testimony, was the interpreter for Saint Peter (often Mark is writing Peter's story). Mark is written (traditionally) in Rome during a time of suffering. He often explains things about the Jewish customs to his non-Jewish audience.<sup>26</sup> Luke is concerned to get the facts out and he is concerned for people from a wide range of backgrounds; the sick and helpless, the poor, women and children, social outcasts.<sup>27</sup> John writes late in his life and is not so concerned with repeating all the stories he assumes his readers already know, he is the interpreter of what the events meant.<sup>28</sup>

Acts of the Apostles is also written by Luke and he is addressing the same Roman, *Theophilus*. It could be also called "the Acts of the Holy Spirit." The Lord Jesus was sent mainly to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24) but the disciples are sent to the nations. The gospel has to cross cultural barriers. With this comes the concern about how much of the Jewish laws and traditions to put onto the non-Jewish (*Gentiles*) when they became followers of the Messiah. Acts 15 is pivotal in this regard, especially the letter which came out of the council (Acts 15:23-29).

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<sup>23</sup> The Lion Handbook of the Bible (Lion publishing plc, 1973) 286

<sup>24</sup> Intro to Job. NIV Study Bible.

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-job/>. Accessed 12 September 2020

<sup>25</sup> Intro to Matthew. NIV Study Bible.

<https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-matthew/>. Accessed 19 September 2020

<sup>26</sup> The Lion Handbook of the Bible (Lion publishing plc, 1973) 499

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 514

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 533

In the book of Acts, we are introduced to the apostle, Saint Paul. He is chosen by the Lord himself to be an apostle to the *Gentiles* (non-Jews, Acts 9:15). He spends time with the other apostles and is accepted by them and so his message is not different from theirs. Further on in the New Testament, we find that thirteen of the letters or epistles come from him. One of the issues which comes up is how much the non-Jews need to follow the laws of the Torah. For Saint Paul, it is clear the ten commandments are still to be followed and obeyed (consider Romans 13). Saint Paul reports on some of the conflicts he had with Saint Peter in regard to the Jewish laws and customs. However, the conflict was resolved and when Saint Peter writes 1 Peter there are many similarities between his letter and those of Saint Paul (1 Peter). Later, Saint Peter writes about the writings of Saint Paul as Scripture, meaning divinely inspired (2 Peter 3:15-16).

The last book of the New Testament is the book of Revelation. This book was written to encourage people under intense persecution and suffering. The purpose of the book is to give them hope. God is in control and the victory will ultimately be his. Many people misunderstand the book of Revelation because they try to take it too literally. A better way is to think of Saint John as writing in code and that the numbers and names are often code. 144,000 is the number of completeness, the total number of the people who will be saved. Not an actual number but a complete number. Babylon was code for Rome at that time and not the Roman Catholic Church. Saint John was a Palestinian Jew and his method of writing is cyclic and not linear. So the seals, the trumpets and the plagues could be all happening together or throughout church history.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A good book on Revelation is *The Message of Revelation* by Michael Wilcock, Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

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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 *Codka Nolasha Cusub* radio ministry, ran a discipling training 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's degree in agricultural science, MA (English Bible) and a DipGrad (religious studies and social anthropology). The author can be reached at [thomsjrj@gmail.com](mailto:thomsjrj@gmail.com).

## Ramadan and Somali Believers

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman\*

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A significant difference between Christians and Muslims is this: Christians focus on religious beliefs, whereas Muslims focus on religious practices. This statement may sound like an oversimplification but it is accurate from a sociological perspective. It is true that Christians also emphasize religious practices such as ethical behavior and observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, but their first emphasis is on what they believe about God and Jesus Christ. It is also true that Muslims emphasize religious beliefs about the oneness of God and the Books of Allah, but these beliefs ultimately find expression in religious action. Christians emphasize orthodoxy, whereas Muslims emphasize orthopraxy. Somali Muslims are no different from other Muslims on this point.

Somali Muslims are aware of the five pillars, whether they practice them faithfully or not. These rituals consist of reciting the *shahadah* (confession of faith), *salah* (five daily prayers while reciting the Qur'an, often within the mosque), *zakah* (2.5% of one's wealth given in charity), *sawm* (fasting during the month of Ramadan), and *hajj* (the greater pilgrimage to Mecca).

Although there are five pillars, two are most important for social acceptance. These are *salah* and *sawm*. The other three contribute to social acceptance, but *salah* and *sawm* are the primary markers of religious practice. When Somalis observe someone doing *salah* they automatically assume that person has recited the *shahadah*, since the *shahadah* is included in *salah*. All Muslims are required to give *zakah*, but neighbors seldom, if ever, know if a Somali gave the full amount. Even though the *hajj* is required once in a lifetime if circumstances permit, most Somalis may never have the means to complete the pilgrimage. Therefore, faithful observance of *salah* and *sawm* are the two most important religious rituals in the eyes of other Somalis.

Somalis normally identify ethnicity with religion. It is often claimed that if one is a Somali, one must be a Muslim. The degree to which one practices *salah* and *sawm* are social markers to determine the strength of one's connection to Islam—and to society. If a man neglects the Friday prayer, his religion is questioned. If a man regularly attends the mosque for the Friday prayer plus other times, his religion remains unquestioned, no matter what he believes privately. If a man refuses to publicly fast during Ramadan, and he has no medical excuse or is not on a journey, his religious devotion is questioned. If he keeps the fast publicly, even if he eats in private, he is considered by others to be a good Muslim. In the eyes of others, to be a good Muslim is to be a good Somali. Anyone who neglects *salah* and *sawm* publicly is looked upon with suspicion.

This article focuses on *sawm*, fasting during the month of Ramadan, as it relates to Somali followers of Jesus Christ. First, let us review the origin of fasting in Islam. In

the earliest days of Islam in Mecca, fasting was voluntary. After the *hijra* to Medina, Muhammad saw Jews fasting during Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) in obedience to Leviticus 16:29 where Jews are commanded to “afflict yourselves” on that day. Literally, the Hebrew text reads, “deprive your throats.” This was the only fast day required of the Jews, and they abstained from food from sunset to sunset. Muslims fasted during that day also. But soon afterwards, for Muslims fasting was changed to the entire month of Ramadan as explained in Surah 2 (Surat ul-Baqarah): 183-185. From that time until today, the Ramadan fast has remained an Islamic requirement.

I will now give a preliminary analysis of attitudes toward—and experiences of—Ramadan based on interviews with Somali believers throughout East Africa. Although the sample population was not extensive, I believe these answers are representative of many Somali followers of Jesus Christ. They were asked the following questions about their own experiences and the experiences of others they know.

- How do believers participate in *sawm*? Do they choose to fast or not? Why? Is it forced upon them by family and friends?
- *Iftar* is an important time for expressing solidarity with family and friends among Muslims. How do believers celebrate *iftar*? With other believers? With family? Does this month bring them closer to family or create obstacles with family?
- Do believers find Ramadan to be a difficult time spiritually, a good time spiritually, or it makes no difference? Do they see Ramadan as a more dangerous time or a safer time? Why? Or does it make no difference?
- What is the social significance of the *Eid* for various Somali believers?
- How do believers help the less fortunate during this month? Do they have any stories of being able to witness to others at that time?

Let me give composite answers without indicating the country of residence, age, gender, or length of time the respondents have been followers of Christ. This will protect their identity.

Most Somali followers of Christ prefer not to fast during Ramadan. They do not see this as a helpful spiritual exercise. If they live with practicing Muslim relatives, they are required to fast. This is especially true of young believers who live with their parents. But when they have an opportunity to eat or drink something in secret, they do so. Somali believers who live alone or who live with other believers do not face the same social pressure. They will consume food whenever they want, but they do so in private.

Somali Christians do not have the luxury—and perhaps the audacity—that other Christian minorities display in some Muslim countries during Ramadan. In Egypt, close to 10% of the population officially register themselves as Christians. I have

seen Egyptian Christians at street stalls brazenly eating in front of their Muslim neighbors during Ramadan as a way of saying, “We are free from your laws. Don’t you wish you were like us?” Of course, this does not create goodwill and better relations. Somali Christians could never do this in a Somali country or neighborhood. Their numbers are too small, and this is not the best way to show the love of God in Christ.

It would be unfair to say that it is only Somali Christians who abstain from food in public but eat in private. Many Somali Muslims do the same. You can see examples of this in the Somali section of Eastleigh, Nairobi, every Ramadan. Most restaurants are closed until sunset, but some Ethiopian restaurants remain open. Not only do non-Muslims eat there, you will see Somali Muslims eating there too. But neither Somali Muslims nor Christians publicly defy the fast. Everyone enjoys eating good food, and if a believer is invited to share in *iftar* at sunset, this can be a pleasant experience. A shared meal with family and friends strengthens ties. However, prayer, especially in the mosque, is usually expected after the meal, and this creates tensions.

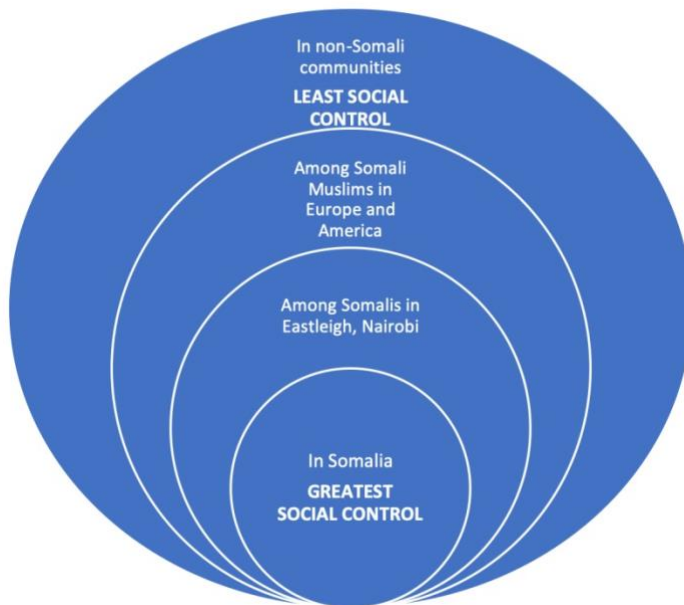
Several believers mentioned that when they lived with a Muslim family they were forced to rise before dawn for the *suhur* meal and *fajr* prayer. This creates stress if it is done involuntarily. One Somali believer wrote, “This month creates obstacles because there are more prayer times required at the mosque. This makes believers uncomfortable, especially when they have to get up in the middle of the night to go to the mosque.” Because of pressure to conform to Muslim practices from family and community during Ramadan, one Somali believer wrote, “I see Ramadan as the most dangerous and difficult time spiritually. I like to get out of the country where I live.” This option is too expensive for most believers. Others will feign sickness to avoid fasting. Almost all of them said that Ramadan was a stressful month for believers. They also claimed that various forms of persecution of believers was greater at that time.

Even though there are dangers, Somali followers of Christ still look for ways to express their faith in non-confrontational ways during Ramadan. If a community of followers of Christ is strong enough, they give food and other assistance to poor people as a witness to their faith. Sometimes believers tell simple Bible stories in their conversations, including the story of Jesus fasting for forty days. One well-known believer is often approached by Somali neighbors asking him if he is fasting. He always tells them, “No.” Surprisingly, they smile and make no trouble for him, even though they know he calls himself a Christian. He is well-liked because of his gentle spirit and kindness toward all. His good behavior toward others is his daily witness.

After Ramadan almost all Somali followers of Christ celebrate the festival called *Eid al-Fitr*, even if they do not go to the community *Eid* prayer. It is a time to visit family and friends, enjoy tea and sweets, and renew acquaintances. Sometimes they do this simply so they won’t “stand out like a sore thumb.” Sometimes they do this because offering well-wishes does nothing to compromise their faith. One Somali

believer, who was raised as a Christian from childhood, always calls Muslim relatives and friends on the phone to wish them *Eid Mubarak!*

We can make the following observation concerning how followers of Christ among Somalis view the month of Ramadan and practice *sawm*. If they live in Somalia and Somaliland, they will adhere to the requirements of Ramadan as fully as possible—at least publicly. Family and community can force them to conform. If they live among Somalis in neighborhoods like Eastleigh, Nairobi, they may find it a little easier to relax these requirements, but publicly they still must be careful not to violate Ramadan expectations. Family and community can make life difficult for them even if they are not forced to conform. If they live among Somali Muslims in Europe and America, community control is relaxed further; they do not feel the same pressure to conform as they would in their ancestral homeland. If they live in non-Somali communities, they do as they please. This is shown in the following diagram.



These observations are not surprising. They are rather obvious. In Somalia and Somaliland, and where Somali communities are strong, Somali followers of Jesus Christ are expected to conform to Islamic regulations for Ramadan. Where Somali Muslim communities are weak or non-existent, Somali followers of Jesus Christ are free to make their own choices concerning what they do during Ramadan.

This study begs the question, why does Somali society insist that all members conform as much as possible to Islamic

requirements for Ramadan? Why can't followers of Jesus Christ do as they please when they live in Somalia, Somaliland, and other Somali communities?

The basic answer is this: Islam is seen as the glue that holds Somali society together. It is assumed that if one is a Somali, one is also a Muslim. The Somali language is important for social cohesion, but not all Somalis speak the Somali language. Pastoralism is important, but increasingly Somalis live in urban areas and own no camels, sheep, or goats. Somali cuisine is important, but even this has been influenced by colonialism and trade. Tribal and clan connections are important, but these do more to create divisions than unity among Somalis. The only thing that really binds them together as unifying glue is the religion of Islam.

William Butler Yeats wrote a poem titled “The Second Coming.” It describes in religious imagery the confusion and fears many felt soon after the destruction of World War 1. Part of the poem says,

*Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Chinua Achebe took a line from this poem as the title for his most famous novel that describes the tension between Igbo traditions and social changes that came with the introduction of Christianity to Nigeria. It seemed like things were falling apart. Somali Muslims fear the same fate awaits them if they loosen their social glue called Islam. Things will fall apart. This fear among Somali Muslims is valid in their minds. Too many Somalis who have converted to Christianity have fallen into alcohol abuse, loose sexual relations, and other “Western” sins. Too often these problems are mistakenly seen as Christian problems since Western culture is often equated with Christianity in Muslim rhetoric.

To be fair, Somali Muslims have their own problems with alcohol and drug abuse and illicit sexual relations, but many of those who secretly abuse these things still fast during Ramadan, and thereby, show they want to remain fully a part of Somali society. Norms are the expected behavior of society. Members of society may not obey the norms, but they seldom reject them openly. Somali Muslims fear that Somali Christians may be openly rejecting their norms—and they worry that things will fall apart.

To go back to the poem by Yeats, “The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.” Somalis are caught between a rock and a hard place. They worry that Somali Christians may lose “all conviction.” (This is why Somali followers of Jesus Christ need to avoid destructive personal behavior and choose to live as the best examples within society.) Somalis also worry about the other extreme: “the worst are full of passionate intensity.” Extremist interpretations of Islam linked with passionate intensity have also torn Somali society apart. The challenge for Somali society is to find the middle ground, a safe place between those who “lack all conviction” and those who are “full of passionate intensity.”

Whether Somali Christians like to admit it or not, yearly Ramadan observance has become a gauge that determines who is safe for society and who is trying to pull society apart. Does it have to be this way? Perhaps not. If followers of Jesus Christ choose to live as honorable and exemplary members of society, other Somalis will begin to see—little by little—that believers really do offer hope for healthier Somali communities.



There is one other group that we have not mentioned. Based on anecdotal information, they number a few thousand. These are Somalis who consider themselves to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, while at the same time, they identify themselves as Muslims. They have taken a highly contextualized approach to their faith. They remain identified as part of the broader Somali community. They are not numbered among Somali “Christians.” They continue to practice *salah* and *sawm* as faithfully as other Somalis. They tend toward Biblical

orthodoxy in their beliefs, and they tend toward Islamic orthopraxy in their rituals. Generally speaking, they are seen as safe members of Somali society.

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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)

## ***A Personal Testimony and a Challenge to the Global Church***

Dr. Howie F. Shute

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I have traveled to some pretty unique places. All of them have been memorable. My wife, Bev, and I have spent time in London, England, Rome, Italy, Dublin, Ireland, Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Zurich, Switzerland. We have enjoyed time together in various African countries, such as Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Malawi, Zambia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Egypt, Djibouti, and Senegal. We have made a home in Johannesburg, South Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Nairobi, Kenya, Fajardo, Puerto Rico, and multiple cities across the USA. My travels have taken me to Holland, Japan, Vietnam, Tunisia, Morocco, Namibia, Swaziland, Mali, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Eritrea, and Yemen. Particularly interesting was a visit to China, staying in Beijing for a week and then going north to a location, where in the same moment I had one foot in China, one foot in Russia, while looking across a bridge stretching into North Korea, and then glancing to my left to gaze upon the Sea of Japan. However, none of these experiences were as captivating and as eye-opening as those in Mogadishu, Somalia. Mogadishu is a city like no other. Somalia is a country without comparison. Even before I set foot on Somali soil, I encountered the unusual nature of this country. Planning travel to Mogadishu was not something my local travel agent could handle.

I visited Somalia twice during the year 2000. At that time, there was no international airport in which to arrive. It was impossible to travel there by road because of the lack of security. As an expatriate, I would have most likely either been killed or kidnapped trying to travel by car to Mogadishu. I had made earlier trips to Hargeisa, Somaliland, one of which was over the road (or I should say over the rolling sand dunes), but the northern part of Somalia (Somaliland) is an “independent” country, albeit not recognized by the international community. Travel to Somaliland requires a visa issued by that country. Travel there is much safer than in the south. Security is much better and travel by road or by air were both safe during those years. None of that was true for travel to or within Somalia. There was no central government at that time. A visa was not required. In fact, there were no issuing authorities for such a travel document, nor were there the proper authorities to process your documents on arrival. Traveling to Mogadishu in the year 2000 took creative and careful planning. First, how would I find safe transport to Mogadishu? And then, what would my security look like? At that time the country and the city of Mogadishu had been fractured into sectors, each of which were controlled by competing warlords. In fact, my visits to Mogadishu came under the protection of one of these warlords. This warlord controlled a major part of Mogadishu, as well as sectors outside the city. I will not use names in this paper in order to protect the security of anyone who I might have had contact with on these two visits, including the name of this strong, but compassionate warlord who had volunteered to provide security for me at no charge. It was under his care that I arrived and moved about in Somalia on both of these visits.

It all began in a meeting of elders and tribal chiefs in Mogadishu where the topic of discussion was centered on their greatest need. “Somalia has lacked a national government since the fall of Siad Barre’s dictatorship in 1991. Rival factions immediately plunged the country into civil war in failed attempts to install themselves as the new national government. U.S. and UN humanitarian and military intervention from 1993 through 1995 [had] failed to restore peace.”<sup>1</sup> Somalis found themselves in unchartered territory. They were a country without a central government. “Taxes ceased to be collected. Regulatory agencies ceased to regulate. Payments on the deposed dictator’s foreign debt ceased to be made.”<sup>2</sup> The country fell into chaos. There were no police to maintain law and order. The courts were rendered irrelevant. Security became elusive to every Somali citizen. The capital city found people leaving for the villages, towns and cities from which they came. Somalis moved to their tribal areas. They lived near their clansmen. Clans began to spawn leaders to provide protection and resources. These warlords emerged out of the vacuum left without a central government. Peace became a luxury that many could not attain. The infamous Somali saying, “Peace and Milk,” was being challenged by the lack of both. By the time I made my first visit to Somalia, “thirteen different ‘peace conferences’ [had] attempted to create a new government for all of Somalia...all of them [had] failed.”<sup>3</sup> It is not the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive scholarly work on the state of affairs in Somalia after the collapse of the central government in 1991. Other scholars have attempted that and their works are available for the reader. Let me simply state that what I observed upon arrival in Mogadishu was a living context like none that I had ever experienced.

It was chaotic. Without peace, their animals were being stolen, their food was being looted, milk became a precious commodity. The cry for ‘Peace and Milk’ became a heartfelt need for the majority of the Somali people. And it was that need that was being discussed on that day in Mogadishu when elders and tribal chiefs were gathered together to find a way forward for peace in their beloved country.

One of the tribal chiefs spoke up in that meeting that he knew a man who might be able to help them find peace. This man lived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He was responsible to his organization for assisting needy people in the Horn of Africa through acts of compassion. I was that man! At that time, I was leading the work for my organization in the 6 countries that comprise the Horn of Africa. I was responsible for both the expansion of the Church in these countries, as well as directing our compassionate ministry efforts there. I had known this Somali chief for about two years at that time. He spoke to these men about me, as one who might be able to arbitrate between the various factions in Somalia and help them find common ground in which to build a foundation of peace. These tribal and clan leaders gave this chief the go-ahead to contact me with an invitation to come to Mogadishu to discuss the prospects of negotiating terms of peace in their country. When my chief-friend spoke

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<sup>1</sup> Powell, Benjamin, Ford, Ryan, and Nowrasteh, Alex (2006) “Somalia After State Collapse: Chaos or Improvement?” *The Independent Institute Working Paper*, No. 64, p. 3, Nov 30, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, Jim (2001) “Somalia And Anarchy.” *Formulations, Free Nation Foundation*; Issue 30, p. 3; Summer 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

to me about their invitation, I was overwhelmed with the immensity of this challenge. Who am I to be a peace negotiator? I had no experience as an arbitrator in such matters. And all previous attempts by those much more qualified than me to bring peace to this country in the previous nine years had all failed miserably. If it were not for my confidence in a God who could do the impossible, even through a weak vessel such as myself, I would have, without hesitation, declined accepting this invitation. Somehow, I felt that Jesus had something in mind in involving me in such an endeavor as this. I accepted. And one of the most incredible journeys of my life began.

My friend, the chief, was the one who had made preparations for all of my accommodations while I would be in Mogadishu. He was also the one who arranged my security detail with this major warlord. My Somali friends gave me counsel on safe travel to Mogadishu. There appeared to be only one safe option. The first leg of my journey was by commercial flight to Nairobi. That was the last of normalcy. After an overnight stay in Nairobi, I caught an early morning flight out of the Nairobi Wilson Airport. This airport served small-plane charter flights. I had flown into South Sudan using charter flights through various mission organizations out of the Wilson Airport, but this flight into Mogadishu was like no flight I had ever flown. All seats had been removed from the plane in which I was traveling, except for two at the very back of the plane. One seat was for me and the other was for my Somali friend accompanying me. The rest of the plane was filled with *khat*, “a shrub (*Catha edulis*) of the staff-tree family that is cultivated in 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>4</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>5</sup>

Somalis are undoubtedly the leading users of this drug in all of Africa. It has been said that at least eighty percent of Somali men chew this drug for its euphoric effects. From my own observation, eighty percent could be a low-side estimate. They chew this leaf, getting “high” on its effects, absorbing the cathinone into their system. “Cathinone is often compared to amphetamines, causing similar (albeit much milder) effects. These include excitement, euphoria, arousal, talkativeness, increased confidence, and concentration.”<sup>6</sup> As a “stimulant drug...it speeds up the messages going between the brain and the body.”<sup>7</sup> It makes the user feel more alert and highly optimistic. For the average Somali man, who has little hope of a safe and prosperous life, this drug-like plant produces an overly optimistic view of their life situation. So, most begin early each day, chewing the leaf and sucking every last drop of stimulant juices from the leaf’s drugging effects. In fact, the leaf is not spit out of the mouth while still chewing the next. Each leaf accumulates inside the mouth, all thrust to one side, giving the appearance of one cheek bulging like a squirrel carrying

<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/khat>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> ADF: Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Drug Facts List, <https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/khat/>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Trip Savvy, Khat: A Harmless Stimulant or a Dangerous Drug?

<https://www.tripsavvy.com/khat-narcotic-plant-1454064>. Accessed 17 October 2020

<sup>7</sup> ADF

its food to store for the winter. This is done to get every drop of juice from the leaf, maximizing the mental stimulation from this drug.

While there might be a difference of opinion on how habit-forming this drug is to the body, there can be no disagreement as to the mental and emotional dependency one gains from the daily imbibing of this drug-like leaf. As previously mentioned, this drug gives one an overly optimistic view of their existence. The user may be financially broke with no steady source of income, but chew this leaf for a while and great wealth is right around the corner. One's wife may be a real drag, but tomorrow he expects a beautiful woman to enter his life as a second wife, one who will meet his every need. Everything will be great tomorrow. Since this stimulant drug is ingested all day long, there is no sleep in sight when the user crawls into bed. The user is alert to the extreme. Of course, the morning's hangover brings on depression and hopelessness, and so the cycle continues. More *khat* to stimulate and bring hope for tomorrow. Over and over again, day in and day out, this cycle continues bringing disastrous effects to one's life. Families are destroyed and lives are lost for most habitual *khat* users.

*Khat* is grown in Ethiopia and Kenya. Ethiopian *khat* is trucked into Somalia and Somaliland, but most *khat* in Kenya is flown into Somalia out of the Nairobi Wilson Airport. Thus, the plane I flew on had all of its seats removed, making room for the maximum amount of 'vegetables,' as *khat* was referred to by the shippers in Nairobi on one of my flights. After all, *khat* is a real cash crop. Ethiopian farmers were at one time cutting down their coffee trees in order to make room for a larger *khat* production. Coffee prices go up and down, but *khat* had such constant, great demand, mostly coming out of Somalia and Yemen, that one could become well-to-do in harvesting this cash crop.

Flying into Somalia on this drug plane seemed quite ironic to me, as I could see only the pilot's head on the other side of the mountain of drugs between us. When I mentioned there were no seatbelts, I was told to place a big sac of *khat* on my lap. "It is heavy enough to keep you in place", I was told. As a follower of Ciise,<sup>8</sup> I am very much opposed to any stimulant or drug that brings destruction to the lives of people. I, in no way, want to glorify this drug or the use of this habit-forming stimulant, but flying on one of these drug planes was my only option to get into Mogadishu safely. As I took off from Wilson that morning, I noticed one plane after another jetting down the runway, all departing for Mogadishu, all carrying a plane full of *khat*. My plane was one of many heading for Mogadishu that morning. Once airborne, I noticed several small planes that seemed to have crash-landed by the runway. My travel companion told me that most of these planes crashed shortly after take-off because they were overloaded with *khat*.

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<sup>8</sup> Ciise is Somali for Jesus.

I have flown into international airports all around the world and I have landed in South Sudan where the pilot had to do a ground-hovering fly-by to drive cattle out of the meadow that would act as our runway. However, nothing had ever prepared me for the sight from my window as we approached that sandy, makeshift runway just outside of Mogadishu. Lining the runway were Somali *technicals*.<sup>9</sup> The more of these gun-wielding vehicles a warlord possessed, the more powerful that warlord would be. By the number of *technicals* I could see, from my viewpoint just before landing, I knew that the warlord who would be protecting me was very powerful. However, it did give me pause to see anti-aircraft guns on the runway where we would soon be landing. For just a moment, the thought occurred to me that maybe I was the target for these high-powered guns.

From the moment we touched the ground and shut off the engines, I found myself in close contact with militiamen hired by my protector. They grabbed my arm and pulled me from the plane, rushing me to a nearby Landcruiser. They placed me in the center seat. I was sitting between two gunmen, both carrying AK-47's. Behind me were two more similarly armed. In front was another gunman wielding this Russian-made killing machine. The only passengers without weapons were the driver and me. As we pulled out of this makeshift airfield, I noticed that we were in the middle of a caravan. There must have been at least five, maybe more, *technicals* behind my vehicle and the same in front. There were also Toyota pickups filled with young gunmen. Many were child-soldiers. I noticed one young boy who was clutching a bazooka. He looked to be no older than ten years old. I wondered how a young boy of that age would fare if he ever pulled the trigger of that powerful weapon.

The streets were blocked off for my arrival. We rushed through the city until we came to this three-story guest house. It had a radio station on the upper floor. The building had been evacuated. My Somali companion and I were the only two in that building for the duration of my stay.<sup>10</sup> This was the case for both of my visits to Mogadishu that year. We were placed on the second floor. As I was trying to adjust to my surroundings, I looked out of my 2<sup>nd</sup> story window and noticed that this guesthouse was surrounded by walls with the gate now closed. Inside the walls was a perimeter of men armed with machine guns – all of this for my protection. The risk of kidnapping foreigners (especially Americans) was very high. If a warlord had one of his guests kidnapped, it would be a real show of weakness on his part, so my protector was taking no chances. I was guarded like this day in and day out.

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<sup>9</sup> Technicals are pickup trucks with anti-aircraft guns or machine guns mounted in the back. Non-government Organizations (NGO's) hired local gunmen for *technical assistance* during the Somali Civil War years. Thus, the term *technical* arose for these vehicles that wielded significant gun power.

<sup>10</sup> Local papers published that an American delegation had visited the capital. I was the only white person in Somalia at the time.

One day I was chatting with some of these young gunmen who watched over me so carefully, making sure that I remained safe while under their charge. I was very interested in what life was like for them, and they were quite curious about me. One of these militiamen asked. "How many wives do you have?" *One* was my reply. "How many sons?" I told them I had two daughters. "Yes, but how many sons?" My answer was none, but I reminded them of my two beautiful daughters. They were shocked to hear that I had no sons and only one wife. They had one more question. "How many camels?" I couldn't help but smile as I reported that I was without any camels. Their unanimous conclusion was that I had been forsaken by God. After all, I had only one wife, no sons, not even a single camel. I thought it was interesting how we see things from our different perspectives. They were living in an unrelenting war-torn country; their resources were so meager, even two simple meals a day was beyond the reach of the average Somali.

Health care was poor; schools were inadequate. Life was lived with little assurance that they would see tomorrow. They were not even confident of where they would go if they were to die before the sun rose in the morning. Yet, they saw me as God-forsaken because I didn't have a second woman in waiting, no son to sustain the family name, and not even a female camel to give me milk to drink or meat to eat. Now, these gunmen were better off than the average Somali because the warlord took care of their needs, but the average Somali could only dream of the security that one had when *milk and peace* would be a constant reality. And all of their pressing needs, whether it be lack of availability of milk or any other precious commodity, resulted because there was no peace.

Maybe the best example of what it looks like to live without peace in Somalia came in my visit to Hawadley. This village north of Mogadishu had been terrorized by gunmen for several years. These gunmen raped and looted at will on a daily basis. Husbands would not leave their homes with their wives because they could not bear to see these evil men rape their women right before their eyes. One young man told my Somali friend traveling with me: "We do not know who fathered the children our wives delivered in the last few years." I cannot imagine living under such conditions. It would be unbearable. The villagers had secretly sent a delegation to Mogadishu to ask the warlord who was now providing my protection if he would come to their village and restore law and order. He did just that in short order. My protector had saved many lives and protected a great deal of property during those years by restoring law and order in the areas he ruled.

I will never forget our caravan making its way into Hawadley that afternoon. People were lining the streets. Arms were waving. Faces were filled with excitement. People were jumping up and down. Ladies were dancing. Children were cheering. What a welcome! At first, I thought this whole demonstration was for me. What had they heard? Did they think I was going to bring them peace? But then my Somali friend told me the story of what they had gone through and how my protector had set them free from the terrible conditions described above. It was then that I realized that they

were honoring the warlord that was now protecting me. I realized that my calling to bring peace to Mogadishu and Somalia was so different from the methods of this warlord. I came with only one weapon in my arsenal. It was Jesus. He alone can bring lasting peace to the hearts of men and women. He alone could rescue the tortured souls of Somalia.

This is exactly what I told those Muslim elders and tribal chiefs in that first meeting. I told them that I had no experience as a peace negotiator. I spoke of being a 'Man of the Book'.<sup>11</sup> I confessed being a 'Follower of Ciise'. I spoke to them about Jesus as their only hope for real peace. I mentioned that he had said much about how to attain peace in the Bible. By this time, I began to wonder how they were going to respond.

Muslims have great respect for Jesus. He is one of their great prophets. It's his divinity that they deny and their greatest objection to Christianity. So, I concluded this introductory meeting by saying that if they really wanted me to act as an arbitrator between warring-factions, they would need to agree to make the Bible our guide in all of our discussions and, specifically, the teachings of Jesus would need to be our focus in pursuing peace. I watched for their response. I was surprised to see the nodding heads and verbal agreements. The Lord had seemingly opened a door for me to minister to these new friends living in such horrid circumstances. What might have been accomplished in these so-called peace negotiations will never be known. After my two visits to Mogadishu in 2000, conditions in Somalia worsened. Security for visitors (even with warlord protection) became impossible. In years to follow al-Shabab, an East African terrorist organization, began systematically to hunt down Christian believers, killing them at will. Warlords became less effective in maintaining security. My Somali friends would not allow me to return to Mogadishu because of their concern for my life.

During the two weeks I spent in Mogadishu, I was able to see many needs that could be met by my compassionate ministry organization. We had provided relief to Somalis more than once by providing food during droughts and famines. In fact, our organization became known as the most efficient and effective distributor of famine relief for Somalia. Moving food through a country without law and order would be nearly impossible using traditional methods of delivery. Competing warlords would grab their share (if not all) of the food-stuffs moving through their territories that they controlled. An organization had to have an infrastructure on the ground that was local. They needed to work in cooperation with village elders. They needed to understand the Somali culture and how to get things done in a war-torn country. Our compassionate ministry organization possessed all of these things.

One of the needs I observed while in Somalia came during a trip to villages to the south of Mogadishu, along the Indian Ocean coast. Many of the villagers in these

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<sup>11</sup> A term familiar among Muslims referring to monotheistic religions but often used by Christians to speak of the Bible as the guide for faith and life.



areas were fishermen. It was the only source of income for many families living in this area. I discovered that none of these fishermen were active in their occupation at the time of my visit. They were fishermen without boats. We provided boats for some of these villages. One motorized-boat could serve three families in providing food for their households and making enough income to buy another boat. Families were provided the boats that they needed with their commitment to buy another boat for three more families. Each one who received a boat had to purchase one for other families, as soon as their income allowed. Our organization worked with the village elders, who policed our policy. The elders made sure that each one who received this gift freely gave to others. This project was very successful and provided food and income to many families.

Ever since the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia has continuously been a country with great physical and material needs. My organization was very concerned with those needs. We were also concerned about the spiritual needs of the Somali people. Somalia is a Muslim country known to be without any significant Christian presence. It is true that the vast majority of Somalis are Muslims, but there is a growing number of Somalis who are turning their hearts to Jesus as their Savior. Those who have their Christian faith exposed are persecuted severely. The subject of religious persecution in Somalia is beyond the scope of this paper. I do, however, want to comment briefly on what I experienced while in Somalia. While meeting people on my two visits to this amazing country, I often encountered men and women who were 'Followers of Jesus'. There is a growing, vital, and dynamic Church in Somalia. The Somali Church is operating underground but their witness is significant.<sup>12</sup> I have not encountered a church anywhere that comes close to the kind of commitment and obedience to Jesus' teachings as I encountered in Somalia. These courageous men and women are willing to die for their faith and many do so with incredible willingness. In my opinion, the Church in Somalia is second to none.

There is a spiritual vacuum in Somalia that needs to be addressed by global Christians. There are some things about Islam that I respect. For example, their persistence that there is only one God is in full-compliance, with biblical revelation, although they have not seen yet the way that this one God expresses himself in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yes, he is one God. That truth must be stubbornly held. However, this one God is beyond human understanding. We cannot put him into boxes that we construct. What might be understandable to man might be foolishness to God. God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah and proclaimed, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways."<sup>13</sup>

What we know about God is only what he has revealed about himself. And in the Scriptures, he reveals himself manifested in three persons. Yes, one God but three

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<sup>12</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>13</sup> Isaiah 55:8, NIV.

persons. The major hang-up for Muslims comes in the person of Jesus Christ. He's their Prophet, but to them, not divine and certainly not a Savior. And so, they pursue good works to get into the good graces of God. Their five pillars,<sup>14</sup> if sincerely practiced, will provide a maximum chance for a way to heaven as they believe. There's the rub - maximum chance but no certainty. There is no assurance of heaven. In the end, Allah is arbitrary and will send one to heaven or hell at his own whim regardless of how one lives out his life and faith. My heart breaks for Somali Muslims. They pursue God but miss out on the One who is personal, loving, and forgiving. A vacuum is left that can be filled only with Jesus, the Messiah. For Somali Muslims there is no personal relationship with God and there is no assurance of heaven, and so there is an emptiness in their religious pursuit. They live with this emptiness, unaware of the cause, not knowing what it is that is missing in their lives. They are creatures of their culture, seeing things from their own perspective.

On the last day of my first visit to Mogadishu, I was waiting for my drug plane to arrive for my return trip to Wilson Airport in Nairobi, Kenya. My security detail was standing near me, protecting me from any unwanted intruders meaning me harm before my departure. As we chatted about various topics, they turned the conversation in a surprising direction. "We know your wife has given you no sons, so we brought a Somali girl here today for you to take back to Ethiopia with you." And then they pointed to a young girl standing nearby, telling me she was ready to go home with me. She was young and I was promised that she would bear me many sons.

I thanked them for thinking about me but I told them that I could not take her back to Ethiopia with me. I mentioned that my wife would not be happy if I returned with a Somali wife. These young militiamen were shocked that I was turning down their thoughtful offer and they responded with a question: "Who runs your home? You or your wife?" They were talking amongst themselves and asking, *what kind of man would consult his wife?* These guys were full of pride that they made all decisions in their homes. They waited for my response. They did not have to wait long. "My wife and I love each other. Our needs are perfectly met without adding another woman into the mix. We are happy the way things are now, and besides, there is peace in our home." They were animate in their pursuing conversation. I asked my translator what they were saying. I was told that they were discussing how this white man is smarter than he looks. I am sure that each of them was reflecting on the lack of peace in their homes. It is pretty obvious that there is no woman on earth, American or Somali, who would share their man with another woman without a fight.

This was just another reminder of how different our cultures were. We thought differently about most matters. We all tend to think and act in the ways of our upbringing. We learn from our fathers and mothers. Our peers become powerful influences as we go to school. Our teachers bend our minds in directions compatible with their own thinking. Our religious leaders help us with our understandings of spiritual things. In this, Americans and Somalis are alike. We are (at least partially)

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<sup>14</sup> Five Pillars of Islam: Belief, Worship, Fasting, Almsgiving, and Pilgrimage. I'm encouraging the curious reader to research further as might be needed.

formed by our environment and for some more than others. Whether to have more than one woman living in your home or whether to follow the biblical revelation that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ is so greatly influenced by our surroundings and upbringing. The Good News is that God is able to reveal himself to anyone regardless of his surroundings and former teachings.

Mogadishu is a city with bombed-out buildings, inadequate hospitals, needy schools, and fishermen without boats. Somalis live in a lawless society. They are unable to travel safely in their own country. Unable to move about, make a living, and enjoy many of the things we take for granted in the West. All of this is so true. They deserve a compassionate ministry from the global community. Yet, the greatest challenge to the Global Church is an effective witness for Jesus Christ in this troubled but wonderful country. Somalis are spiritually-hungry people in search of a God who seeks a personal relationship with his people. They may not be aware of this searching, but God has placed a spiritual vacuum in their lives that can only be filled by Jesus Christ. He is constantly at work, drawing us toward himself. I believe that one of the greatest challenges and responsibilities for the Global Church today is to turn their evangelistic efforts to these people.

Somalia is a country and a people deserving high priority for the Church's resources and investments in mission. Most mission organizations consider Somalia closed to the Gospel, but in my experience, there is an open door even now to take Jesus to these struggling people. The Apostle Paul had a "...vision of a man from Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'"<sup>15</sup> At once Paul and his companions went to Macedonia and proclaimed the Good News in Jesus to these needy people. God had opened a door for evangelism for these early Christian missionaries. Today the door is opening to the Somali people. God is already at work there. We can see it in a dynamic, growing, underground church. We see hearts opening. We see God opening doors for the Somali Bible Society (SBS) to provide Bibles, compassionate ministry, and training. Once again, God is opening our eyes to see men and women begging us, *come over and help us*. Seek God in prayer as to how you might be able to answer this call.

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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

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<sup>15</sup> Acts 16:9, NIV.

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).

## The Miracle of the Emerging Somali Church

Pastor Simon Fry

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### Introduction

The Lord God almighty rules supreme in heaven over everything, for all time. The Prophet Isaiah wrote: “for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose, . . . I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it” [Isaiah 46:9-11]. This paper seeks to briefly outline God’s master plan of salvation of mankind, quickly narrowing down to His current purposes that He is bringing to pass in the Islamic world at this present time; before then specifically focusing on what the Almighty is doing amongst the Somali people.

### God’s Sovereign Plan of Salvation

The Prophet Job in an encounter with God cries out in worship, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” [Job 42:2]. The living God can do all He wants; nothing He has purposed can be stopped. Indeed, Proverbs 21:30 says, “No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.” No matter who opposes God or how clever they may be, there is no hope of victory over what He has purposed [Psalm 2, Acts 2:22-24]. So, it is theologically safe to assume that the tragic fall of the human race as recorded in Genesis 3 did not thwart God’s plan for mankind as laid out on the 6th day of creation. Gen 1:27-28 states, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Mankind is made in the image of God, the only physically created thing to be described in this way. As image-bearers God commissions humanity to fill the earth and rule over it as His representatives. Calvin (Genesis 2001: 27) notes “God could Himself indeed have covered the earth with a multitude of people but it was His will that we should proceed from one fountain.” For the omnipotent one who wanted the world populated with His image-bearers could have easily done this from the start. Thus, God choosing not to use this approach must have been done with purpose. Calvin notes that part of this purpose is we shall all proceed from one source (more on this later). However, this is only part of the reason God wanted His image-bearers to have a part to play in fulfilling His purposes here on earth, the privilege of co-labouring with Him. Hallelujah.

God started by giving Adam the Garden of Eden in which to work out His purposes. Mankind’s growth and dominion over the earth, in their pre-fallen state, would have been perfect. Therefore, naturally bringing God glory as they ruled over the created world exactly

how the Lord would want them to. Thus, to use the Prophet Habakkuk's words, "For the earth *would have been* filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." [Habakkuk 2:14] (Italics – changing the prophecy to what would have occurred). However, mankind's rebellion against God after giving into Satan's temptation led to sin, death, and destruction being in God's world. What was once going to happen naturally was now impossible. Now the human race is born dead in its sin, opposed to God and under His wrath [Genesis 6:5, Ephesians 2:1-3]. But remember, "No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord."

The scene is now set for God's redemptive plan, devised before the foundation of the world, [Ephesians 1:4, Revelations 3:8] demonstrating the amazing grace and steadfast love of the Lord, swings into action. Rescuing Noah and his family from His divine judgement on the earth through the ark [Genesis 6-9]. Choosing Abraham and his chosen descendants, Isaac, then Jacob and through him the people of Israel, to be blessed by God and through whom He would bring blessing to the world. To Abraham, and through him the people of Israel, he gives the promised land in which to work out His purposes; to be like a kingdom of priests, a holy nation [Exodus 19:6]. However, the Bible shows how Israel, due to sin, failed to fulfil this and ended up in exile under the Babylonian empire. This demonstrates that man in his own efforts cannot fulfil the purposes of God [Romans 8:7-8]. Yet, God in his grace brought them back to the land, although the physical kingdom was never really what it once was. All through Israel's past though, even in the glory days of King David, God's prophets had been pointing forward to a coming anointed one who would establish God's eternal rule over the whole earth [2 Samuel 7:12-13, Isaiah 9:6-7, Daniel 7:13-14]. The Messiah, literally translated as 'Anointed one' or Christ in Greek.

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." [Galatians 4:4-5.] Jesus Christ came from heaven to earth on a rescue mission at precisely the right time in God's master plan. He lived a perfect life, the only one who God could look down from heaven and be well pleased [Matthew 3:17]. Jesus accomplished all the work the Father had given him to do [John 17:4]. Then the Son of God willingly laid down his life on the cross as the perfect sacrifice, taking on himself the wrath of God as He bore the punishment of mankind's sin upon his shoulders [Romans 3:21-26], before three days later rising victorious from the dead and offering the hope of salvation now to all people [Romans 1:4-6]. The key thing for one to be right with God now has nothing to do with one's ethnicity, gender or social status, but whether they are in Christ or not [Galatians 3:38, John 1:11-12].

The resurrected Jesus before ascending into heaven gives his disciples what has commonly come to be called, 'The Great Commission.' "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” [Matt 28:18-20]. God desires people from all nations, all over the earth to be saved and made righteous by Christ. Then through the power of his Spirit that now works in His redeemed He enables them to supernaturally live in a way that is pleasing to God [Ephesians 1:19-20, Colossian 1:29].

Amongst many other things which are not the remit of this paper, the Great Commission is clearly a recommissioning of the Genesis 1:28 command to mankind on day he created! For the Lord has purposed so it will come to pass [Isaiah 46:11]. What once would have happened naturally, due to sin can only happen supernaturally through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in those who come to Jesus. As Calvin noted on Genesis 1:28 that God wanted mankind to all proceed from one fountain, Adam. Now in order to fulfil God’s command we need to be in the new Adam [Romans 5:12-20; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 45]. Christ is the true source humanity needs to be united with, in Him is the fulfilment of God’s plan in heaven and on earth. As the Apostle Paul writes, God was “making known the purpose of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth.” [Ephesians 1:9-10].

Just like in the beginning, God wants to involve his redeemed people in His eternal plan of fulfilling his purpose. Commenting on the Great Commission, Piper says (2000: 173) “It was not merely given to the Apostles for their ministry, but was given to the church for its ministry as long as this age lasts.” God could easily do it all Himself, but He has given the privilege to His adopted children to be His representatives, His image-bearers, to be involved in His eternal purposes.

The Apostle Paul explains in Ephesians 2:8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Bruce (1984: 291) commenting on this passage says, “If those who belonged to the old order were dead through their trespasses and sins, those who belong to the new creation are characterised by ‘good works,’ works performed not to secure salvation but as the fruit of salvation.” A large part of those good works pertains to the people of God, the church, engaging in their part in the Great Commission. The late J. I. Packer said (1961: 75), “If therefore we love God and are concerned to glorify him, we must obey his command to evangelise.” Jesus is clear he will not return until, “this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14. Edward Dayton in Perspectives on the World Christian Movements makes clear (1981: 581), “The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded his Church to make disciples of every nation. Every Christian in every local church, in every country of the world, is called upon to be a witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ.” (1981: 595)

Revelation 7:9-10, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Which should come as no surprise as the Lord God almighty knows the end from the beginning and nothing can stop His purpose. If He wants the gospel preached to all nations (or better understood all ethnic groups), it will come to pass. This is a picture of the future that the Apostle John saw. The end of the story is certain; as the Lord has spoken and will bring it to pass. Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth so none can stop Him! Amazingly, the church of Jesus Christ has been given the privilege of being the main agent through whom God chooses to usher in his plan on earth. Yes, He could use angels to appear and bring about His purposes on earth and he does sometimes, and of course scripture does not tell us all they are doing in the spiritual realm either. However, the commission is given to the Church of Jesus Christ, His redeemed people, with all their weaknesses and mistakes they make. The sovereign Lord will work out His eternal plan, and all onlookers will be able to do nothing but marvel at the wisdom of the almighty. Ephesians 3:10 says, "So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." Hodge commenting on this verse says, "This gives us our highest conception of the dignity of the church." [1994: 109]. Over the last 2000 years, God has been outworking His plan through His people, in His own time, the Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness [2 Peter 3:7-12].

Before jumping forward to this present time to look at part of God's plan unfolding; it is worth noting that from a human perspective the outworking of God's plan is not straightforward and there seems to be countless setbacks that make no sense at a human level. Remember, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." 1 Cor. 1:25. Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples wanted to know times and seasons for Israel in Acts 1:6 which the Lord responds by saying, "It is not for you to know times and seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" [Acts 1:7-8]. Calvin (Acts 1995: 30) notes on Acts 1:7 "He is speaking about times and seasons; but since the same principle applies in other things we should accept this as the universal precept, that we are to be content with what God reveals and regard it as unlawful to inquire what he does not reveal." Indeed, in the sovereignty of God His salvation plan is unfolding and whilst one may not be able to predict or strategize how this plan is to develop, church history would show that the Lord has times and seasons for different peoples to be reached with the gospel and times when it appears the church gets distracted and loses ground.



## The wind of the Spirit moving across the Islamic World

As this paper is concerned with the emerging Somali Church, it is important to briefly consider the rise of Islam and the historic response of the Church to it, before looking at what God is currently doing in the Islamic world today.

Church History 101 notes (2016: 32) “By the turn of the (7th) 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. But its advance ground to a halt in Spain. . . . The historic Christian communities of the Near East and North

Africa were either destroyed or reduced to the status of despised and oppressed minorities.” Sookhdeo comments (2002: 14), “The church which had known the leadership of such men as Augustine, Athanasius, Cyprian and Tertullian found itself quite unable to resist the advancing armies of Islam. The ruins of ancient church buildings are the sole remains of a once vigorous church.” As stated why the Lord allowed this is unwise to claim complete understanding; however, Church History 101 makes this poignant point (2016: 34) “While there is a time and a season for everything, the church must not forget what matters most: it must remain clear and steadfast on the great commission . . . proclaiming the gospel to a lost and dying world.”

Sadly, in the 12th Century, “Rather than relying on the spiritual weapons of faith, love prayer, evangelism, and good works, the church looked to political, military, and financial might to answer the threat of Islam. It was thought that the only language the Islamic forces would understand was the language they themselves spoke – the language of violence. The Crusaders failed to understand that Christ enjoins His people to speak a different language. . . . Ours should be a language of humility and love in the name of Christ, not violence, slaughter and retribution.” (Church History 101 2016: 56). This action of the flesh left a deep scar in the Islamic world, inoculating it from the gospel for centuries to come.

David Garrison in his book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, explains (2014: 17) that there were no known movements of God where people voluntarily turned to Christ from Islam in its first 1200 years! A movement he defines as (2014: 5) “either 100 churches planted or 1000 Muslim Background Believers (MBB) baptised in less than a 2-decade period. Then in the 19th century there were 2, followed by a further 11 towards the end of the 20th Century. However, in the first 14 years of the 21st century there have been a further 69 movements of God right across the Islamic world. He concludes this summary with, “Something is happening – something historic, something unprecedented.” (2014: 18). Garrison is not alone in recognising this. Mike Shipman writes in his book *Any 3* (2013: 15) “This is God’s day of salvation for Muslims.” Even seasoned Bible smuggler Tom Hamblin is recorded as saying (Meroff 2016: 203), “Tens of thousands of Muslims are disillusioned with Islam, and God’s Spirit is at work to open their hearts to the message of Christ Jesus.” Whilst there are a multitude of factors causing this turning to Christ, one also

has to stand back in praise of God and acknowledge the Lord is on the move in a powerful way. Peter Wagner comments in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movements* (1981: 574) that it is helpful to have 4 strategies in mind when thinking of Mission. That is:

- Right Goals
- Right Place at the right time
- Right Methods
- Right People

Whilst acknowledging that all situations need people working in them, Wagner goes on to write (1981: 578), “But no one who takes strategy seriously would advocate for a massive labour force in green fields. Jesus wouldn’t. He does not tell us to pray for more labourers to go to the green fields or to fallow fields. The labourers are needed for the ripe harvest fields.” Wagner highlights that in Matt 10:5-6 the disciples at that time are told not to go to the Samaritans but only the Jews, as the former were not ripe at that point. However, not long later the disciples were told to go to reach Samaria. The time was ripe for harvest.

In the purposes of God, it would appear that the time is now ripe for a massive move of God across the whole Islamic world, despite the harsh treatment many MBB face from leaving Islam. Garrison interviewed many MBB (2014: 232) “whose communities had beaten them, arrested them, tortured, shunned, poisoned them, and stripped them of their jobs, possessions, and families.” This is also the testimony of many Somali believers too. According to Patrick Sookhdeo (2009: 30 & 38) “All schools (of Islam) agree that it is permitted to kill apostates from in front or from behind, that their blood shed requires no vengeance, that their property belongs to true (Muslim) believers, and finally their marriage ties become null and void.” Again, sadly this assessment by Sookhdeo is the regular experience of Somali Muslims who turn to Christ.

In spite of this Garrison notes (2014: 5) “Muslim movements to Jesus Christ are taking place in numbers we’ve never before seen.” MBB are choosing to deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus [Matthew 16:24], even though for some it will end up with their bodies being literally nailed to a cross for this decision! Yet still they come to only one who has the words of eternal life [John 6:68], who promises his followers who take up their cross, “. . . whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Matt 16:25. The one who can say to all who turn to him, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). Garrison observes (2014:243) “The Qur’an offers no assurance of salvation. For assurance of salvation, one must turn to the person and work of Christ.”

God is at work bringing his plan of salvation across the Islamic world, the church must learn the lesson from the past and not use natural means to try to deal with Islam; but double its efforts on reaching the 1.8 billion people in the House of Islam

with the good news of Jesus Christ. As Garrison (2014: 248) encourages, “Muslims are neither a religion nor an ideology; they are individuals in need of a Saviour, individuals for whom Christ died.” Shipman notes (2013: 97), “When you witness, even to unresponsive persons, you are never wasting your breath. The Holy Spirit is convicting them of their sin and disbelief. Though they cannot see Jesus with their own eyes, the Spirit is revealing Christ to them. The Spirit is also convicting them of the judgement to come.”

God wants so much to move in the Islamic world that there are literally thousands of stories of God giving the church a helping hand in this mission. Garrison records (2014: 238) God are visiting these Muslims through dreams, visions, and answered prayers in the name of Jesus. Virtually everyone who has worked in ministry to

Muslims can attest to the pervasive presence and work of the Holy Spirit.” Many Somali Muslim Background Believers give testimony to God meeting them in this way. Alongside this, as in the past in the West, “Scripture in the local language has been instrumental to every movement we have examined,” Garrison observes (2014: 237). Indeed, several Somali Believers I have spoken with, including 2 key leaders in the Somali Church came to Christ through reading the Bible. One leader said to me, “When I was in Khartoum studying Islam, someone gave me a Bible, which I threw on the floor. Then a voice inside of me said, ‘You need to know why they are wrong so you should read it.’ So I picked up the book and started to read it. After two years of studying Islam in an Islamic country and studying the Bible on my own, I chose to reject the god of hatred and violence and chose the God of love and grace.” These means God is using do not negate the work of the church; but aids it. Piper says, (2000: 210), “There is a distinct calling on the church to do frontier missionary work amongst all the remaining unreached people groups....So the goal of Christ’s work and ours is that God might be glorified by the nations as they experience his mercy.” Experience His love and grace!

### **The miracle of the emerging Somali Church**

It is in this wider context of the Spirit of God blowing across the Islamic world that we see him moving in what Miller (2006) calls, ‘the Hardest place.’ That is in Somalia and amongst the Somalis. If it was called the hardest place in the Modrickers time, it is even more difficult now due to near 3 decades of war. Mohamed Abdulahi’s book, *The Silent Gun*, is a harrowing read, as it records current issues that are killing the Somali people and yet no one hears the gunshots that are bringing death. His excerpt on the back cover reads, “When drafting this book, I was like someone whose house was on fire, whose family members were living in that house including his mother, father, spouse and siblings with no fire extinguishers nearby.”

Even amongst Muslims, life is incredibly cheap and killing of innocent people is not uncommon. Abdulahi (2018: 26) tries to address this; he writes, “Islam teaches that killing an innocent person has no place in the religion. . . Killing innocent people whether a Muslim or non-Muslim has no place in Islam.” Yet, if life is bad for the so called ‘Innocent Muslim,’ Abdulahi acknowledges, it is much worse for religious minorities (2018: 49). Thoresen writes (2014: 1), “The church among the ethnic

Somali population in the Horn of Africa constitutes a culturally marginalised and persecuted minority.” Yet, like across the rest of the Islamic world, there is a growing vibrant Somali Church. When it comes to the work of salvation, Jesus said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God,” Luke 18:27. Hudson Taylor puts it so aptly, “I have found there are three stages in every great work of God, first, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done!” Those who want to minister among Somalis have a pre-Islamic foundation on which to build. The

The first Somali converts in recent history, according to Thoresen (2014: 51), came to the Lord in 1898. However, it is worth mentioning, as the Reverend Mahad Birik comments in his Master’s Dissertation, there is evidence of pre-Islamic Judeo-Christian influence amongst the Somalis (2019: 1). Over the next 37 years, Thoresen says (2014: 57), SEM saw 450 Somalis turn to Christ and be baptised. In 1935, Thorsen notes, “A stronger emphasis was to be placed on the training of national co-workers and stationing them in various towns and villages.” Somalia’s changing political situation with colonial powers and its own internal rise in desire to be independent led to, (2014: 59) “Former Muslims who turned to Christianity were subject to harassment and social isolation not only for leaving the faith of their fathers, but also fraternising with foreigners.” However, the general picture given through Thoresen’s research is slow growth, with some setbacks as always until the late 1960’s. Interestingly, much of the setbacks were to do with ecclesiological difference between the different mission agencies. During the 1970’s the now autonomous Somali Government nationalised the properties of many mission agencies, and curbing their missional activity. By 1989 as opposition to Siyaad Barre turned violent, it drove the country into chaos; Pietro Salvatore Colombo, OFM, the Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Mogadishu was murdered and with that the last of the expat missionaries left Somali promptly (Thoresen 2014: 69). The Somali Church had little choice but to go underground or flee to neighbouring countries.

The Modrickers were based in Somalia from 1954-1973 before they were expelled. They briefly lived in Ethiopia where they were involved in setting up a radio station which continued the mission of reaching Somalis. The radio ministry was highly effective in reaching Somalis with the truth of the gospel and I personally have met several Somalis whose testimony involves the radio being a key part to them beginning of their journey towards Christ. Today both in Kenya and Ethiopia I am aware of Somali Muslim Background Believers who are broadcasters on radio stations giving the good news of Jesus to the Somali people. Likewise, social media is proving to be a highly effective platform to engage with Somalis before leading them through to saving faith in Jesus. Amazingly enough, now Somali MBB’s are at the forefront of that ministry. A brave Somali couple in the UK publicly broadcast on social media pointing people to Jesus on a regular basis. They show their faces openly and have received many death threats from Muslims because of this, sadly even from their own family. Others from Sweden, Nairobi and Ethiopia are actively engaged in using social media platforms to reach their own people for Jesus.

There have be several attempts in both Ethiopia and Nairobi in the 1990’s and early 2000’s to establish larger Somali Church congregations, but this just made them

easy targets for persecution, even in countries where legally speaking they had religious freedom. The murder of an outspoken Somali evangelist, David Abdulwahab Mohamed Ali in May 2008 is an example of this. However, the biggest factor for the struggling of Somali believers to form a united growing church network

according to Somali MBB's I have met is the meddling of various mission and church-based agencies. One Somali Christian leader put it like this, "Everyone wants a piece of the Somali Camel meat, to be able to say to people back home, 'Look at how much Somali Camel meat we have.' Not realising that the Camel is actually alive and wanting to walk and grow!" The late influential Somali believer, Ahmed Ali Haile, noted a similar problem (2011: 115), "Whilst we were concerned with Islamic militancy during our years in Nairobi, one of our greatest challenges was coping with some of these Christian groups who came to Kenya to 'help' us." Elsewhere in Ahmed's book, *Teatime in Mogadishu*, he writes (2011: 65), "The death of culture happens when the society insists that it has the best culture; that is disease which is afflicting the Somali Culture today." He is writing this about Al-Shabab in Somalia, but sadly the same principle pervades much church-based and mission agencies approaches to reaching the Somalis for Jesus.

People want a church like the one back home! Thoresen notes, (2014: 2), "The way in which Somali Christians have conceived of the church, and related to it, may be the reasons why the number of Christians has remained small." The way Somalis have conceived or related to church historically will be massively shaped by those who have introduced them to the church i.e. mission and church-based agencies.

The Somali Church whilst still needing some support and help from outside also needs the freedom to grow in its own cultural context, creating its own traditions and norms based on the Bible, not church (and particularly Western Church) tradition. Garrison would argue that this is not limited to the Somali Church but many emerging church movements across the Islamic world. He writes positively that (2014: 33) "These movements may be forming new expressions of Christian faith that are distinct from the various other branches of Christianity around them."

Over the last 7 years God has miraculously enabled the emerging Somali Church movement, made up of Somali Muslim Background Believers and led by Somalis themselves. This movement has grown from dispersed and sometimes despondent MBBs, into a church planting network that spans across 6 nations in the Horn of Africa and reaching into a 7th. It is also involved in reaching out to Somali diaspora around the world and for the last 3 years has been training Pastors from non-Islamic backgrounds on how to evangelise Muslims. The Somali Believers Ministries Network (SBMN), as they are called, describe themselves as, "A Christ Centred Community, whose vision is to, "Create a united Somali network of house churches, to reach the Somali people in the Horn of Africa and beyond with the love of Jesus." The 'Somali Camel' is most certainly not dead, or even sick; it is up, walking and affectively reaching Somalis with the good news of Jesus Christ, whilst helping others to do likewise.

One of the SBMN leaders who has been a Christian for many years described this growing movement as the most exciting thing he has seen happen amongst the Somali MBBs, however, as always in God, the best is yet to come. The miracle of the emerging Somali Church may be moving from the impossible to difficult stage according to Hudson Taylor's understanding, but that means it is well on its way in

the sovereignty of God to being done! This is not to minimise the long hard road which has much suffering ahead of it for the Somali Church as daily attacks and even killings take place against Somali Muslim Background Believers. Even in the last month I am sadly aware of another Somali MBB who has gone to be with the Lord because of his faith and others who have just been released from prison and have to leave their country because they refused to turn their back on Jesus. In both these cases great will be their reward in heaven.

### **Conclusion**

John Piper says (2000: 11) "Mission is not the ultimate goal of the church, worship is. Mission exists because worship doesn't. ... Worship therefore is the fuel of mission." Jesus told us that the Father is seeking worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth [John 4:23]. One of the key ways anyone worships God according to the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 is to, "to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." The Lord wants people from all over the world, from every tribe tongue and nation to worship him and bring him glory, including many representatives from Somalia.

Whilst the road ahead will be difficult, the Lord will have his beautiful Somali Church in his time, or more correctly he will have many glorified Somali Christians included in His Church. As I started this paper with a quote from the Prophet Isaiah, it is fitting for us to finish with another. One that assures us of the completion of God's unfolding plan or redemption including those from amongst the Somalis even as it happens in somewhat perplexing ways.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" [Isaiah 55v9-11].

### **Use of the Bible**

Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from the Bible are from the ESV. The Bible is the authoritative word of God, its veracity untarnished and teachings relevant to all.

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## First Generation Believers' Impact on Frontier Missions

Abdi-K Mahmoud

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*"You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people." 1 Cor 16:15*

One of the passages of Scripture that I relate to the most is Mark 5:1-20. In this passage of Scripture, a desperately needy man encounters Jesus and Jesus transforms him from a mad man to a healthy man. Jesus and His entourage face hostility from the man's community; they are denied entry into the town. The people could not stomach the transformation cost even though they could clearly see their person was made well. Jesus instructs the man who had an encounter with Him to go home to his own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for him and how He has had mercy on him.<sup>1</sup> This transformed man responds with obedience and has an impact on the mission work among his people, "so the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed."<sup>2</sup>

Upon reflection, one can see multiple parallels between this passage and the mission work among Somalis. Various Gospel workers arrived on our shores. They met a few of us and shared the Gospel with us. The message of the Cross captivated us, and Christ transformed our lives. Our community could not stomach the cost of transformation that comes with a changed worldview. They are hostile to the Gospel workers and deny them entry into our lands. However, they cannot deny us access to our own people and communities. I believe the instruction from the Lord, to go home to our people and tell them how much the Lord has done for us and how He has had mercy on us, applies to us today.

Let us take a moment and briefly reflect upon the experiences of first-generation Somali believers who responded obediently to the Lord's instruction to go and tell their people how much the Lord has done for them. Some use public forums to share the good news with their people; these include two faithful brothers who have been using radio ministry for more than a decade and, most recently, social media platforms to spread the Gospel. Others have employed covert means to spread the Good News through friendship evangelism, discovery Bible studies, and other contextualized methods. Still, others have chosen to invest in mobilizing believers to the mission field through teaching in theological institutions, pastoring local churches, and working with para-church organizations. It will be helpful to see a study on the effectiveness of these various approaches and their contribution to the mission work, especially among the Somali people.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 5:19

<sup>2</sup> Mark 5:20

In this paper, I want to take a closer look at our homes. What do the families of first-generation believers look like? Here are some specific real-life case studies to help us think deeply on this: Brother X was married with kids when he responded to the Gospel more than a decade now; he has not been able to tell his wife about his faith. Consequently, his kids are being raised in the Islamic ways. Brother X is faithful to Christ, and whenever he can, he fellowships with other believers. What is brother X's impact on the mission work among his people? Brother Z and sister W met after they had both responded to the Gospel. They are both actively engaged in ministry. When Z and W decided to get married, they opted to get married the Islamic way to please their families. In what ways will they raise their children? Especially amongst their families? What is the impact of Z and W on the mission work among their people? Brother Y is actively engaged in ministry; he is outspoken about his faith. His family is of the opinion that they need to rescue brother Y's kids from their father's spiritual influence. How should brother Y continue to relate to his family? What is brother Y's impact on the mission work?

In the advent of renewed zeal of mission work among Somalis and the growing popularity of rapid discipleship making movements among many unreached people groups, it is prudent to ask questions based on first-generation believers' experiences. We need to ask how much we should invest in the family unit in frontier missions, especially among Somalis. The case studies above all relate in some way to the family unit. Woodberry and others make an important observation, "Modeling the Christian life, building relationships, and demonstrating authenticity are key for effective discipling."<sup>3</sup> Effective discipling is key to fruitfulness in the mission field. The life choices first-generation believers make in their family units play a critical role in advancing the Gospel from one generation to the next one. In our renewed zeal of advancing the Gospel among Somalis, is it time to slow down and intentionally invest in the family unit – invest in the health of our marriages and parenting skills? Will this result in a generational fruit?

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### About the author



Abdi-K Mahmoud is married to Laura, his best friend and a fellow partner in the ministry; they have 3 children: Shamsa, Zeenat and Nabeel. Abdi is engaged in challenging but fruitful ministry in the East African Coast under Bethany Gateways. Abdi has a missional and a pastoral heart. The Lord uses him in a mighty way to advance the Kingdom of God in the Muslim World. The author can be reached at [walalodinho@gmail.com](mailto:walalodinho@gmail.com).

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<sup>3</sup> From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims (Second Edition) (p. 170). William Carey Library. Kindle Edition.

## Courage in Our Conviction A Conversation with Pastor Shafi'i Ibrahim Faarah

Aweis A. Ali

### Prologue

The Somali people in the Horn of Africa have been exposed to the Gospel for over a century by different intrepid missionaries of various denominational persuasions. The most significant Big Three are the Roman Catholics, the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM),<sup>1</sup> and the Mennonite Mission. The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) is also one of the earliest pioneers in Somalia. The SOLC set up a mission base in Kismayo, southern Somalia, in 1896 and eventually expanded its mission work to Jilib, Mugaambo and Jamaame, all in southern Somalia. While evangelism was the primary focus, the SOLC's ministry was holistic, opening schools and clinics for the local people.<sup>2</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) opened a mission station in Somalia in 1881 and started ministering to the Somali people.<sup>3</sup> The Cathedral in Mogadishu, built in 1928, was the biggest in Africa up until the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>4</sup> According to Venanzio Francesco Filippini, the RCC Bishop of Mogadishu, there were 40,000 Somali Catholics in southern Somalia by 1940.<sup>5</sup> The entire Somali population in Somalia proper was estimated in 1940 to be about 1,150,000 according to the Italian colonial authority and 1,200,000 in 1950.<sup>6</sup> This makes the Somali Christians in 1940 to be about 3.5% of the population; this is a significant growth in a Muslim country where local Christians have not been statistically crucial in the last several decades. However, other competent voices like Bishop Giorgio Bertin, the RCC Bishop of Djibouti and the Apostolic Administrator of Somalia, doubt the high figure of 3.5%.<sup>7</sup>

French fathers from the RCC started a high-profile ministry in the northern Somali village of Daymoole, near the port town of Berbera, in 1891 opening an orphanage and a school.<sup>8</sup> The RCC schools were expanded to southern Somalia with the financial support of the Italian colonial government in 1939.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This mission organization changed its name a few times over the years but always kept is the acronym, SIM. It is known today as Serving In Mission.

<sup>2</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyow), *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

<sup>3</sup> Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, volume 1 (Brill Academic Publisher, 1991) 120.

<sup>4</sup> "A Surprising History of Christianity in Somalia," Alex of Esther Project (2017). <http://theestherproject.com/surprising-history-christianity-somalia/> (accessed 30 September 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia, Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 66.

<sup>6</sup> "Catholic Hierarchy," Diocese of Mogadiscio, (nd). <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/dioceses/dmgds.html> (accessed 26 April 2018).

<sup>7</sup> The Bishop made this claim in an e-mail communication with the researcher on 17 April 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyow), *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, (Harvard University Press, 1st edition, 1963), 77.

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953 and the SIM in 1954.<sup>10</sup> Unlike the low-profile mission work of the RCC, both the SIM and the MM demonstrated the proverbial missionary zeal.<sup>11</sup> Both mission organizations won numerous Somalis to the Lord within a short time. A Somali Muslim fanatic killed an MM missionary in Mogadishu in 1962. Merlin Grove was only 33 years old when he was stabbed to death in Mogadishu, Somalia.<sup>12</sup> The RCC was not spared of martyrdom. Bishop Pietro Salvatore Colombo, 66, is the highest profile martyr this church has produced in Somalia. He was shot and killed in the Mogadishu Cathedral in 1989.<sup>13</sup>

The 2017 World Watch List places the Somali Church as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most persecuted in the world.<sup>14</sup> This church often makes the infamous top two slots of the World Watch List;<sup>15</sup> it has been on this list since 1992.<sup>16</sup> According to Open Doors, “The mere suspicion of one’s having renounced Islam leads to a rushed public execution.”<sup>17</sup> The most prominent Somali martyr is arguably pastor Liibaan Ibraahim Hassan who was martyred in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1994.<sup>18</sup> One of the most prominent Somali Christians is the late Michael Mariano Ali who served his country as an elected member of parliament, cabinet member and an ambassador.<sup>19</sup> While the Somali constitution was tolerant of the tiny Christian population in the 1960s, the 2009 constitution was amended to make it a Sharia Law compliant, thus adding insult to injury in the eyes of the already besieged Somali Christians.<sup>20</sup>

Pastor Shafi’i Ibrahim Faarah, 88, is the most high-profile living Somali Christian; he is also the oldest known Somali Christian in the world; these two distinctions and his fearless witness sustain his larger than life image. The confident and the charismatic pastor sat down with me in the Somali inhabited North East Kenya. Following is the interview I had with the most eminent Somali pastor. The interview has been edited for space and clarity.

**AAA:** Tell me about your childhood.

<sup>10</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyow), *The Islamic Movement in Somalia*, 21.

<sup>11</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), 111.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 129. See also: Ruth Myers. *When the Lights Go Out: Memoir of a Missionary to Somalia*. Acorn Press, 2016 (chapter 18: Murder in Mogadishu), Kindle version.

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<sup>14</sup> “World Watch List,” *Open Doors USA*, (nd).

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<sup>15</sup> “World Watch List,” *Christianity Today*, (2017) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/january/top-50-countries-christian-persecution-world-watch-list.html> (accessed 03 July 2017).

<sup>16</sup> “About Somalia,” *Open Doors USA*, (nd).

<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/somalia/> (accessed 30 September 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> J. Gordon Melton *Faiths across Time: 5,000 Years of Religious History* [4 volumes]: 5,000 Years of Religious History. ABC-CLIO, 2014. 1897. Kindle Version

<sup>19</sup> Somalia - Trusteeship and Protectorate: The Road to Independence. Country Studies. Nd.

<https://country-studies.com/somalia/trusteeship-and-protectorate:-the-road-to-independence.html> (accessed 31 March 2019).

<sup>20</sup> “Somalia,” *Voice of Martyrs Canada*, (nd). Somalia. <https://www.vomcanada.com/somalia.htm> (accessed 30 September 2017).

See also: “Somalia,” *US Department of State*, (2011).

**Pastor:** I was born in the Somali inhabited region of what is now North-East Kenya in 1932. My father died when I was about five years old. My mom raised me. I grew up herding cattle and camels in the Horn of Africa. No one could steal my camels. I was a fearsome warrior who would lay down his life for his cattle and camels. When I was about 19, a lion grabbed my favourite heifer in broad daylight in the North-East county of Wajer, Kenya. I seized the lion by the ear and then stabbed it in the neck with my double-edged dagger. The lion jumped off the heifer and groaned in pain. It disappeared into the forest.

**AAA:** How did your father die?



Pastor Shafi'i Ibrahim Faarah  
Photo credit: Aweis A. Ali

**Pastor:** My father was inside a shallow makeshift borehole collecting water for his cattle in the Afmadow district in southern Somalia. Two oxen fought at the mouth of the water well, and one of them fell into the borehole smashing my father to death.

**AAA:** When did the Lord find you and what challenges did you face as a new disciple?

**Pastor:** The Lord found me in 1969 after an American tourist had witnessed to me. Somali Muslims started persecuting me; relatives, neighbours, and even total strangers targeted me. My fellow Somalis could not comprehend the idea of a Somali Muslim leaving Islam, and following Jesus. To them, I committed religious treason, an apostasy. My Ogaden clan is known for their violence and religious fanaticism. I feared for my life, yet I was determined to stay with the Lord.

**AAA:** How are you still alive if so many people wanted to kill you for your Christian faith?

**Pastor:** I had kept a very low profile until 1971 when I started to share my new faith with my close family members openly. Like apostle Paul, the Lord has revealed himself to me and encouraged me not to waver in my walk with Jesus. My own Damascus Road encounter gave me extraordinary courage in my conviction. I was never the same.

**AAA:** Tell me about your birth family?

**Pastor:** My family are nomadic pastoralists. While they own cattle, sheep, and goats, they are best known for their camel herding prowess. My entire clan is also known for their pride; they believe they are the best people ever created by God! I belong to a warrior clan that is feared by many. While my clan could choose to kill me anytime, no one from another clan would have the guts to lay a finger on me because my

Muslim clan will strike back with a vengeance. While my Ogaden clan protects me to this day, my sub-clan, Mohamed Subeyr, protects me the most.

**AAA:** Why would your Muslim clan protect a Christian convert whose punishment should be death according to the teachings of Islam?<sup>21</sup>

**Pastor:** 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>22</sup> My Ogaden clan is the most numerous clan of all Somali clans. We reside in Somalia, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and North-East Kenya.

**AAA:** Should Somalis continue being an integral part of their clan after the Lord finds them?

**Pastor:** Absolutely. This Somali proverb best illustrates my point, “both your shoes and your clan protect you.”<sup>23</sup> The Somali clan system is a mixed bag, but I like to focus on the positives. The clan system offers protection, social security, and a safety net for its members.

**AAA:** Were any of the Somalis whom the Lord found in your ministry martyred for their faith?

**Pastor:** I am aware of 8 who were martyred in North-East Kenya.

**AAA:** I heard from multiple sources that you are the first known Somali to follow Jesus in Kenya. Tell me about this.

**Pastor:** That is correct. There were no known Somali Christians in the Somali inhabited counties of North-East Kenya and the entire country of Kenya before the Lord found me. For decades, I was the only visible Somali Christian in Kenya.

**AAA:** What do expatriate missionaries ministering to the Somalis do well and what could they do better to be a better witness to the Somalis?

**Pastor:** Bringing the Gospel to my Somali people is a huge blessing. I am thankful for the sacrifices of expatriate missionaries to make Christ known to my people; they

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<sup>21</sup> “Ali burnt some people and this news reached Ibn ‘Abbas, who said, “Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, ‘Don’t punish (anybody) with Allah’s Punishment.’ No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, ‘If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.”

*Sahih al-Bukhari*, translated by M. Muhsin Khan 4:52:260, (Kazi Pubns Inc1995).

<http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/052-sbt.php#004.052.260> (accessed 01 April 2019).

See also: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 9:89:27. <http://cmje.usc.edu/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/089-sbt.php#009.089.271> (accessed 09 May 2018). *Arab Law Quarterly*, vol. 13. No. 3, Brill, 1998.

<https://www.istor.org/stable/i276475> (accessed 04 February 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Nomadic background Somali Christians martyred for their walk with the Lord in Somalia since 1991 were killed in regions where their clan is not the dominant one.

<sup>23</sup> *Tolkaaga iyo kobtaada dhexdaa looga jiraa*

do this well. Expatriate missionaries often struggle to understand the Somalis. We are proud people and sometimes arrogant even when our stomachs are empty. Missionaries assume Somalis to be docile and humble because we are poor with limited formal education. They are shocked when they learn we are hawkish, proud, and sometimes egotistical. Many missionaries then get discouraged; they should not be disheartened because their sacrifices are bearing fruits.

**AAA:** How do the Somali Christians and missionaries see your ministry?

**Pastor:** Many of them think my strategy is too reckless because I share my faith very openly. I do not blame them! I preach with no fear. Many Somali Christians and missionaries believe that keeping a low profile in sharing the Gospel is the most effective way in this hostile environment. I must admit they have a point. Despite our different strategies, we serve the same Lord, and we pray for one another. I believe that what is inspired is the Gospel, not the strategy we employ to communicate it.

**AAA:** What has helped you the most to become mature and prominent minister of the Gospel?

**Pastor:** I joined a local church shortly after I was saved; this community of faith and the larger spiritual family in the denomination helped my faith to deepen. Many Somali Christians do not understand the value of a denominational family; mission workers with parachurch organizations often encourage new believers to attend Bible study groups and fellowships that often meet in the living rooms of these missionaries.<sup>24</sup>

**AAA:** Why do you think missionaries with parachurch organizations do not often encourage new Somali believers to attend a local church in addition to the Bible studies and fellowships?

**Pastor:** Missionaries with parachurch organizations are often territorial; they do not want to lose their hard-earned fruits to a local church with its own denominational distinctive. So, these missionaries who do not share a theological persuasion or doctrinal unity isolate the new believers. This makes the new believers weak and confused. The mature Somali Christians I know belong to established local churches with denominational links. The weakest ones I know only attend intermittent Bible study and fellowship meetings held in the living rooms of missionaries with parachurch organizations.

**AAA:** Could you name one or two missionaries who had the most positive impact on your life and ministry?

**Pastor:** Yes. They are Larry and Debbie Kitchel of Christian Mission Aid.

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<sup>24</sup> Ahmed Ali Haile and David W. Shenk, *Teatime in Mogadishu: My Journey as a Peace Ambassador in the World of Islam*. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2011), 111.

**AAA:** How are the Kitchels different from most of parachurch organization missionaries?

**Pastor:** The Kitchels always knew their ministry was to strengthen the church, not to replace it or compete with it. The many African church leaders the Kitchels trained and equipped will agree with me.

**AAA:** Tell me one unforgettable favour the Kitchels did for you?

**Pastor:** The late Larry Kitchel once visited me when I worked in Nairobi; he asked me how he could best help my ministry. I requested from him about 200 Bibles to smuggle them for believers in Somalia; he gave me 220 Bibles next time we met. I donated 20 of the Bibles to Somali believers in North-East Kenya. I put the remaining 200 Bibles on the back of a he-camel and started walking 17 days from North-East Kenya all the way to the southern Somali port town of Kismayo. I donated some of the Bibles to believers in Kismayo and walked with my camel to Jamaame, Jilib, Wanlawein, Baidawa, all in southern Somalia, and finally Mogadishu. I blessed all the Somali believers I met with Bibles, and I prayed with them. I then walked back from Mogadishu to North-East Kenya. It was an epic journey; I cannot do that anymore. I am an old man.

**AAA:** What most excites you about the people of God?

**Pastor:** I sometimes see tourists, visitors, and other foreigners with no ministry assignment but they still share their faith with wisdom and courage. These Great Commission-minded believers excite me the most. I love them.

**AAA:** How could the community of faith pray for you?

**Pastor:** I need plenty of prayers for God's protection from the evil one. When Satan fails to undermine our relationship with the Lord, he targets our loved ones.

## Epilogue

The Somali church is the product of a partnership between various innovative expatriate mission organizations, churches, and valiant Somali believers; it is this divine effort that gave birth to what is often described as the second most persecuted church in the world after North Korea. Expatriate mission workers do not only bring the Good News to the Somalis but also education, healthcare, impeccable work ethics and a host of other benefits. This is the holistic ministry that appeals to many Somali Muslims, some of whom become disciples of Christ; many of the Somali Muslims who do not follow Jesus pick up some Christian values and develop a friendly attitude towards the Christian minorities.

While parachurch organizations like the SIM are overrepresented in the Somali ministry, church-based mission organizations like the MM most benefit the Somali ministry eventually because they can deliver their evangelistic message with consistent and coherent doctrines shared by all the mission workers. New Somali



believers also learn the importance of belonging to a local church and to a larger denominational family. While parachurch organizations like the SIM lack this distinction of doctrinal unity, they still have a lot to offer to a people group that is Muslim majority. After all, Warren and Dorothy Modricker pioneered the modern mission work among Somalis in 1933. The Modrickers later joined the SIM and expanded the Somali ministry to the entire Somali peninsula. The Modrickers are considered as the First Family of the Somali Church. One would be hard-pressed to find a Somali Christian whose faith journey is not directly or indirectly traceable to the Modrickers.

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### About the author

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**Modrickers Ma Maqasheen? Have You Heard of the Modrickers?**

Aweis A. Ali

Magac laga miskiin maahan  
Soomaalidu ku maahmaah  
Magaca Warren ah  
Micnihiisa yaa ah  
Mid waardiye ciidana  
Gama' marna an yeelin  
Siduu mayracaayo

No one is too poor for a good name  
Is a Somali proverb  
The name Warren  
Has a good meaning  
It means guard, defender, protector  
Like he is grazing his livestock  
One who does not slumber

Marwo Dorothy iyaduna  
Micnaheeda yaa ah  
Mowle hadiyaddisii  
Ma daaley ahaydoo  
Maskax Eebbe siiyo  
Muran laga ilaalshoo  
Uu Masiixo dhowrsaday

The name Dorothy  
Has a great meaning, too  
It means God's gift  
Dorothy was tireless  
Divinely intelligent  
Never argumentative  
The Lord Jesus protected her

Idaacaddii Masiixee  
Muxubo ay u fuliyeen  
Anigoo Muslim ahoo  
Iska jooga Muqdisho  
Kaga bayray mugdigoo  
Masiixaanba raacay  
Mahadbaan u haayaa

The radio ministry  
Which they established  
When I was a Muslim  
Living in Mogadishu  
It vanquished the darkness  
I followed Jesus  
I am grateful to them

Soomaalidoo murgootoo  
Meelo badan ku firisan  
Murugmaarug daaloo  
Aan Masiixa garanayn  
Waxaa yimid Modrickers  
Uu Mowle soo diray  
Muxubana ku miisay

The Somalis were sad  
They were scattered  
And very confused  
They did not know the Lord  
Then came the Modrickers  
God sent them to us  
He filled them with love

Meel kastoo Soomaalidu  
Minan ay ku leedahay  
Cadan iyo Muqdisho  
Nairobidi mudnayd iyo  
Addis magaci weynayd  
Jabuutidi mugga yarayd  
Way markhaati furayeen

Wherever the Somalis  
Lived or simply stayed  
From Aden to Mogadishu  
The great Nairobi  
The well-known Addis Ababa  
Even the tiny Djibouti  
The Modrickers testified

Waxa qoys Maraykana  
Soomaalida Muslimka ah

An American family  
Serving Somali Muslims

*In ay magaca Ciise  
Maalin iyo habeenba  
Markastaba ku wacdiyaan  
Ma ahayn wax uun fudud  
Masiixaase soo diray*

*Every day and every night  
They witnessed to them  
In the name of Jesus  
That was not easy  
But they were Messiah-sent*

*Eebbe Warren muuq tusi  
Micnihiisu uu yahay  
Markaad aaddo Soomaaliya  
Meel kale ma ahanoo  
Minankaagi weeyaan  
Magaalaa ku taalla  
Magaceedu Warren yahay*

*Warren saw a divine vision  
The meaning of which was  
When you reach Somalia  
It is not an alien land  
It is like your own home  
There is a village there  
In which its name is Warren*

*Warren maabki soo qabay  
Meelo badan ka baadhbaadh  
Mise tuulo magaceed  
Uu Warren yahaybaa  
Mowle sii diyaariyay  
Markii ay yimaadeen  
Martiqaadba loo fidi*

*Warren grabbed the map  
He searched the village name  
The village with that name  
He found the Warren village  
God predestined it that way  
Modrickers visited the village  
They were hosted well*

*Martisoorki dabadeed  
Injiilkii Masiixyeey  
Muxubbo ugu sheegeen  
Intii maqashay yaabtay  
Misbaaxdii Ilaahbaa  
Musaafurku u keeneen  
Aadna ugu micneeyeen*

*After the warm reception  
They shared with love  
The Gospel of Jesus  
The hearers were amazed  
The Modrickers brought  
The Light of the Lord  
They explained everything*

*Labaatan sano markii ay  
Meelo ka baxsan Soomaaliya  
Ay injiilka Masiixa  
Soomaalida u meersheen  
Muqdishay yimaadeen  
Miishan ay ka fuliyeen  
Masiixayna tuugeen*

*After two decades  
Outside Somalia  
The Gospel of Jesus Christ  
They shared it with the Somalis  
They arrived Mogadishu  
They set up the Mission  
They prayed to the Messiah*

*Modrickers markii ay  
Muddo waddanka joogeen  
Afkanaga macaanbay  
Misna ay bartenoo  
Oo Kitaabki Mowleey  
Murtidiisii turjumeen  
Eebbaa ku mahadsan  
Miro aad u badan buu  
Mowle siiyay qosykaan*

*After the Modrickers  
Stayed in Somalia for a while  
They learnt very well  
Our beautiful language  
Then they translated  
The Holy Bible  
Thanks to God  
God gave the Modrickers  
Plenty of fruits*

*Muslimiinta qaar baa  
Marar badan maagoo  
Eabbahood miciinsaday  
Isaguna megen geli  
Markastoo la maagay*

*There were some Muslims  
Who persecuted them  
They prayed to God  
He protected them  
Against all aggressions*

*Helen Miller buuggii  
Meeshii Ugu Adkayd  
Ay ugu magac dartay  
Ayay Modrickers  
Sheekadoodi meerisay  
Mana ay dhammaynine  
Yaa mid kale innoo qori?*

*Helen Miller's book  
In which its title is  
The Hardest Place  
She wrote about their life  
And their ministry, too  
It does not cover everything  
Who will write us the sequel?*

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### About the Modrickers



The Modrickers. Photo credit: The Hardest Place, Helen Miller

Aweis composed this Somali poem and translated it into English in memory of the greatest missionary couple to have ever served among Somalis, Warren and Dorothy Modricker. The Modrickers were pioneer missionaries to the Somalis; they arrived in British Somaliland in 1933 and temporarily relocated to Yemen when the British colonial authorities denied their entry to Somaliland. To better minister to the Somalis, the Modrickers lived in Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya before eventually retiring to the US, where they continued ministering to the Somalis. The Modrickers were indeed the First Family of the Somali Church. Almost every Somali Christian in the Somali peninsula is directly or indirectly the fruit of the Modrickers. Translating poetry without compromising its

quality is impossible, but Aweis tried his best in this translation. The Lord found Aweis through the ministry of *Codka Nolasha Cusub* (Voice of New Life), the very radio ministry the Modrickers started in 1972. Rev. Aweis is eternally grateful to this godly couple. The author can be reached at [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com).

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The Editorial Board of the SBS Journal consists of 5 members who include missionaries and other workers in the Somali ministry. The *SBS Journal* Editor in Chief is Aweis A. Ali, a long-time minister of the Gospel and an author. Aweis earned a Bachelor of Theology degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa, a Master of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO. Aweis is currently a PhD candidate at Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. The title of Rev. Aweis' thesis is "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." The Editorial Board can be reached at [info@SomaliBibleSociety.org](mailto:info@SomaliBibleSociety.org) or [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com)

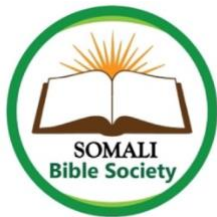
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