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What is the Diaspora language?

Adam Cheney

Introduction

For decades, the prevailing thought in missions has been for missionaries to learn and utilize the mother tongue of the people group they are sent to. This is evidenced by the amount of time and money that many mission agencies allocate toward language learning for their newest members. Over the last decade, there has been a shift in focus from the paradigm of sending missionaries overseas to minister in another culture towards equipping local churches and workers to receive people who have migrated for one reason or another. When immigrants, such as Somalis, leave their homeland and travel overseas, should there still be a strong focus on learning the Somali language?

The thesis of this article is that there should be more focus on communicating in a common diaspora language rather than the receiving culture learning the Somali language. This article will utilize English as a diaspora language since I am based in North America, but other global trade languages might be implemented instead, depending on the location around the world. As workers who engage with the Somali diaspora, it is essential to remember the goal of language is to communicate the truth of Christ. His truth is expressed in a variety of ways.

The Importance of Language

Living overseas along the coast of Kenya for five years, I worked hard at learning both the trade language of Kiswahili and the local mother tongue of Chidigo. It was necessary to learn both languages to work effectively. The team I was on had a strong focus on learning both languages so that there might be a deepening understanding of the worldview of the local people. Anthropologist Charles Kraft writes, “The best way to learn the worldview of a culture is through learning the language. This is the most direct route into the heart of a culture.”[1] While this essay argues for the use of a common language such as English, this is not an affront to the traditional approach to language learning when entering a new culture. If “Language is a symbol,”[2] as Paul Hiebert writes, then we must understand what the language is symbolizing in each unique location.

After years of daily interactions in Kenya, it was noted that the languages spoken in the village were very fluid. The older generation only spoke the mother tongue of Chidigo. Very few people could read and write it. The middle generation often had jobs that took them out of the local village. Thus, they were more equipped to speak and write Kiswahili. They understood Chidigo but used it less frequently. The use of Kiswahili and English often demonstrated their status and highlighted their level of education. The youngest generation had a hard time understanding Chidigo but were

[1] Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology For Christian Witness* (New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 250.
[2] Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 4. printing (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 122.

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fluent in English and Kiswahili. There was a generational influence on which language was effective in communication. The youngest generation had only a basic understanding of Chidigo and certainly did not understand the theological terms.

It took years to learn the nuances of who used which language and which language was most effective in our church planting effort. Kraft writes, “When we come to understand the people in their culture, then we are in a better position to communicate the Gospel in such a way that they will understand it.”[3] One lesson learned in Kenya was the need for adaptability, and a simple conversation might include the use of multiple languages. The context determines the language.

What is the Diaspora Language?

The context I am currently in is in the State of Minnesota, which includes many Somali people. My current role is working with refugees who make up a part of the African diaspora. Outside of the Horn of Africa, Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population. Throughout the world, many large cities have a significant Somali population, but the State of Minnesota has significant Somali populations both in the metro area as well as the smaller suburban towns.

The shift of Somali people throughout the world is cause for a renewed look into what is effective evangelism among the Somali Diaspora. "The current trends and realities of migration and diaspora require missiologists and mission practitioners to re-evaluate cherished theories and practices of mission that remain territory-specific and geographically focused."[4] What is effective in Nairobi or London might not be effective in Minnesota.

In Minnesota, the Somali diaspora is unique in that they have remained a tight-knit and isolated group. In fact, "Some Somali leaders pride themselves on Somali separateness."[5] In my doctoral dissertation, I am finding that this isolation may be caused both by the desire of Somalis to separate themselves and the lack of true welcoming into the Minnesota communities. With such an influx in population, there has been increased "Fear, stereotypes, and discrimination, largely in connection to race and religion."[6]

In Minnesota, Somali people are now surrounded by Christian communities and have access to hearing the gospel. Yet, due to a lack of interaction between the Somali and Christian communities there is minimal movement of new believers

[3] Kraft, *Anthropology For Christian Witness*, 10.

[4] Sadiri Joy Tira and Darrell Jackson, “Responding to the Phenomenon of Migration: Early Proponents of Diaspora Missiology and the Lausanne Movement,” in *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology*, ed. Sadiri Joy Tira, Tetsunao Yamamori, and Christopher J. H. Wright, Revised and updated (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2020), 98.

[5] Randy Mitchell, “Case Study 5: Diaspora Missions in Minnesota: Local Actions with Global Implications,” in *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice*, ed. Enoch Wan, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies - Western Seminary, 2011), 300.

[6] Martha Bigelow, “Somali Adolescents’ Negotiation of Religious and Racial Bias in and out of School,” *Theory Into Practice* 47, no. 1 (2008): 27.

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towards following Christ. Often, the Somali community is overlooked or neglected, deemed too hard to evangelize. It would be wise for Christians in Minnesota to look at the example of Stanley Jones, who spread the gospel among people in India. He realized that Christ must be presented to the Indians in a setting in which they would understand. "It must be the Christ of the Indian Road."[7] Likewise, Christ must be presented to the Somali diaspora as Christ of the diaspora Road. Christ must be seen as a savior to those who have left their home, fled, and become part of the diaspora community. Christ must be someone they can identify with.

English as a Diaspora Language in Minnesota

The experience of being a refugee or immigrant is difficult. It is a new identity that is labeled onto a person. With the new identity, there is a loss of who they were. "As refugees, Somali men lost their 'position' in the workplace, in society, and within the family.... Men were reduced to 'bare life' to being only human and thus no longer 'men.'"[8] Living in the midst of a Christian community, it has become harder for Muslim men to lead their families in the religion they have grown up with.[9] It takes five years before a refugee can become a citizen in America, and often this is the point where the identity of being a refugee is finally dropped.

Without an understanding of the identity loss, I began to learn the Somali language after first moving to Minnesota. This was done intentionally and strategically to find ways to share the gospel in the community. It became immediately apparent that any time I practiced speaking Somali, it was met with a high degree of suspicion. Suspicion has been noted in other case studies as well.[10] Interestingly, discussions about Christianity and Jesus were welcome when English was used. There was significant resistance, even to simple Somali phrases. With a deeper understanding of identity issues faced by the diaspora community, it makes sense that a person coming from the majority culture [America] will be seen as a threat by those in the minority culture [Somali]. The Somali language is essential to the identity of the Somali people. Thus, a middle-aged white Christian male who starts trying to learn Somali is akin to someone trying to take a part of what is left of Somali identity.

In contrast to attempting to learn the language, using Somali greetings has been wonderfully received. Greeting someone in their own language is a way of seeing them and affirming who they are. Every time I greet someone in Somali, it is welcome. Conversation can then proceed in a different language at that point. The greeting affirms their identity and is not seen as a threat. Many Somalis are proficient in Kiswahili I have found this a wonderful language to use, as the use of Kiswahili

[7] E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (United States: Abingdon Press, 1925), 22.

[8] Natasha Carver, *Marriage, Gender and Refugee Migration: Spousal Relationships among Somali Muslims in the United Kingdom*, 1st ed., Politics of Marriage and Gender: Global Issues in Local Contexts (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021), 216, https://doi.org/10.36019/9781978805576.

[9] Cawo Mohamed Abdi, “Threatened Identities and Gendered Opportunities: Somali Migration to America,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, no. 2 (2014): 468, https://doi.org/10.1086/673380.

[10] Mitchell, “Case Study 5: Diaspora Missions in Minnesota: Local Actions with Global Implications,” 302.

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does not pose a threat to the Somali identity. Enoch Wan and Anthony Casey highlight the difference as well: "The point is that in ethnically contested spaces, there are a host of factors at work that bar people from interacting with each other….Minority people[s] usually do not feel comfortable in the same territory as the majority culture, especially if there is a history of discrimination."[11] A better understanding of power dynamics and identity issues has helped develop much better conversations in the community.

Minnesota has many strong Christian communities, and the Somali diaspora is now living in their midst. The American Church is a significant resource that can be mobilized to reach those who have resettled among us. Yet, many Christians are sitting on the sidelines. They must be encouraged, trained, and mobilized. Learning the Somali language would be a significant obstacle for many American Christians. Few American Christians would be willing to overcome such a hurdle. The Somali diaspora is readily learning English, and many already have sufficient skills in it. Teaching English is a great way of breaking down the barriers, getting to know Somali, and building relationships with them. As one peacemaker said, "In order to be faithful disciples of Jesus, the church must be a visible community."[12]

The American Christian church must be taught how to engage cross-culturally. As I do not know the Somali language, I have demonstrated to other Christians how to manage the struggle of language barriers. If fellow Christians whom I mentor were to see me fluent in the Somali language, they would feel interacting with Somalis was beyond their own capabilities and relieve themselves of the obligation to make Christ known. We want to encourage the Christian church to be a significant witness to the Somali community. To accomplish this, they must seek to build relationships with them and understand their culture, which can most easily be done in North America in the English language.[13]

There is a large cultural divide between the Somali diaspora community and the Christian community here in Minnesota. "Such cultural divide that exists is the perfect environment for breeding mistrust, fear and prejudice."[14] It is essential for Christians to feel empowered and capable of interacting with Somalis. This requires getting to know their Somali neighbor across the street. It requires getting to know their Somali coworker better. It requires meeting Somali mothers at the park, playing with their children, and striking up a conversation. Furthermore, it requires building friendships and taking an interest in the lives of the Somalis in our communities.[15]

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[11] Enoch Wan and Anthony F. Casey, *Church Planting Among Immigrants in US Urban Centers - The "Where", "Why", and "How" of Diaspora Missiology in Action*, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies - Western Seminary, 2016), 52.

[12] Peter M. Sensenig and David W. Shenk, *Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 94.

[13] Mitchell, "Case Study 5: Diaspora Missions in Minnesota: Local Actions with Global Implications," 290.

[14] Mitchell, 302.

[15] Donald K. Smith, *Make Haste Slowly: Growing Effective Intercultural Communication*, 2nd ed. (USA: Snowfall Press, 2011), 54.

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Finally, it requires connecting to Somalis in the language that is available to both parties, in this case, English.

Conclusion

The main thrust of this article has been on the use of a common language, such as English, rather than allowing obstacles, such as the Somali language, to be a barrier. Missiology requires adaptation to the environment around the worker. I have found the need to adapt to different language expectations in different locations. It is necessary to determine what works and what is effective. In this Minnesota community, trying to learn the Somali language was determined not only to be ineffective but offensive to the local men. Learning the language is also a significant barrier in mobilizing the significant workforce of Christians in the local communities. May God grant the evangelists wisdom and discernment as they seek to share the good news of Christ of the Diaspora Road to those who find themselves far from home.

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About the Author

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Grace Alone: The Anchor of Salvation and Evangelism

Hadliye Baashe Amani

Introduction

Throughout human history, people have yearned for spiritual meaning and reconciliation with the divine. Christianity offers a profound answer through the doctrine of (*Sola Gratia)*— "Grace Alone"—a transformative understanding that salvation is an unconditional gift from God, bestowed entirely through divine mercy rather than human effort or merit.[16]

In a world obsessed with personal achievement, self-validation, and earning approval, *grace alone* emerges as a radical and liberating theological principle. It fundamentally challenges the universal human tendency to believe that divine favor can be earned through righteousness or good works. Instead, this doctrine proclaims that salvation is a pure expression of God's unmerited love, freely given to humanity despite its inherent brokenness and spiritual limitations.[17]

For Somali evangelists working with the Somali Bible Society, "*grace alone*" is more than an abstract theological concept. It represents a revolutionary message of hope that transcends cultural barriers and personal struggles. In a context marked by complex social dynamics, historical challenges, and diverse spiritual landscapes, the message of grace offers a universal invitation to restoration and spiritual renewal.

The doctrine of grace alone does not diminish human responsibility but elevates divine compassion. While humans cannot save themselves, God's love is comprehensive and inclusive, reaching beyond human boundaries of worthiness or performance. This understanding transforms evangelism from a process of moral persuasion into an invitation to experience unconditional love and spiritual transformation.[18]

By emphasizing grace, evangelists communicate a message of profound hope: divine acceptance is not a reward to be earned but a gift to be received. This perspective invites individuals to move beyond religious legalism, cultural limitations, and personal insecurities to embrace a relationship with the divine characterized by mercy, compassion, and genuine spiritual connection.[19]

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[16] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 133.

[17] D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 89.

[18] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, The Doctrine of God, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 319.

[19] N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 141.

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In the context of Somali evangelism work, *grace alone* becomes a powerful bridge—connecting theological depth with practical spiritual outreach and offering a message of hope that speaks directly to the human heart's deepest longings for acceptance, meaning, and redemption.

The Grace That Saves: A Biblical Foundation

Scripture is fundamentally a story of divine grace—a transformative, unmerited favor that weaves through humanity's relationship with God from the earliest moments of creation to the ultimate act of redemption through Jesus Christ. Far from being a peripheral theological concept, grace is the central mechanism of God's reconciliation with humanity.[20]

The Apostle Paul articulates this profound truth with remarkable precision in his letter to the Ephesians: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."[21] This passage reveals grace as fundamentally distinct from human achievement. It is not a reward earned through moral performance but a sovereign gift bestowed by God, independent of human merit.[22]

This principle of grace has deep roots in the biblical narrative. Even in the Old Testament, God's gracious nature is evident through His covenant with Abraham. Genesis 15:6 portrays Abraham as being "credited… as righteousness" not because of his perfect obedience but because of his faith—a radical departure from the transactional religious systems of his time[23]. Abraham's story demonstrates that a relationship with God has always been about trust and divine initiative, not human performance.

The New Testament dramatically expands this understanding, presenting Jesus Christ as the ultimate expression of grace. The Apostle Paul writes, "The grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people"[24]—a revolutionary statement that demolishes previous religious exclusivities. This grace is universal in its offer, transcending ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries.[25]

Grace, in the biblical context, is not merely a theological abstraction but a dynamic, transformative power. It does more than forgive; it fundamentally reconstructs human potential. Where human effort fails, divine grace intervenes. Grace simultaneously declares human inadequacy and affirms God's overwhelming love.

This understanding of grace forms the theological bedrock of Christian evangelism. It provides a message of hope that is simultaneously humbling and liberating—

[20] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 120.
[21] Ephesians 2:8–9, NIV.
[22] J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 139.
[23] Genesis 15:6.
[24] Titus 2:11.
[25] Carson, D. A. *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians*. Baker Academic, 2010, 35.

acknowledging human brokenness while offering complete spiritual restoration. The gospel becomes not a message of human achievement but of divine invitation and radical restoration.

The implications are profound: Grace means that no one is beyond redemption, no past is too broken, and no individual is disqualified from God's love. It transforms evangelism from a message of condemnation to an announcement of unconditional acceptance and transformation.

By emphasizing grace, the biblical narrative presents a God who is not primarily concerned with human performance, but with relationship, restoration, and redemption. It is a narrative that invites humanity not to prove their worth, but to receive an undeserved gift.

Grace Alone: A Theological Revolution

The doctrine of Sola Gratia emerged as a profound theological watershed, challenging centuries of religious thinking and fundamentally redefining the relationship between humanity and divine salvation. At its core, this principle represents more than a theological abstraction—it was a radical reimagining of spiritual transformation that struck at the heart of religious power structures and human understanding of redemption.[26]

The historical context of the Reformation provides crucial insight into this theological revolution. During an era when the Roman Catholic Church had developed a complex system of indulgences—essentially a transactional approach to salvation where spiritual merit could be purchased or earned—Martin Luther emerged as a pivotal reformer. His confrontation was not merely an academic dispute but a fundamental challenge to a spiritual economy that had reduced divine grace to a marketable commodity.[27]

Luther's revolutionary insight was seemingly simple yet profoundly transformative: salvation is entirely a work of God's grace, utterly independent of human effort or merit. His now-famous statement, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone," encapsulates a nuanced theological understanding. This principle acknowledges that while salvation is entirely unmerited, genuine faith inevitably produces spiritual fruit—a transformation that originates not in human willpower but in divine grace.[28]

Theologically, *grace alone* represents a decisive rejection of Pelagianism, a theological perspective that had argued for human spiritual self-sufficiency. Against this view, the Reformation affirmed human spiritual bankruptcy and total dependence

[26] Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution—A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (HarperOne, 2012), 85.

[27] Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 122.

[28] Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Freedom of a Christian, 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

on divine intervention. The Westminster Confession of Faith articulates this perspective with stark clarity: “Man, by his fall, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good… therefore, a sinner is not able to convert himself”.[29]

This theological position is not a diminishment of human worth, but a profound recognition of human limitation. It transforms the narrative of salvation from a story of human achievement to a story of divine rescue. Grace becomes not just a theological concept, but a living, transformative power that reaches into the depths of human brokenness.[30]

The implications of Sola Gratia extend far beyond individual soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). It fundamentally restructures how believers understand their relationship with God. No longer are they performers seeking to earn divine favor, but recipients of an unmerited, transformative love. This perspective introduces a radical humility—acknowledging that spiritual life is a gift, not an achievement.

Moreover, this understanding of grace challenges both religious legalism and spiritual complacency. It refuses the transactional view of spirituality that suggests humans can manipulate divine favor while simultaneously rejecting any notion that human effort is irrelevant. Instead, it presents a dynamic relationship where divine grace is the source and motivation of spiritual transformation.[31]

Luther and the reformers were not merely challenging an institutional practice but reframing the entire metaphysical understanding of the human-divine relationship. Sola Gratia declares that salvation is a monergistic work—a term indicating that God alone is the active agent in spiritual regeneration. Human faith is not a meritorious work but a responsive instrument through which divine grace operates.

This theological revolution continues to resonate. In a world often characterized by performance metrics and transactional relationships, the doctrine of grace alone offers a counter-narrative of unconditional love and transformative power. It suggests that spiritual life is not about achieving, but about receiving; not about proving worth, but about being declared worthy through an external, divine declaration.

The doctrine of Sola Gratia remains a powerful reminder: spiritual transformation is fundamentally a work of God, a gift of grace that transcends human limitation and offers hope beyond human performance. [32]

Grace in Action: Lessons for Evangelism

The doctrine of Sola Gratia transcends theological abstraction when encountered in specific cultural contexts, nowhere more powerfully illustrated than in the challenging

[29] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1646, reprinted by Princeton Theological Seminary, 9, 2016.

[30] Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. 1936/1956. Translated by G. T. Thomson. T&T Clark, 1975.

[31] McGrath, Alister E. *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: 412.*

[32] J. I. Packer, Knowing God, 139.

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landscape of Somali evangelism. Here, the message of unmerited grace becomes not just a theological concept but a transformative proclamation that challenges deeply ingrained spiritual paradigms.

In Somalia, a culture profoundly shaped by Islamic theological frameworks, the concept of divine relationship is fundamentally transactional. Islamic theology emphasizes a meticulous balance of deeds, where salvation is perceived as a careful accounting of human actions, with divine favor earned through strict adherence to religious obligations.[33] Against this backdrop, the Christian message of grace emerges as a radical alternative—a completely different understanding of the human-divine relationship.

The Christian proclamation of Sola Gratia offers a liberating counternarrative. Where Islamic theology suggests a spiritual economy of merit, Christianity presents a revolutionary concept of unearned favor. This is not a subtle theological distinction but a fundamental reimagining of humanity's relationship with the divine. Salvation is reframed from an achievement to be pursued to a gift to be received.[34]

The Somali Bible Society's initiative, *"Equipping and Mobilizing Somali Evangelists,"* recognizes this theological depth. Their approach is deeply strategic, understanding that effective evangelism is not about argument but about presenting a transformative narrative. By grounding their ministry in the principle of grace, these evangelists are equipped to offer more than a religious alternative—they provide a message of profound spiritual liberation.

This approach requires remarkable cultural sensitivity and theological depth. Somali evangelists must navigate a complex spiritual landscape where the message of grace can be easily misunderstood or dismissed. They are called to communicate a counterintuitive truth: that divine acceptance is not earned through human effort but granted through an act of divine love.[35]

The evangelistic strategy emerging from this understanding is nuanced. It is not about presenting Christianity as superior but about revealing a fundamentally different understanding of spiritual relationship. Grace bridges cultural and religious experiences and a transformative spiritual encounter.[36]

Practically, this means Somali evangelists are trained to share personal narratives of transformation. They become witnesses to grace—living demonstrations of a love that reaches beyond cultural and religious boundaries. Their evangelism is

[33] John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103.
[34] Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (London: Mowbray, 1986), 112.
[35] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 175.
[36] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 97.

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characterized not by condemnation but by invitation, not by judgment but by demonstration of a love that transcends human limitation.[37]
This approach recognizes a profound missiological principle: effective evangelism is not about winning arguments but about revealing a different kind of relationship with the divine. Grace becomes the lens through which the gospel is presented—not as a set of religious propositions but as a living, transformative reality.[38]

The theological implications are profound. In a context where spiritual worth is often measured by external compliance, the message of grace introduces a radical alternative. It suggests that human value is not determined by performance but by divine declaration. This is not just a religious message but a fundamentally liberating perspective that can transform individual and communal self-understanding.[39]

For Somali evangelists, Sola Gratia is more than a doctrine—it is a missional strategy, a theological framework, and a personal experience. It transforms evangelism from a process of religious persuasion to an invitation to a fundamentally different way of understanding spiritual life.

The power of this approach lies in its ability to address deep human longings—the desire for acceptance, the hope of transformation, the possibility of a love that is not contingent on human performance. In the challenging context of Somali evangelism, grace becomes not just a theological concept but a living, transformative reality.

Challenges and Misconceptions About Grace
The doctrine of grace, profound in its simplicity, is paradoxically complex in its practical application. Its revolutionary nature invites both misunderstanding and resistance, revealing the deeply ingrained human tendencies to either manipulate divine love or reduce it to a transactional arrangement.

The Apostle Paul anticipates these misunderstandings with remarkable foresight. In his letter to the Romans, he confronts a potential misinterpretation head-on: “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!”.[40] This rhetorical challenge exposes a fundamental misunderstanding of grace known as antinomianism—the erroneous belief that divine grace provides a permissive license for moral indifference.[41]

Antinomianism represents a profound theological distortion. It transforms grace from a transformative power into a passive endorsement of human brokenness. This misconception fundamentally misunderstands the nature of divine grace, which is not merely a legal declaration but a regenerative force. True grace does not simply

[37] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message, 132.*
[38] Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 54.
[39] Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: 143.*
[40] Romans 6:1-2, (NIV)
[41] R.C. Sproul, *The Truth of the Cross* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2013), 88.

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overlook sin; it fundamentally reconstructs human spiritual capacity, producing a profound internal transformation that naturally moves toward holiness.[42]
The theological complexity lies in understanding grace as both a declarative and transformative reality. Grace is simultaneously a divine pronouncement of acceptance and a spiritual power that reshapes human nature. It is not a static concept but a dynamic spiritual force that reconciles, redeems, and progressively sanctifies the believer.[43]

Conversely, another significant misunderstanding emerges from legalism—the opposing extreme where human effort is seen as a necessary supplement to divine grace. This perspective attempts to contribute to salvation through human performance, effectively diminishing the completeness of Christ's redemptive work. In contexts like Somali evangelism, where religious systems often emphasize strict adherence to external practices, this challenge becomes particularly nuanced.[44]

Addressing these misconceptions requires a sophisticated theological approach. Evangelists must communicate grace as a comprehensive spiritual reality that is simultaneously unconditional and transformative. It is neither a permissive endorsement of sin nor a rigid system of spiritual achievement but a relational dynamic that invites continuous spiritual formation.

In the Somali context, this communication becomes even more critical. Transitioning from a religious framework that emphasizes external compliance to understanding grace as an internal transformation requires patience, cultural sensitivity, and profound spiritual wisdom. Evangelists must demonstrate grace not as an abstract theological concept but as a lived reality that brings genuine freedom and spiritual empowerment.

The practical manifestation of grace challenges both cultural and religious presumptions. It suggests that spiritual transformation is not about meeting external standards but receiving a divine invitation that fundamentally reconstructs human potential. This message offers liberation from two equally destructive spiritual narratives: the exhausting cycle of earning divine favor and the hopeless acceptance of perpetual spiritual stagnation.[45]

Moreover, understanding grace requires acknowledging human limitations without surrendering to spiritual despair. It presents a nuanced view of human nature—recognizing human brokenness while simultaneously declaring divine capacity for complete restoration. Grace becomes the bridge between human weakness and divine potential.

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[42] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 510.
[43] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: 115.*
[44] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 158.
[45] John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 4th ed.), 220.

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For evangelists, this means developing a holistic approach that demonstrates grace through both proclamation and demonstration. It is not enough to articulate the theological principle; grace must be embodied, lived, and experienced. This requires developing spiritual communities that reflect the transformative power of unmerited divine favor. [46]

The challenges surrounding grace reveal a profound spiritual truth: divine love cannot be domesticated or reduced to human religious frameworks. Grace remains a radical, disruptive force that challenges both religious legalism and moral complacency. It invites humanity into a fundamentally different understanding of spiritual relationships—not based on performance, but on unconditional love.

In essence, grace emerges not as a theological problem to be solved but as a divine mystery to be experienced. It is a continuous invitation to move beyond religious performance into a transformative spiritual journey characterized by freedom, hope, and progressive restoration.

The Academic Lens: Grace in Interfaith Dialogue

The theological concept of Sola Gratia emerges as a profound hermeneutical lens in interfaith dialogue, offering more than a mere doctrinal distinction—it represents a fundamental reimagining of the divine-human relationship that challenges prevailing theological paradigms. Scholars like Kenneth Cragg have recognized this unique Christian theological contribution as a critical point of interfaith engagement, particularly in contexts where religious understanding is deeply rooted in transactional spiritual frameworks.[47]

In the academic exploration of comparative theology, Sola Gratia stands as a distinctive theological marker. Where Islamic theological frameworks conceptualize salvation through a meticulous accounting of human actions, Christianity presents a radically different narrative. This is not merely a doctrinal nuance but a fundamental epistemological shift in understanding spiritual relationships—from a performance-based model to a grace-initiated transformation.[48]

The scholarly significance of this theological distinction cannot be overstated. Islamic soteriology typically presents salvation as a delicate balance—a careful weighing of human deeds where divine acceptance remains fundamentally uncertain.[49] The Qur'anic perspective emphasizes human responsibility and divine judgment, creating a spiritual landscape characterized by persistent existential anxiety. In stark contrast, the Christian doctrine of grace introduces a revolutionary concept: divine acceptance that precedes human performance.[50]

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[46] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: 152.*

[47] Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 78.

[48] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 112.

[49] John Esposito, *Islam: 98.*

[50] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 45.

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This theological approach offers what philosopher-theologians term an "ontological reassignment" of human spiritual status. Grace does not merely forgive; it fundamentally reconstructs human spiritual identity. Where traditional religious frameworks suggest a conditional relationship with the divine, Sola Gratia proposes an unconditional divine initiative that transforms the very nature of spiritual encounters.[51]

For Somali Bible Society evangelists engaged in academic and cultural dialogue, this presents a nuanced missiological strategy. The goal shifts from religious argument to theological invitation—presenting grace not as a competitive theological proposition but as a profound alternative understanding of divine love. This approach demands sophisticated cultural hermeneutics, recognizing that interfaith dialogue is not about winning arguments but about revealing deeper spiritual possibilities.

The academic exploration of grace reveals its potential as a bridge-building theological concept. It challenges both Islamic and legalistic Christian interpretations that reduce spiritual life to transactional frameworks. Grace emerges as a dynamic theological category that transcends religious boundaries, offering a universal narrative of divine love that does not diminish human dignity but elevates it.

Scholarly analysis highlights the profound phenomenological difference between performance-based and grace-based spiritual frameworks. In performance-based systems, human anxiety emerges from the perpetual uncertainty of divine acceptance. Grace introduces a fundamentally different existential experience—one characterized by security, transformation, and unconditional love.

This does not suggest a simplistic supersessionist approach that dismisses alternative theological perspectives. Instead, it invites a sophisticated interfaith dialogue that recognizes the depth of different religious traditions while offering a distinctive Christian theological contribution. The Somali context becomes a microcosm of broader interfaith theological engagement, where grace can be presented as a liberating alternative rather than a competitive narrative.[52]

For evangelical scholars and practitioners, this approach demands what missiologist Lamin Sanneh termed "translational theology"—the ability to communicate profound theological concepts across cultural and religious boundaries. Grace becomes a linguistic and conceptual bridge, inviting dialogue rather than demanding capitulation.

The academic lens thus transforms grace from a purely theological concept to a critical hermeneutical tool. It offers a way of understanding spiritual relationships that go beyond doctrinal debates, pointing toward a more profound dialogue about human dignity, divine love, and spiritual transformation.

[51] Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret, 123.*

[52] Lamin Sanneh, *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 67.

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In the complex landscape of interfaith dialogue, Sola Gratia emerges not as a theological weapon but as an invitation—a profound theological concept that offers a different way of understanding the divine-human relationship, characterized by unconditional love, transformative power, and ultimate hope.

Grace as the Lifeblood of Evangelism

Evangelism, at its most profound level, is not a human strategy but a divine movement—a continuous unfolding of God's redemptive love through human vessels. The doctrine of Sola Gratia transforms evangelism from a programmatic activity to a participatory experience of divine transformation, where human messengers become conduits of an infinitely more powerful narrative of redemption.

The Apostle Paul's personal testimony provides a theological template for understanding evangelism's true nature. His declaration, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect" (1 Corinthians 15:10, NIV), represents more than a personal reflection—it is a missiological manifesto. Paul recognizes that his entire apostolic identity is a product of divine grace, not personal merit or strategic brilliance. [53]

This understanding fundamentally reorients the evangelical mission. Evangelism ceases to be an exercise in persuasion and becomes an invitation—a gentle, powerful announcement of a transformative reality that transcends human limitation. The evangelist is not a salesperson marketing a spiritual product but a witness testifying to a living, dynamic experience of divine love.[54]

In the challenging context of Somali evangelism, this perspective becomes particularly critical. Here, evangelists operate in a complex cultural and religious landscape where traditional religious narratives emphasize human effort and compliance. The message of grace emerges as a revolutionary alternative—not a competing religious proposition, but a fundamentally different understanding of spiritual relationship.

The power of grace-centered evangelism lies in its radical humility. It acknowledges human brokenness while simultaneously declaring divine capacity for complete restoration. Somali evangelists are thus equipped not with argumentative strategies but with a transformative narrative that invites rather than demands and reveals rather than condemns.

This approach requires a profound theological and psychological sophistication. Grace-driven evangelism recognizes that spiritual transformation is not a human achievement but a divine initiative. The evangelist becomes a facilitator of an encounter, not the source of the encounter itself. Their role is to create spaces of spiritual openness, to embody the love they proclaim, and to trust in a grace that works beyond human understanding.

[53] The Gospel Coalition, "Biblical Evangelism: Jesus is Our Savior,
[54] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011).

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The missiological implications are profound. Evangelism, understood through the lens of grace, moves from a results-oriented activity to a relational journey. Success is not measured by conversions or numerical growth but by faithfulness to the divine invitation. Each interaction becomes an opportunity to demonstrate a love that is unconditional, transformative, and deeply respectful of humans.
For Somali evangelists, this means developing a ministry approach characterized by patience, empathy, and profound spiritual wisdom. They are called to be living testimonies of grace—demonstrating through their lives a love that challenges existing religious frameworks without disrespecting them). Their evangelism becomes a delicate dance of cultural sensitivity and spiritual authenticity.

The theological depth of grace-centered evangelism lies in its recognition of divine sovereignty. It suggests that spiritual transformation is ultimately a work of God, not a human strategy. Evangelists are invited to participate in this divine movement but not to control or manipulate it. This perspective introduces a radical humility that distinguishes the Christian mission from mere religious expansion.[55]

Moreover, grace transforms the very motivation of evangelism. It moves from a mandate of religious obligation to a response of gratitude. Evangelists are not driven by guilt or institutional pressure but by a profound experience of divine love that naturally overflows into sharing. Their proclamation becomes less about convincing and more about revealing—less about winning arguments and more about offering hope.

In the Somali context, this approach offers a powerful alternative to religious narratives characterized by judgment or coercion. Grace introduces a different spiritual language—one of invitation, restoration, and unconditional love. It suggests that spiritual transformation is not about meeting external standards but about encountering a love that fundamentally reconstructs human potential.[56]

Ultimately, grace-centered evangelism is an ongoing participation in God's redemptive story. For Somali evangelists, this means holding their mission with both profound seriousness and radical openness. They are witnesses to a grace that is simultaneously universal and deeply personal, a love that reaches across cultural, religious, and personal boundaries. In this understanding, evangelism becomes more than a religious activity—it is a continuous unfolding of divine love, an invitation into a transformative spiritual journey that begins with grace and is sustained by grace.

Conclusion

In the complex tapestry of human spiritual experience, grace emerges as the most profound paradox—a divine gift that simultaneously humbles and elevates, destroys and reconstructs, judges and redeems. Sola Gratia is not merely a theological proposition but a transformative narrative that challenges the fundamental human impulse to earn, prove, and justify our existence.

[55] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.
[56] The Gospel Coalition, Biblical Evangelism.

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The doctrine of grace stands in stark contrast to the prevailing cultural narratives of achievement and self-validation. In a world obsessed with performance metrics, personal branding, and continuous self-improvement, the message of Sola Gratia offers a radical alternative. It declares that human worth is not determined by accomplishment but by divine declaration. This is not a message of passive acceptance but of profound spiritual liberation.

For the Somali Bible Society and its evangelists, grace becomes more than an abstract theological concept—it is a lived reality, a missional strategy, and a transformative power. Operating in a context deeply shaped by religious frameworks that emphasize human effort and compliance, these evangelists become living testimonies to a different kind of spiritual relationship. They embody a message that suggests spiritual life is not about meeting external standards but about receiving an internal transformation.

The power of grace lies in its ability to simultaneously confront and comfort. It dismantles human pride by revealing our fundamental spiritual limitation, while offering a hope that transcends those very limitations. In the Somali context, this becomes a particularly powerful narrative—an invitation to move beyond religious performance into a genuine spiritual encounter characterized by freedom and restoration.

Missiologically, Sola Gratia represents a sophisticated approach to spiritual engagement. It is not a competitive religious proposition but a universal invitation to experience a love that is unconditional and transformative. The evangelists of the Somali Bible Society are thus equipped not as religious warriors but as compassionate witnesses to a profound spiritual reality.

This doctrine challenges both religious legalism and spiritual complacency. It suggests that spiritual life is a dynamic journey of continuous transformation initiated and sustained by divine love. Grace becomes the anchor that provides stability in the midst of human uncertainty, the light that illuminates the depths of human brokenness, and the power that reconstructs human potential.

The global significance of this message cannot be overstated. In an era characterized by division, polarization, and spiritual fragmentation, Sola Gratia offers a unifying narrative. It transcends cultural, religious, and personal boundaries, pointing to a love that is simultaneously universal and deeply personal.

For the church universal, this doctrine serves as a continuous reminder of its true missional identity. Evangelism is not about institutional expansion or doctrinal conquest but about participating in God's ongoing work of redemption. It is about creating spaces where divine love can transform the human experience and where hope can emerge from the most unexpected places.

The story of grace is not a historical artifact confined to the pages of theological textbooks or the memories of the Reformation. It is a living, breathing narrative that continues to unfold in the lives of individuals, communities, and cultures. It is the

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"song of the redeemed"—a melody of hope that resonates across time and space, inviting humanity into a different kind of spiritual experience.

As the Somali Bible Society continues its missional journey, it carries more than a message—it carries a promise. A promise that divine love reaches beyond human limitation, that transformation is possible, and that hope is not a distant dream but an immediate reality. Sola Gratia becomes not just a doctrine to be understood but a life to be experienced.

In a world hungry for authenticity, searching for meaning, and longing for genuine transformation, the message of grace stands as a beacon of hope. It declares that our worth is not determined by our achievements, but by a love that precedes and transcends our understanding. It is an invitation to step beyond the boundaries of religious performance into a spacious place of spiritual freedom.

Sola Gratia: A gift freely given, a love unconditionally offered, a hope eternally sustained.

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God Our Father

Stephen Thompson

God our Father

The Lord Jesus taught us to relate to God as Father, as a loving and kind father. Jesus always related to God as his Father. This appears to be a development on the Old Testament concept of God where God is hardly ever mentioned as Father. God as Father loves you. He knows you. You belong to Him. He is always there for you. He will meet your needs, lead you, and give you peace. He will also discipline you. God as Father speaks to us through the Bible, and we speak to Him through prayer. For many, calling God “Father” is a negative experience because their fathers were imperfect. They may need counselling and prayer to overcome this and begin to experience God as Father. Islam rejects “father” as a name for God because it suggests God had relations with a woman (or another God). However, several of the ninety-nine names for God in Islam are attributes of a good father. Referring to God as "Father” represents a level of intimacy that Muslim Background Believers often never reach.

Calling on God as a father does not mean God had children but is about relationship and connecting with God. Christians reject any idea that Jesus was the Son of God in a physical sense and that God had relations with a woman and produced a son. We agree with Muslims that God is “not begotten nor does he beget.” When we call God “Father, “we are enabling a meaningful relationship with Him.

God as Father in the Old Testament

There are a few references to God as a father in the Old Testament so we cannot say it was only a New Testament way of relating to God. When Israel was first forming as a nation, God was seen as a father caring for them in the desert (Deuteronomy 1:31). The prophets Isaiah and Malachi poetically wrote about God being father to the people of Israel and their creator (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8, Malachi 1:6 and 2:10). Just like Israel and later the church were seen as the bride of God or Christ so God wanted his people to have a personal and intimate relationship with Him (Jeremiah 3:19, 20). Sin and idol worship were like the people being an unfaithful bride or wife. The children of Israel (mainly the southern kingdom) were precious to God like his first-born son (Jeremiah 31:8, 9).

In the eternal covenant with the prophet and king David, God promises to be a father to David and his descendants. He would even punish as necessary (2 Samuel 7:14). This motif is repeated in the book of the Psalms several times (Psalm 2:7, Psalm 89:26-27). This promise of David’s son being the eternal Son of God and king is promised about Jesus in the New Testament:

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Luke 1:30-33 NLT (The Angel Gabriel Speaking to Mary)
30 "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!
31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 And he will reign over Israel[a] forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

God as Father in the New Testament

The main teaching of Jesus around prayer is the Lord's prayer. This is how he introduces it in Matthew 6:9-10 NLT, "Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." We are to address God in prayer as "Father." Beginning from the beatitudes in Matthew 5, the God of the believers is their Heavenly Father - Matthew 5:16 NLT, "In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father." We are to love our enemies because the Father's general grace is shown to them as they experience the daily blessings of rain and sunshine just as we do (Matthew 5:43-46). We are to be perfect just as He is (Matthew 5:48). At the same time, our religious good deeds like fasting, giving, and prayer are only for our Heavenly Father and should not be carried out so we can boast before others (Matthew 6:1-8). Our Heavenly Father looks after the birds of the air, and so he will look after us (Matthew 6:27-34).

God is a good Father and knows how to give good things to those who ask (Matthew 7:11). He will judge those who confess faith with their mouths but deny it with their lives (Matthew 7:21). When we are being accused we should not worry about what to say because the Holy Spirit or Spirit of the Father will speak through us (Matthew 10:20). Obedience to the will of the Father make us brothers and sisters of Jesus (Matthew 12:50). We are not to have many we call "father" on Earth because God is our Father (Matthew 23:9). Knowing when Jesus should return is knowledge kept with the Father (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).

In the gospel according to Luke, we also have the story that Jesus told of the prodigal son (Luke 15). In the story, a father has two sons. One son asks for his inheritance and goes out and spends it on riotous living. He becomes so broke that he ends up in a position where he has to feed pigs and even wishes he could eat what they are eating! How shameful for a Jew for whom pigs were forbidden! In his desperation, he returns in repentance to his father. His father is waiting for him, and welcomes him with open arms and even celebrates his return. This leads to jealousy and righteous indignation on behalf of the other son who has been "a good boy." Obviously, the loving father is a picture of God who is always ready to accept any sinner who is truly repentant. It is also a condemnation of us "good boys" who stand in judgment on the evil others do.

In John's gospel, God is called "Father" nearly 100 times. He is Jesus' Father and "the Father." If God is the Father and Jesus is the Son, the obvious conclusion is that Jesus is subservient and not equal. This can be an honest conclusion from John's gospel. The website "God Running" gives ten attributes of Jesus' relationship

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with His Father.[57] In many of these attributes, the disciples were to follow Jesus' example. The key to understanding Jesus' relationship with the Father is found in John 1:1, 14 and 18. John 1:1 (NIV) "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God..... 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. … 18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." Jesus, the Word of God and inseparable from God himself, makes God known to us by entering our humanity. His subservience is related to his being a human being while on Earth. As such, he can do nothing of himself (John 5:19). He lives for the will of the Father (John 5:30), and the Father is greater (John 10:29 and John 14:28). Also he is the way to the Father (John 14:6).

However, as God, he works just as the Father works (John 5:18). He gives life to whom he wills (John 5:21). He has been given all judgment (John 5:22). He was before Abraham (John 8:58). Also he displays divine attributes as is clear from his "I am" statements." For example, he claims to be the bread of life (John 6:28); meaning he is the sustainer who gives us all we need. He claims to be the light of the world (John 8:12); he is the illuminator who brings energy into our dark world. He claims to be the door (John 10:9); he is the mediator and brings us to where we could not go. He claims to be the good shepherd (John 10:11); he is the one who cares for us as we need caring for. He claims to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); he is the life-giver who brings us to eternal life. He claims to be the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); he is the leader he guides on the straight path. He claims to be the true vine (John 15:1); he is the success-maker, and he is the one who makes us fruitful.[58] The Holy Spirit was a gift promised by the Father that the believers would receive after Jesus departed (Acts 1:4).

As believers who have the Spirit, we are adopted into God's family and fellow heirs with Christ. This means we can speak to God intimately as "Abba, Father" (Romans 8; Galatians 4:6). Simon Holley, in the December 2022 Somali Bible Society Journal (37) reminds us that under Roman law, adopted sons had exactly the same rights as the legitimate son of a family and this could not be reversed.[59] Saint Paul writes (Galatians 4:1-6 NLT): "Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. 2 They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. 3 And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world. 4 But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. 5 God sent him to buy freedom for us who

[57] "10 Attributes Of Jesus' Relationship With His Father (And what we can learn from them)", 2016. https://godrunning.com/2016/05/14/10-attributes-of-jesus-relationship-with-his-father-and-what-we-can-learn-from-them/ (accessed 7 December 2023).

[58] Paul J. Bucknell, "The Power of the Gospel of John: The Bible Teaching Commentary,"n.d. https://www.foundationsforfreedom.net/References/NT/Gospels/John/John00_Power-I-Am.html (accessed 7 December 2023)

[59] Simon Holley, T"he Father Heart of God." (Somali Bible Society Journal volume 3, issue 2, December 2022) says that under Roman law, adopted sons

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were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. [6] And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”

From the New Testament letters, God is the Father (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 8:6; James 1:27; 3:9; Jude 1:1). He is also the father of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 1:3). Saint Peter, Saint Paul and Saint John are similar in this respect. Jesus will hand the Kingdom over to the Father once all the opposing kingdoms, authorities, and powers are defeated (1 Corinthians 15:24). The Father was the one who raised Jesus from the dead and it was his will that Jesus should die to save us from sin and rescue us from the present evil age (Galatians 1:1 and 4). In his letters, Saint Paul shares his heart of prayer. He prays to the Father with thankfulness (Ephesians 1:17; 3; 14; 5:20; Colossians 1; 1 Thessalonians). God, the Father, is glorified as Jesus is acknowledged as Lord (Philippians 2:11). Jesus and the Father are recorded as separate entities in 2 Thessalonians and in many of Saint Paul’s greetings, 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17 NIV “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”

In Hebrews 12, God disciplines us like a good father. We should submit to his discipline. Hebrews 12:7-11 NIV: “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”
God has lavished great love on us as our heavenly Father, 1 John 3:1 NIV “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.”

Many find it hard to relate to God as a good father because their own fathers were not good fathers. Floyd and Sally McClung were living in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the 1970s. They ran a clinic for dropouts from Western society who drifted in search of adventure, drugs, and bad home situations.[60] In the book Floyd tells stories of young people who ran away from their homes because of bad experiences with their parents and mostly the fathers. One young man rejoiced in the death of his parents.[61] These negative experiences and a failure to know God personally can keep people from understanding and experiencing God as father. There is healing as we acknowledge our needs and sins. Then we prepare to accept God’s grace; His love and forgiveness and we trust Him. Having this trust we can put our trust in God

[60] Floyd McClung Jr, The Father Heart of God, Harvest House Publishers, Oregen, USA, 9.
[61] Ibid 10.

and relationships can be restored. We need humility. Floyd McClung's book is worth a read.

Dr. Shabir Ally in Let the Qur'an Speak (available in written form and on YouTube), explains why Muslims do not call God "Father." God can be like a father in that he cares for us, but the correct term for Muslims to use is *Rabb.* In his opinion, the term literally means Lord but can be translated as *sustainer.* God is our carer and provider. Calling him *ab* or father can lead to us confusing him with the father of Jesus Christ in Christianity. If we accept God as the father of the Lord Jesus Christ, then he becomes the Son of God and worthy of worship and this is not acceptable. Also if we place too much emphasis on us being children as the Christians and Jews do (surah 5:18) then how can God punish us. Shabir says, "If we start thinking of him as Father, then perhaps this is presuming too much for ourselves as though we are children of God and we have a right over him." [62]

Looking for names among the 99 names of God, which are attributes of a father, I found the following: *AL-MUHAYMIN,* which can mean the guardian; *AL-WAHHAAB,* which means the Grantor; and *AR-RAZZAQ,* or the provider.[63] Some of the other ones may also be attributes we expect to find in a father. Generally, Christian writers understand God as more of a master and not a father in Islam.[64]

So what is your experience? I would be interested to know. Is it easy for someone from a Muslim background when they become a believer to call God "father?" I would suggest it is not common. Although in Somali, one of the names for God is *Eebbe,* which appears to come from the word for father *aabbe.* Bilquis Sheikh, a Pakistani woman from a high-class background, struggled to call God "Father." One night she early in her journey to Christ she was thinking about how much she had appreciated her earthly father. Then she wondered if God was like her earthly father. She writes: "Suddenly, a breakthrough of hope flooded me. Suppose, just suppose God were like a father. If my earthly father would put aside everything to listen to me, wouldn't my heavenly Father…"

Shaking with excitement. I got out of bed, sank to my knees on the rug, looked up to heaven, and in rich new understanding, called God "my Father." I was not prepared for what happened."[65]

She goes on in the next chapter to explain how she felt his presence and the places (particularly) in Matthew's gospel came to life for her.
Let's finish with the words of a Somali hymn which is the Lord's Prayer in Somali.

[62] Shabir Ali, "Why Don't Muslims Call God "Father"?" 07 March 2022. https://www.quranspeaks.com/post/why-don-t-muslims-call-god-father (accessed 31 May 2024).
[63] "Investigating the "99 Names of God"" 03 April 2023. https://qurantalkblog.com/2023/04/03/99-names-of-god/ (accessed 31 May 2024).
[64] Silas, "Islam Has No Father," https://www.answering-islam.org/Silas/no_father.htm (accessed 31 May 2024).
[65] Bilquis Sheikh, I Dared to call Him Father, Chosen Books, Michigan, 1978, 47.

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Eebbow sarreeyow waan kuu salaadnaa
Eebbow sarreeyow waan kuu salaadnaa
Samaa isinkaaga lahaa suubbanaan
Samaa isinkaaga lahaa suubbanaan
Sayidnimadaa ha soo degatoo
Sayidnimadaa ha soo degatoo
Samada say ku tahay dhulkana ka sin
Samada say ku tahay dhulkana ka sin

1. Na sii cunno iyo waxaan cabnaba
Na sii cunno iyo waxaan cabnaba
Na sii saaka soortaan u baahan nahay
Na sii saaka soortaan u baahan nahay

2. Waxaannu samayno noo saamax
Waxaannu samayno noo saamax
Sidaan innaba u saamaxayno
Sidaan innaba u saamaxayno

3. Ha na saarin miisaankaaga
Ha na saarin miisaankaaga
Ha nagu sii dayn siriq Shayddaan
Ha nagu sii dayn siriq Shayddaan

Our Father in Heaven, we pray to you.
Our Father in Heaven, we pray to you.
Hallowed be your good name.
Hallowed be your good name.
Your Kingdom come
Your Kingdom come
Manifest it on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Manifest it on Earth as it is in Heaven.

1. Give us food and water.
Give us food and water.
Give us today our daily bread.
Give us today our daily bread.

2. Forgive all our sins
Forgive all our sins
Like we forgive others.
Like we forgive others.

3. O God, do not judge us.
O God, do not judge us.
Do not leave us in Satan’s trap.

Do not leave us in Satan's trap.[66]

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[66] Codadka Iftiinka –Voices of Light. Translated by Aweis A. Ali, Aweis Ali, Maandeeq Publishing, Ethiopia, 2023, 27.

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The Gospel of Matthew In Witness To Muslims

Ibrahim Abdur-Rahman

We want Muslims to know the story of Jesus Christ. Muslims have always been attracted to Jesus as a great messenger of God who healed the sick and raised the dead—and they expect him to return to earth before the Judgment. The Qur'an does not mention Jesus often, but when it does, it necessarily invites further discussion and investigation among Muslims in their conversations with each other.[67] Over the centuries, a surprising wealth of Muslim literature has grown around Jesus, full of stories and wise sayings; many have been compiled by Tahrif Khalidi in his book *The Muslim Jesus*.[68]

Some Muslims want to learn more. They want to go back to the original sources in the Gospels, even if they are discouraged by other Muslims from doing so. And we especially want Somalis who have chosen to follow Christ to know the Gospel story. I acknowledge that each of the four Gospels in the New Testament makes important contributions to our understanding of Jesus, and none of them should be neglected. But which of the four should we encourage them to read first?

Different Ways of Thinking

Somalis—and Muslims in general—live all over the world. They have adapted to Western, Eastern, and African ways of thinking, depending on where they live. But a Somali who has lived in the Puntland State of Somalia all his life and an American who has lived in Alabama in the United States of America all his life are not going to process information and build arguments the same way. Somalis and other Muslims around the world have been nurtured from childhood on the Qur'an and secondary sources such as *hadiths* and *tafsir*. These sources approach spiritual matters differently from, for example, Paul's Letter to the Romans, written to believers in a Greco-Roman culture—or his letters to the Corinthians.

The question I am raising is: Which of the four Gospels fits most closely with the way Somalis and other Muslims think and process information? I think the answer lies in deciding which of the four Gospels is the most Jewish. I believe Jews of the first centuries of the Christian era [A.D.] and Muslims of the first centuries of the Hijrah [A.H.] have enough similarities in thinking to make reading the most Jewish Gospel a solid choice.

Another way of asking this question is, Which of the four Gospel accounts is most Semitic? When I use the term "Semitic," I mean the Semitic languages (such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic) and the cultures and traditions associated with the

[67] For a general introduction to the subject of Jesus in the Qur'an, see Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*. Oxford: One World, 1995.

[68] Tahrif Khalidi, ed. and trans., *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

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peoples who speak these languages. Their ways of thinking and writing are somewhat different from ancient Hellenic (Greek) and modern European/American ways. Thoughts are developed quite differently between a Westerner and a Semitic writer.

The great Jewish historian H. Graetz in his monumental six volume *History of the Jews*, wrote about similarities between the Jews of Arabia and the Arabs before the coming of Islam:

> In consequence of their Semitic descent, the Jews of Arabia, possessed many points of similarity with the primitive inhabitants of the country. Their language was closely related to Arabic, and their customs, except those that had been produced by their religion, were not different from those of the sons of Arabia. The Jews became, therefore, so thoroughly Arabic that they were distinguished from the natives of the country only by their religious belief.[69]

From the earliest days of Islam Jews and Muslims were neighbors, influencing one another in thought processes. This was quite different from Europe. Bernard Lewis reminds us,

> For most of the Middle Ages the Jews of Islam comprised the greater and more active part of the Jewish people. The Jews who lived in Christian countries, that is in Europe, were a minority, and a relative unimportant one at that. With few exceptions, whatever was creative and significant in Jewish life happened in Islamic lands.[70]

From The Least Jewish Gospel to the Most Jewish Gospel

Since there was such close interaction between Jews and Muslims before and during the first centuries of Islam, let me suggest that we consider which is the most Jewish Gospel, and then we recommend it to be the initial one for Muslims and new believers from a Muslim background to read.

The least Jewish Gospel, of course, would be the one according to **Luke**. Luke begins his Gospel account by writing, “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who were from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.” (Luke 1:1-4).[71]

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[69] Professor H. Graetz, *History of the Jews*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1894, vol. 3, 56.

[70] Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984, 67.

[71] All New Testament quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. Abbreviation NRSV.

These four verses are one long, elegant Greek sentence in the original language. They are intended to catch the attention of Greek-speaking non-Jewish readers. These verses follow a Graeco-Roman literary style of writing. Theophilus is named as the original recipient of the Luke's Gospel. His name in Greek means "friend of God" or "loved of God." He may have been a non-Jewish patron of the book.

Luke also used Greek terms where other Gospels used Hebrew terms: "teacher" for "rabbi;" "lawyer" for "scribe;" "skull" for "Golgotha."[72] Luke's Gospel naturally contains Palestinian Jewish information and quotes from Jesus, but it definitely was not written primarily for the Palestinian or Middle Eastern reader. If I may use modern language, Luke's Gospel fits more with thought processes of Westerners like Europeans and Americans than Middle Easterners or East Africans.

Luke was a non-Jew writing primarily for a non-Jewish audience. Before I began working among Muslims, Luke used to be my favorite Gospel to read. A.T. Robertson wrote concerning this Gospel, "Luke was called a painter by the ancients. Certainly, he has produced a graphic pen picture here [in the story of the Prodigal Son] of God's love for the lost that justifies forever the coming of Christ to the world to seek and save the lost."[73] As beautiful as this Gospel is, I believe there are other choices that are more appropriate when introducing Muslims to the story of Jesus. Next, we consider the Gospel of **Mark**. It is thoroughly Jewish, but seldom would anyone recommend that Muslims begin with Mark, primarily because it opens with the words, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) Since Mark affirms that Jesus is the "Son of God" and the Qur'an denies that Jesus is the "son (*walid*)" of God (*Surat al-An'am* 6:101), we either have to say that these two books contradict each other, or we have to say that the meaning of "son" when referring to Jesus is different when used in the New Testament from the way it is used in the Qur'an. This requires too much explanation when introducing a Muslim or new believer to the Gospel message.

The third possibility is the Gospel of **John**. In modern times, this has probably been the favorite choice when sharing the Gospel with Muslims and new believers from a Muslim background. And for good reasons. A.T. Robertson wrote, "John's Gospel is supreme in its height and depth and reach of thought. The picture of Christ here given is the one that has captured the mind and heart of mankind."[74] One time a famous Somali sheikh visited me. He was overflowing with enthusiasm, telling me how he just finished a week in isolation reading and meditating on the Gospel of John. As a Muslim, it moved him deeply.

[72] Mark C. Black, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Luke*. Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996, 21.

[73] Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930, vol. 2, 214.

[74] Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930, vol. 2, 214 and vol. 5, ix.

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John begins by writing, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” (John 1:1-5) There is much in these opening lines—and in the rest of the Gospel of John—that may appeal to Muslim readers. Muslims believe that Jesus is the “Word” of/from Allah. (See Qur’an *al-‘Imran* 3:45 and especially *al-Nisa’* 4:171), even though they interpret this title of Jesus in a different way than Christians do.

The Gospel of John is more Jewish in thought and approach than some might expect.[75] In the opening verse, John not only calls Jesus the *Logos* (“word”), drawing a link with non-Jewish philosophy, but the *Logos* also was often identified with Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 8 and the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria. Adele Reinhartz wrote this about John’s Jewishness in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*:

> The parallels to rabbinic literature do not reveal any dependence or direct knowledge of rabbinic texts, all of which are dated to a period of at least two centuries after the completion of the Gospel. For this reason, John’s similarities to some rabbinic traditions and his use of similar exegetical methods do not demonstrate dependence but rather help to establish the existence in the first century beliefs, practices, or methods that otherwise may be known only from much later Jewish texts. John is therefore a source for the antiquity of some rabbinic traditions, not the other way around.[76]

Yes, the Gospel of John is an outstanding choice for those raised with ways of thinking found in the Qur’an, hadiths, and classical Islamic texts—but John contains a difficulty that may need to be addressed.

Muslims also like to point to one passage in the Gospel of John they believe speaks to their favor. It is an ancient Muslim interpretation of John 16:7, where Jesus says, “It is to your advantage I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” The Greek word in this verse translated as “Advocate” or “Helper” or “Comforter” is *paráklētos* (παράκλητος). Muslims like to change the spelling to *periklutos*, meaning “famous.”[77] (There is no ancient textual evidence for making this change of spelling.) Muslims identify this spelling with the

[75] John does explain some terms for non-Jewish readers, as in John 2:13 when he explains a festival is the “Passover *of the Jews*,” but generally speaking the Gospel is quite Jewish/Aramaean in perspective.

[76] Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Bettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New* Testament. N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2011, 155.

[77] Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment.* London: Macmillan and Co., 1926, 156.

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Arabic word "Ahmed," claiming this is one of the names of Muhammad. With this reasoning, they say that the coming of Muhammad was foretold in John 16:7, linking the verse with Qur'an *al-Saff* 61:6: "And [remember] when Jesus son of Mary said, 'O Children of Israel! Truly, I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which came before me in the Torah and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me whose name is Ahmad."[78] The earliest biography of Muhammad alludes to this. Heraclius, a Byzantine emperor in the lifetime of Muhammad, supposedly said, "You know that this man [Muhammad] is a prophet who has been sent; we find him in our book [referring to John 16:7]; we know him by his description…"[79]

When Muslims read this part of John, they may insist that it is a prophecy about the coming of Muhammad. To counter this, Christians will need to look at all the verses in John that refer to the Comforter and show how Muhammad cannot fulfill all that is written. The *paráklētos/Advocate* is promised to be with the disciples forever (14:16), but Muhammad cannot be with us forever. The *paráklētos/Advocate* is the "Spirit of truth" which will be "in you" (14:17), but Muhammad cannot live within us. The *paráklētos/Advocate* is called the "Holy Spirit" which is sent in Jesus' name and "will remind you of all that I have said to you" (14:26), but Muhammad is never called the "Holy Spirit," nor did he remind us of all that Jesus Christ taught.

My point is that when Muslims or new Muslim background believers read the Gospel of John, they may want to talk more about what they believe about Ahmed/Muhammad than about Jesus. Do not misunderstand me. I agree that the Gospel of John is a wonderful choice for them to read, but perhaps there is an even better choice to read first.

Reasons to Choose the Gospel According to Matthew

I would suggest that Muslims, especially Somali seekers and new disciples, first read the Gospel of Matthew. There are several reasons for this:

It Was the Most Popular Gospel Among Early Followers of Christ

In the earliest days of Christianity, the Gospel of Matthew was quoted more often than any other Gospel. Larry Chouinard, in his commentary on Matthew, writes, "It may surprise the modern reader to realize that for the first two centuries of the Christian era, Matthew's Gospel prevailed as the most popular of the Gospel accounts. Not only was Matthew's text the most frequently quoted NT [New Testament] book among second century Christians, in virtually all textual witnesses and canonical lists Matthew is placed first.[80]

[78] All Qur'an quotations are taken from *The Study Quran*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, editor-in-chief. N.Y.: HarperCollins, 2015.

[79] A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: a translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.

[80] Larry Chouinard, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Matthew.* Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1997, 9.

Édouard Massaux notes, "Of all the New Testament Writings, the Gospel of Mt. [Matthew] was the one whose literary influence was the most widespread and the most profound in Christian literature that extended into the last decades of the second century… Until the end of the second century, the first gospel remained the gospel par excellence…"[81] For example, "…the citations from Matthew in Bks. 111 and IV of Irenaeus *Against Heresies* are more numerous than those from all other Gospels combined."[82]

Not only was the Gospel of Matthew quoted more often than all the others in the early years of Christianity, but even today Christians also turn to it more than the other Gospels "either for defense and controversy" or for strengthening one's "moral and spiritual life."[83]

In Some Ways, It Is the Most "Jewish" of The Gospels, and Therefore Fits Most Easily with Muslim Thought Processes.

All four Gospels obviously contain Jewish thought patterns because of the subject matter: they tell about Jesus who was a Jew living among Jews. But Matthew stands out as being more Jewish than the others. The Talmudic scholar Daniel Boyarin, who has studied the four Gospels from a Jewish perspective, wrote:

> To be sure, Matthew is frequently closer in thought and expression to rabbinic texts than Mark. It is this point, in fact, that has given rise to the notion that Matthew's Gospel is more "Jewish" than Mark's, a distinct error in my view, although Matthew may have been closer to proto-rabbinic traditions than Mark was."[84] "The Gospels themselves, when read in the context of other Jewish texts of their times, reveal this very complex diversity and attachments to other variants of "Judaism" at the time. There are traits that bind the Gospel of Matthew to one strain of first century "Judaism" while other traits bind the Gospel of John to other strains. The same goes for Mark, and even for Luke, which is generally considered the "least Jewish" of the Gospels.[85]

[81] Édouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature Before Saint Irenaeus*, trans. by Norman J. Belval and Suzanne Hecht, Arthur J. Bellinzoni, ed., 3 vols. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1993, 3:186-87.

[82] Sherman E. Johnson, "Introduction to Matthew" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, et al. N.Y.: Abingdon Press, 1951, 231.

[83] Sherman E. Johnson, 231.

[84] Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: the story of the Jewish Christ*.N.Y.: The New Press, 2012, 169, note 39.

[85] Boyarin, 22.

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Lines of reasoning in the Gospel of Matthew sometimes are quite different from the other three Gospels. A quick look at how each Gospel account begins will show their differences in style and thought.[86]

- Mark begins with "Son of God," a Jewish phrase that was identified with the anointed King or Messiah. See Psalm 2:7, where God says to the king, "You are my son; today I have begotten you." This may have been recited when a king was enthroned in Israel or Judah, and the king then became the adopted son of God. Although the Jewish definition of "Son of God," when explained clearly, might become acceptable to Muslims, it came to carry a deeper meaning for Christians. Muslims will probably be turned off by the language.
- Luke begins with classical Greek. (1:1-4) He clearly states that he is writing this especially for Theophilis, a person with a Greek name. We don't know who Theophilis was, whether he was a Hellenistic Jew or a non-Jew. Either way, Luke wrote this Gospel so that he "might know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." (1:4) Several linguistic differences are found between the Greek language Luke uses and the Greek language of the other three Gospels.[87]

- John begins with the logos doctrine, easily identified with "Wisdom" in Proverbs, as well as the logos doctrine in the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo, and the logos doctrine among Greek philosophers. John tends to be more mystical. Throughout most of Somali history, Somalis embraced mystical thought called Sufism, but in recent years Sufis have faced rejection and persecution from other Somalis. Still, the Gospel of John may especially appeal to those with a mystical inclination—and even to those who are not mystical—but the question of "Ahmed" can lead to a sidetrack that is unhelpful.

- Now let's consider the Gospel of Matthew. It begins with the genealogy of Jesus. This is a foreign way to introduce a person from a Western perspective, but it is natural for Somalis. When Somalis meet for the first time, they often ask not only the person's name but also the name of the father or grandfather to try to determine the person's tribal relation to one's own. Somalis also take pride in reciting their ancestry name by name back many generations. It gives them a sense of place, a sense of belonging. This is also true for the earliest biography of Muhammad. In *Sirat Rasul Allah* by Ibn

[86] I am not implying contradictory messages in these Gospels. I am referring to different approaches for different target audiences when these Gospels were written.

[87] Nathaniel J. Erickson, Literary Leanings in the Gospel of Luke: on Luke's Greek style – NT Greek et al., 2021.

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Ishaq, Muhammad's story begins with "This is the book of the biography of the Apostle of God. Muhammad was the son of 'Abdullah, b.'Abdu'l Mutallib (whose name was Shayba, b. Hashim (whose name was 'Amr)," and the list continues to trace ancestors back to Adam.[88]

When Somalis hear about Jesus' ancestry, they will especially be intrigued by the fact that Jesus was a descendant Abraham and David. Consider the opening section of the Gospel of Matthew which begins this way: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (1:1) Various names are recorded until the list ends with the summary, "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations." (1:17)

An ancient Jewish interpretative practice was called *gematria*, where a numerical value was given to a name, word, or phrase. The name David in Hebrew was "DVD." D had a numeric value of 4, and V had a numerical value of 6; so D4 + V6 + D4 equaled 14. When Matthew used the number fourteen, he was saying Jesus was the new King David. The key theme of the Gospel of Matthew is even implied in the genealogy: the King/Messiah is here. Matthew is the Gospel of the "kingdom of heaven," focusing on the teachings and life of the King.

The Gospel of Matthew Has Had an Enduring Attraction to Some Jews. I Believe It Can Also Have an Enduring Attraction to Some Muslims.

There are ancient traditions that Matthew first wrote this Gospel in the Hebrew language. Papias, who lived during the time of the apostles and heard the Apostle John speak, claimed that Matthew wrote in Hebrew and then each person interpreted the words as best he could.[89] Eusebius, the early church historian, wrote, "Matthew also having first proclaimed the gospel in Hebrew, when on the point of going also to other nations, committed it to writing in his native tongue, and thus supplied the want of his presence to them, by his writings."[90] Iranæus and Origin made similar claims.

Jerome wrote, "Matthew, who is also Levi, and who from a publican came to be an Apostle, first of all the Evangelists, composed a Gospel of Christ in the Hebrew

[88] A. Guillaume, 3.

[89]For a closer look at this statement, see PAPIAS (c. 60-135 A.D.) and the Gospels of Matthew and Mark - Updated American Standard Version (uasvbible.org).

[90] Christian Frederick Cruse, trans. *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955, 108.

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language and characters, for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed: who translated it into Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Furthermore, the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day in the library at Cæsarea which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the city of Berœa to copy it.[91] Notice that Jerome said this Gospel was "for the benefit of the circumcision [Jews] who had believed."

Even though we have found ancient copies of the Gospel of Matthew only in the Koine Greek language, it has been translated into Hebrew by Jews over the centuries. In 1927, Hugh Schonfield published an English translation from Jean du Tillet's copy of a Hebrew manuscript of Matthew which Tillet obtained in 1553. The title page in Hebrew and Latin "describes the volume as 'The Gospel of Matthew, until this day laid up among the Jews and concealed in their recesses, and now at last, from out of their apartments and from darkness, brought forth into the light, etc.'"[92]

Why was the Gospel of Matthew translated back from time-to-time into Hebrew for Jewish readers? According to Shem-Tob, it was because of the appeal of the Gospel itself to Jews! Shem-Tob worried that Jews would "drink from these waters" even though it was forbidden for them to read. They might be led astray, so he wrote *Even Bohan* [*The Touchstone*] in 1380, and revised it later, to fight against the appeal of Matthew and the other Gospels. He explained:

> I have chosen to complete this my treatise which (I have called) *Evan Bohan* by transcribing… the books of the gospel in spite of the fact that the books are forbidden for us to read, lest the disciples should come without having sufficient practice and should drink from those waters… Nevertheless, I have chosen to transcribe them… for two reasons: The first is to answer the Christians from them and especially the proselytes who speak in regard to their faith but do not know the word of faith and explain the Scriptures of our holy law in regard to that which is contrary to the truth and contrary to their faith. In this way glory will come to the Jew who debates with them whenever he captures them in their own pit. The second is to show to the faithful the degree of defect in these books and the errors that occur in them.[93]

Conclusion

I have developed this article based on the assumption that Jews and Muslims historically have used similar thought patterns. During the formative period of Islam, they interacted closely with one another. Even at the time the Qur'an was being

[91] Hugh J. Schonfield, *An Old Hebrew Text of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927, 193.

[92] Schonfield, 5.

[93] George Howard, *The Gospel of Matthew according to a Primitive Hebrew Text*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987, 177.

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recorded, there were close associations, whether peaceful or not. They even communicated with one another using the same language.
All four Gospels may appeal to Muslims, if they begin to read them. I believe this is especially true of the Gospel of Matthew, the "most Jewish" of the Gospels in many ways. Matthew communicates the most attractive message for witness to Muslims because:

1. It was the most popular Gospel among early followers of Christ.
2. In some ways, it is the most "Jewish" of the Gospels, and therefore fits most easily with Muslim thought processes.
3. It has had an enduring attraction to some Jews. I believe it can also have an enduring attraction to some Muslims.

As I wrote in the beginning of this article, we want Muslims to know the story of Jesus Christ. They are already attracted to Jesus as a great messenger of God. The Gospel of Matthew can introduce them to the rest of the story that the don't currently understand.

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"Shelter: A Journey from Turmoil to Transformation"
Displaced but Not Defeated: Finding Purpose Through Language, Technology, and Belief

Hadliye Baashe Amani

Shelter: A Journey from Turmoil to Transformation, I trace my life's path through times of upheaval and discovery, navigating both physical and spiritual terrain. This memoir captures my journey from the immediate challenges of displacement to finding a profound, renewed sense of purpose.

The opening chapter I, *"The Loss of Innocence,"* tells of the moment when the familiar boundaries of my world dissolved, forcing me to confront life's brutal realities at an early age. This chapter captures the vulnerability of leaving behind the safety of childhood, marking the start of a journey shaped by both resilience and uncertainty.

Chapter II "The Journey Begins" shifts to a pivotal moment: our family's escape from Mogadishu to Kismayo—a 500-kilometer passage filled with tension and fleeting glimpses of hope. Along the way, each stop and stretch of road deepened our struggle and resolve, showing us how survival itself can become an act of courage.

Though *Shelter* remains a work in progress, I'm honored to share Chapter III with you in the Somali Bible Society Journal. Through these chapters, I hope readers find inspiration in the power of resilience, faith, and the search for meaning.

Chapter III: Eye of the Storm

In this chapter III," EYE OF THE STORM," I delve into the profound inner turmoil that gripped me during my time in Kismayo, the third largest city of Somalia. As a student at the local Qur'an school, I found myself
increasingly conflicted between the captivating spiritual lessons of Islam and the rigid, oppressive dogma that was demanded of me.

Outwardly, I maintained the appearance of a devoted pupil, but inwardly, I secretly questioned and rejected the fundamentalist interpretations forced upon me. I was drawn instead to the freedom and camaraderie I discovered by exploring the city and immersing myself in the vibrant Bajuni community.

However, this simmering conflict between my inner spiritual journey and the relentless demands of religious orthodoxy reached a breaking point when I witnessed the horrific sectarian violence and brutality perpetrated in the name of jihad. Faced with the jarring disconnect between the professed teachings of Islam and the inhumane actions carried out by its supposed devotees, I underwent a profound awakening. I could no longer ignore how sacred spirituality had been

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divorced from its essence and repurposed as a tool of dehumanization and oppression.

This realization ushered in an unwavering determination to embark on a new path of transcendence, free from the constraints of outdated customs and the perpetual cycle of violence. My heart's innermost yearnings transformed into a plea to rise above the limitations that had previously shackled my soul.

Arrival in Kismayo

In 1991, after the collapse of Somalia's central government, our recently acquired residence was situated in Kismayo, a vast deserted meat manufacturing plant where adults parked their luxurious SUVs outside. While certain families ventured into the factory building, my guardians decided to establish comfortable large tents instead, positioning them beneath lofty trees. The expansive tree branches offered an inviting shady spot, enabling us to evade scorching hot and sticky weather

Situated near the equator, Kismayo is a location that experiences extremely high temperatures and humidity midway between the planet's northern and southern poles. However, the presence of the Indian Ocean, which brings monsoon winds, along with nearby forested areas that provide cooler breezes, offers some relief. Despite these favorable conditions, we still found ourselves sweating profusely.

In the first few days, everyone was assigned to tasks that helped make our new place feel like it was home. The mothers were always inside the house, fixing things and creating spaces for cooking and sleeping. The children enjoyed exploring the yard, chasing one another around the tree and tenting. The men in our group were outside a lot, too, working hard to secure tent lines and to ensure that our area was safe. I remember hearing loud laughter and joking as they worked, which made me feel happy to hear them sounding so lighthearted after the long and scary journey we had all been on.

Morning Reflections

My favorite part of each day was waking up before sunrise. I would tiptoe out of the tent as quietly as possible and climb into the branches of a big, shady tree. Up there, I felt like a little bird watching the dawn's first rays peek over the Kismayo skyline.

I often reflected on our stop in the countryside near Jilib, where the mango farms and lush gardens filled me with the belief that abundance was within reach if I remained open to it. The juicy and sweet mangoes made me wonder whether spiritual nourishment could also be found.

However, upon arriving at Kismayo, the destination we sought for safety, I felt a sense of sadness instead of the nourishment I had hoped for. I still carried unanswered questions about our struggles and suffering in my heart.

Each morning, I attempted to release these doubts and uncertainties towards the rising sun like a prayer, seeking a warm light that would reveal the truth I longed to

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understand. I hoped that this newfound wisdom would lead to profound inner fulfillment and growth, much like the Jilib trees that bear fragrant and life-sustaining fruits.

Attending Qur'an School

After resting and settling into our new home in Kismayo, it was time for the children, including myself, to attend the Qur'an School, also known as *dugsi*. This was where we learned and memorized verses from the Qur'an and basic Islamic teachings, although some families used it as a kindergarten.

However, my experiences at the *dugsi* differed greatly from my time at Kamaludin Primary School in Mogadishu. The harsh realities I had witnessed there–war, violence, and the deafening sounds of heavy artillery - had a profound psychological impact on me. Despite this, I believe that I have developed strong inner resilience and strength over the weeks.

On the first morning, I found myself unsatisfied with simply accepting and reciting the teachings before me while sitting in Kismayo *dugsi*. The traditional lessons felt strangely hollow to my ears after the profound questioning and soulful seeking that had taken root during our exodus. As the *dugsi* teacher launched rote recitations of Qur'anic verses, my mind began to wander, reflecting on the persisting doubts that blossomed during our tenuous journey. I wondered how ancient words from the holy text could possibly relate to or provide scaffolding for existential wrestling now consuming my child's psyche.

While the other children listened deferentially, I found my focus pulled inward, revisiting the pivotal moments that pierced my soul with insistent inquiries about faith, suffering, and mankind's constant diaspora in search of illusory sanctuaries.

Mere dogma and doctrine no longer felt adequate to engage with the elemental "whys" now propelling my spiritual evolution. Part of me felt almost dissociated from the *dugsi* lessons, an oasis of innocence I had abruptly outgrown after trials that forced premature maturity and skepticism upon me. I could not help but feel a brewing sense of restlessness and even defiance toward this prescriptive indoctrination.

My heart continues to yearn for profound understanding, but I instinctively know that such an awakening cannot be achieved solely through childhood lessons and rituals. The path I now embarked upon demanded an unwavering commitment to seeking personal gnosis by revisiting and engaging with each nagging uncertainty rather than suppressing it.

As the *dugsi* lessons dragged on during the morning, I realized that the true teachings and initiation into enlightenment would have to be self-administered through the courage to continually ask "why?" This inner abyss of questioning awakened me, and only I could choose whether to surrender in blind obedience or bravely lean into its radiant, terrifying truth.

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Conflict with Qur'an Teachings

We relocated to Kismayo in search of stability. However, the only formal education available was the Qur'an School, where we were tasked with studying and memorizing 144 chapters of the Qur'an.

As the classes continued, I struggled to comprehend the benefits of these practices. Reciting ancient Arabic words without grasping their deeper significance felt hollow and empty exercise of regurgitation rather than genuine enlightenment.

My mind constantly wandered from the rote drill of verse memorization. I could not help but question why we devoted much effort to verbatim acting as vessels carrying these scriptures. Could their profound spiritual messages not be fully imbibed through this detached, academic approach alone?

The other kids seemed to follow the memorization routine, but I found it unappealing to simply store words such as onions in an inexhaustible mental compartment. Instead, I longed to chew on their meanings and absorb their wisdom, transforming it into something that could nourish my soul meaningfully.

To my surprise, I began scrutinizing the verses as they flowed from the teacher's mouth and my peers in perfect harmony. I searched for any profound insights that could provide answers to profound questions about the senseless suffering and injustice I had experienced in my short life.

However, I frequently found that the verses raised more questions than answers. Each new reading gave rise to conflicting interpretations in my mind, and the complexity and nuances seemed to multiply endlessly, mocking the simplicity of mere memorization.

This internal conflict intensified my struggle, my desire to truly understand, and my frustration with accepting dogma. This tension pulled me further away from the prescribed ritual until I could no longer recite it with genuine conviction.

Politely excusing myself one afternoon, I wandered away from the Qur'an School and its currents of hollow utterances. Seeking refuge under a gnarled old acacia tree, I felt that the seeds of my existential wrestling had grown through cracks during my customary indoctrination.

As the sun set over Kismayo, I remained rooted there motionless beneath the acacia, facing westward, so that the incandescent truth of the setting sun could bathe my spirit directly. In the glow of that celestial fire, the rigid memorization of words began to transform into something far more visceral and knowable–a burning need for transcendence.

I was fascinated by the historical narratives and timelines of the Qur'an, particularly the stories of the prophets from Adam to Jesus. These epic tales were masterfully

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crafted, and the sweeping timeline was immensely compelling. I was captivated by the powerful legends and the broad scope of the accounts.

However, as I continued reading, I reached the verses known as the "Madina verses," which seemed to advocate or condone violence and imposed stringent regulations on human behavior. The shift from an intriguing spiritual narrative to a divisive dogma with rigid rules created a deep sense of discord in me.

Despite my reservations about how religious groups chose to interpret the message and wisdom supposedly from the Almighty, I still desired to learn the chronological history and timelines of these scriptures. There was an undeniable allure to comprehending the grand and overarching narratives.

However, as the verses became increasingly prescriptive, instructing strict adherence to certain acts and codes of conduct, sacred texts lost their luster. The once-compelling narrative was transformed into a rigid doctrine, promoting an unyielding orthodoxy that I could not embrace wholly.

The conflict stemmed from a yearning to absorb only spiritually enriching stories and historical accounts without being mandated to adhere to unyielding dogmatic dictates that did not align with my personal beliefs. I desired the flexibility to appreciate compelling teachings while still maintaining the liberty to be skeptical of any doctrine that felt misaligned with my inner voice.

This inner struggle intensified as I attended the Qur'an School of Kismayo, where I observed other children reciting verses flawlessly and their expressions devoid of emotion. Conversely, I found myself more adept at mentally disentangling poetic mythologies from subsequent doctrinal requirements.

I was apprehensive about revisiting the "Madina verses" once again, as I knew they would prompt a new round of aversion towards their literal interpretation. Nevertheless, I cannot ignore their historical significance and captivating narratives. I found myself both repulsed and drawn in by the conflicting messages conveyed in the Muslim scripture.

Spiritual Dissonance

As I progressed through my daily studies, my thoughts oscillated between embracing spiritual lessons and grappling with dogmatic teachings. While I eagerly consumed the rich allegories, the dissonance between what I was instructed to believe and my own God-given intuition became more pronounced, exacerbating the divide between prescribed spiritual nourishment and my own understanding.

At Kismayo School, each student was expected to adhere to a detailed set of rules and regulations, much like being part of a religious cult or the Sicilian Mafia. We were told that strict adherence to these norms was the only path towards achieving spiritual purity.

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Every Thursday and Friday, attendance at the mosque was mandatory, and we would listen to the imams expound on their specific interpretation of Islam. This particular sect saw themselves as divine representatives on Earth empowered to shape our spiritual destinies through their teachings.

Despite the insistence of my parents and guardians that I unquestioningly follow these rituals and codes, I found it difficult to fully embrace and adopt these practices.

The narratives and stories from the Qur'an continued to captivate me with their epic scope and powerful imagery, transporting me to the timeless realm of ancient prophets and transcendent experiences from Adam to Jesus.

Whenever the "Madina verses" were recited, which urged violence, enforced strict codes of behavior, and demanded unwavering allegiance to human-created doctrines, I felt a strong aversion. The beautiful poetry and enlightening parables transformed into something domineering and totalitarian no longer resonating with my innermost thoughts.

As the imams at the Kismayo mosque preached that our sect was the sole possessor of truth, I mentally rejected their words even though they had reached my ears. The gap between my sense of universal spiritual truth and the rigid doctrine presented as an absolute truth continued to increase.

Initially, I had a theoretical understanding of the group's beliefs. However, I later discovered that they expected unquestioning conformity in practice. This expectation made me uncomfortable. I resented being instructed to blindly follow the group's interpretation of faith without any room for personal exploration or doubt. Certainly, the Holy Spirit was my companion during this time through Prevenient Grace.

My guardian believed that the following rituals and regulations were necessary to preserve my spiritual devotion and purity. However, I felt that true enlightenment required going beyond any single dogma and pursuing a journey of transcendence.

Over time, I continued to perform the expected tasks on the surface, but inwardly, my heart and mind grew further away from the dogmatic teachings of the Kismayo sect, as each religious lesson and militant sermon demanded unwavering allegiance.

Exploring Alternatives

My reluctance to fully embrace the Qur'an School's teachings led me to seek other activities, such as playing football and exploring the outskirts of Kismayo, rather than attending the *dugsi*. Although my aunt provided guidance in my parents' absence, she lacked the oversight and engagement that would typically question a child's frequent absences from Qu'ran classes.

As I gradually created my own alternative social environment, one that may not have been any better than the *dugsi*'s teachings, I was able to explore new areas of curiosity and civilization beyond rigid doctrines.

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Playing football with other local kids on the sunbaked dirt roads of Kismayo, I discovered a sense of freedom and camaraderie outside the influence of the mosque. We existed in the moment, our joyful shouts and bare feet were marked by the rhythms of the nearby Indian Ocean.

Those carefree trips to the seaside awakened a primal yet purifying feeling within me. The predictable yet constantly changing and moving waves captivated me, while the gulls' hovering shadows and raucous calls added natural harmony to the primeval scenes.

In contrast to the predominant Somali population, I stood out both culturally and physically. My ancestral language, Chimwiini, further set me apart, as previously noted. Upon arriving in Kismayo, I encountered the Bajuni, a small community that resonated with my Bravanese background. These people, primarily engaged in fishing and craftsmanship, shared some physical and linguistic traits with me.

Interacting with Bajuni youngsters, I found immediate acceptance. They introduced me to the Indian Ocean, imparting their fish-like swimming techniques. This marked the beginning of my aquatic prowess, a skill that would prove crucial in my future.

Immersing myself in Bajuni culture, I absorbed their traditional fishing methods, artisanal skills, and coastal lifestyle. This immersion served as an escape from what I perceived as ritualistic practices elsewhere. My exposure to the Bajuni way of life expanded my awareness of Somalia's cultural diversity and highlighted the significance of safeguarding all communities' distinct customs.

The time I spent with the Bajuni in Kismayo greatly impacted my personal development. It not only shaped my identity but also provided me with skills and insights that would prove invaluable later on life.

Questioning Quranic Verses

As I ventured beyond the bounds of the Qur'an School in Kismayo, I could not help but contemplate the contentious verses that were increasingly estranging me from my faith. Some passages, like those that advocate waging war against non-Muslims, subjugating women, and permitting slavery, seemed to contradict Jesus Christ's teachings of peace, equality, and human sanctity. Even though I never studied the Bible during that difficult time, I felt a spiritual connection to the true God, whom I did not yet know well. This experience caused me to shift from skepticism to outright criticism of Islam.

The verse from Surah At-Tawbah 5 in the Qur'an, which calls for violence against idolaters, conflicts with the true nature of spirituality. The verse instructs Muslims to "slay the idolaters wherever you find them and take them captive" after the sacred months, a directive that seems at odds with Jesus' portrayal of God the Father. In the Book of Genesis, humanity's inherent dignity is affirmed, which is inconsistent with the violent command in Qur'an.

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Moreover, Surah An-Nisa 34's declaration that "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women..." before allowing husbands to discipline insubordinate wives, including through physical punishment, also troubled me. In contrast, the New Testament's Ephesians 5 encourages husbands to love their wives, as Christ loved the church, treating them as spiritual equals.

The most concerning aspect of the Qur'an is its scattered endorsements of slavery, such as in Surah An-Noor 58: "There is no blame on you or them to move about freely, you and they together, after the three times of night prayer." The endorsement of enslaving human beings as property felt like a gross injustice compared to the unconditional liberties espoused throughout scripture, such as Galatians 5: "For freedom Christ has set us free..."

As I observed the outlying areas of Kismayo, I witnessed the rich tapestries of diverse souls all striving to exist with dignity, which deepened my conviction that these dehumanizing Qur'anic philosophies were more a product of the mentalities and power structures of 7th-century Arab culture than any transcendental spiritual truth.

In stark contrast, the Bible's teachings on our shared humanity - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) - resonated more deeply with my questioning mind each day. The exaltations of our equal divine spark seemed more closely aligned with the organic universal harmonies I witnessed beyond the mosque's indoctrinating walls.

While still drawing on the powerful narratives and poetic storytelling of the Qur'an, I found myself increasingly repelled by the oppressive dogma of violence, gender subjugation, and slavery. This dogma seemed more entwined with archaic socio-political tribalism than with a gospel of spiritual salvation.

In contrast, the biblical philosophies of unconditional equality and enlightened peace instilled a new hope that the "whys" burning within me could be quenched without betraying my underlying ethics and intuitive sense of human dignity.

Living a Double Life

As I grew older, around 10 years of age, I had already memorized large portions of the Qur'an and studied in-depth the narratives about the prophets' lives as well as the adherence of the Sahabah (companions of the Prophet Muhammad). Through a critical lens, I gained an understanding of the core concepts of Islam.

However, I increasingly lived a double life. While my psychosocial environment revolved around roaming the city streets—catcalling girls, spending long days swimming on the shores, and even going to the cinema to watch movies with local street children—my religious upbringing and personal beliefs have increasingly clashed with these activities and actions. My life was marked by a stark contrast between my outer and inner worlds. While I was expected to attend the *dugsi* Qur'an school and mosque, I also felt a deep obligation to maintain my religious practices to

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keep my aunt from withdrawing her support. Despite this, I managed to balance my delinquent freedom with my religious duties with little oversight from my preoccupied aunt.

This duality allowed me to draw on the powerful stories of Islam's history, captivated by the epic narratives of prophets and their devotees who shaped civilizations. At the same time, I developed a growing disdain for oppressive doctrines that were intertwined with these spiritual accounts. The more Qur'anic verses I studied, the more I became disillusioned with the regressive orthodoxies of Islam.

Rejecting Dogmatic Interpretations

Therefore, while I maintained the outward appearance of attending the *dugsi* and participating in rituals at the Kismayo mosque, fundamentalist interpretations were rejected. My mind struggled to reconcile the enthralling spirituality with the ossified, unethical dogmas I found in the Qur'an.

This conflict is evident in my Jekyll-and-Hyde persona. I was immersed in mystical sacred texts and myths within the confines of the *dugsi.* On the other hand, I roamed the streets of Kismayo, cursing, harassing, and embracing the uncouth to rebel against the oppressive religious authority I felt internally.

In these unrestrained forays, I discovered how to embody primal human perseverance without any contrived religious sanctions or intellectualized cultural hegemony. I saw kids united in a playful anarchy, rejoicing in their existence despite any rigid moral indoctrinations that tried to contain their vibrant souls.

This unbridled duality ultimately hindered my acceptance of the doctrine, as it required unwavering spiritual submissions. I have already experienced the liberating feeling of simply being free from these cultic ideologies.

Although I appeared to be a devoted *dugsi* student, I was secretly a skeptical youth who questioned everything I had been taught to believe as an absolute truth. The Qur'an's compelling mythological power endured, but its oppressive, regressive dogmas became increasingly repulsive as I continued my education on Kismayo streets.

Witnessing Atrocities

The experience of witnessing the brutal clan warfare between the militias led by General Mohamed Farah Aideed and Mohamed Said Hersi Morgan near Kismayo was deeply disillusioning. The savagery I observed, including massacres, bodies being dumped in rivers, and indiscriminate slaughter, even of those who surrendered, was among the most horrific atrocities I have ever witnessed, ranking only behind the horrors of Hiroshima and the Auschwitz concentration camp.

My young eyes were exposed to these atrocities as I accompanied the militias' logistics caravans, which delivered food and supplies, allowing me and other teenagers to observe the fighting at a dangerously close range. What sickened me

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most was witnessing the active support and encouragement of these heinous acts by a sect of mullahs from the Muslim Brotherhood in the name of jihad and religious righteousness. They provided fatwas, fighters, and provisions and even led prayers that celebrated massacring the opposing clan as a path to paradise's rewards.

I heard these twisted interpretations of Islamic teachings with my own ears from the mullahs' lips in Turdho, an agropastoral village just outside Kismayo, as the fighting raged perilously. They glorified the most abominable transgressions of human life and dignity as righteous, holy wars, perpetuating the cycle of violence and bloodshed.

As Mogadishu descended into a living hell of violence and trauma, my temporary refuge in Kismayo appeared poised to plunge into the abysses of sectarian bloodletting. The victorious militia aimed to hunt and exterminate every last man, woman, or child from the clans aligned with their opposition, including civilians guilty of no crime other than their lineage.

Despite not hailing from either of the warring clans, my aunt's husband feared that his life would be in danger if vengeful militants took Kismayo. As a member of a small, traditionally neutral Braveness minority community, my own status offered no shield from conscription to escalating tribalism and persecution.

Awakening to the Truth

In that crucible of society's descent into its most rapacious and hateful depths, any lingering innocence still clinging to my soul was permanently seared away. I can no longer ignore how sacred spirituality was divorced from its essence and repurposed as a sledgehammer to obliterate human dignity, compassion, and ethics.

The dogmatic teachings I had already begun questioning took their final, undeniable unmasking as brutal instruments of dehumanization and oppression in the hands of the power-hungry and fanatical. Anything calcified into unquestioning orthodox obedience reveals its toxic potential to reduce us to our most barbaric and unconscionable selves.

My simmering nexus of "whys" detonated into an overwhelming rejection of institutionalized belief structures that betrayed our fundamental obligations to one another as a human family. I knew then that any dogma demanding our souls' unquestioning submission formed an open privation against higher moral and spiritual truths, pulling me towards emancipation.

While the anguished cries of fallen warriors reverberated throughout the accurate battlefields, within me, something profound was being shattered and reborn - an unwavering determination to embark on a spiritual journey that would no longer be constrained by outdated customs and their perpetual cycle of violence. My heart's innermost earnings transformed into a plea to transcend all limitations.

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With over 20 years of experience, Hadliye has lived and worked across multiple continents, primarily in Southern and Eastern Africa and Europe, developing extensive intercultural and multilingual expertise. He holds a Master's degree in Education from Luleå University of Technology in Sweden and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) at Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi, Kenya. The author can be reached at educationdirector@somalibiblesociety.org

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Jibril and the Gabrielic Precedent: A Contrast and Evaluation

Solomon White

Introduction

A central contention of Islam is that the prophet Muhammad received messages directly and repeatedly from the archangel Jibril (Gabriel),[94] and that with such a portent, the imparted texts are from heaven itself and, as delivered by a supreme heavenly agent, are divinely inspired, inimitable, literally true, immutable, untouched by human influence, and are perfect and supreme in every way. The Christian Scripture also identifies multiple appearances by Gabriel to various people at various times, but with messages and outcomes conflicting with those Islam attests to, questions arise of what constitutes an authentic angelic encounter. Although the Bible is taken to be supreme, no possible conclusions are advanced from the outset of this study; rather, this study is exploratory, looking to find the points of commonality or divergence between the Islamic testimony and Scripture's record, and for the lessons to be extrapolated from them.[95] What makes an encounter authentic? What are contraindicating signs? What are the safeguards which allow a genuine *encounter "pass-through" status* to legitimacy but which deny non-authentic occurrences?[96] Following some introductory remarks, this study:

1. identifies the Bible's and Muhammad's attested appearances with Gabriel/Jibril,
2. it looks for evidence within these accounts to determine authentic or spurious encounters and
3. it looks for clarifying Scriptural benchmarks by which one can assess or "sift" past, present, or future "prophets." Such a study is problematic, as little evaluative comment has surfaced about the integrity of the revelatory process itself – such appears, to a large extent, to either be taken for granted and assumed or categorically rejected, with its authenticity otherwise resting relatively unchallenged and the intervening investigative clarifications being sidestepped (further study may well show otherwise).

[94] Also: Jibrāʾīl, Jabrāʾīl, Jibreel, and other forms. Here, "Gabriel" is generally used in Christian discussion and "Jibril" for Islamic settings, though they are generally deemed interchangeable. Islam's assertion that Jibril is the one who visited Muhammad was apparently first stated by Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad's first biographer (Robert Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry Into Islam's Obscure Origins*. Revised and Expanded Edition. New York: Post Hill Press, 2021, 97).

[95] Writing from an explicitly Christian as well as a Protestant perspective, the Protestant Bible is taken as paramount and the Qur'an as Islam's authoritative source, though the sira and hadith are also essential. The issue of the historical veracity of the Islamic narrative is left unaddressed – this paper engages Islam where it is at, although the questions already in circulation are profound.

[96] It is recognized that some Christians deny the possibility of biblical, church age miracles. It is assumed that both miracles and prophetic oracles of God are possible, and that a study such as this may give clarity and allow selective acceptance where Christians may have inappropriately denied miracles on a rather wholesale basis, or limit them where acceptance has been insufficiently discriminatory.

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By limiting the discussion to Gabriel and Jibril, who both Christianity and Islam understand to be archangels, there is an even footing from which to embark in examining what each religion says of them. This precludes theophanies (which Islam does not claim to have[97]),[98] and most visions, dreams, and any manifestation where there is not an identified "messenger" (in Christianity, if not a theophany, such are generally deemed to be the work of the Holy Spirit).

For this study, an "angel" is understood as a being "not contained physically in a place so as to assume form and shape, . . . but [who] remain[s] spiritually circumscribed . . . [and] is an intellectual substance, ever in motion, free, incorporeal, ministering to God, with the gift of immortality."[99] An angel is dispatched as a deputy who conveys a message – an ambassador or harbinger of weal or woe[100] – and is a superior being from a spiritual, non-temporal world (although such can also be human – I Kings 19:2; Hag. 1:13; Lk. 7:24-27). Of these, archangels are seen as the highest angelic order. Angelic visitations in both the biblical and Islamic records are rife, and their unseen presence and activity are presumed rather than taken as an oddity or exception.[101]

The Problem Presented and the Need for Resolution

When attesting to an angelic or Gabrielic visitation, at least two crucial issues inherently arise. First, there is supernatural authority involved: encounters are not just human, or even with human authorities (i.e. civil, ecclesiastical, etc.), but are

[97] However, Watt suggests that 39:67-74 and possibly 89:22-30 are Qur'anic theophanies (Watt, W. Montgomery, and Richard Bell. *[Bell's] Introduction to the Qur'an*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, 80).

[98] Theophanies are visible manifestations of a deity, and in the Old Testament are often understood to be pre-incarnational appearances of the Lord Jesus himself – i.e. to Abraham (Gen. 18), at the burning bush to Moses (Ex. 3:2), leading the children of Israel through the desert (Ex. 13:21-22; I Cor. 10:1-4), and elsewhere. In Islam, at least one commentator speaks to this (though other Muslims would likely object to the inference that anything but Allah is divine, as is the case with Christian theophanies): "According to Seyyed H. Nasr, the Qur'an is to Muslims a central theophany of Islam (Nasr 1998, p. 43), equivalent to the theophany of Christ in Christianity" (Lubanska, Magdalena. "Muslim Religious Narratives and Perceptions of Christianity," *Muslims and Christians in the Bulgarian Rhodopes*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, 190). This is one of several core paradigm shifts between Islam and Christianity which must be kept in mind.

[99] Saint John of Damascus. *Writings: The Fount of Knowledge, The Philosophical Chapters, On Heresies, & On the Orthodox Faith*. Translated by Frederic H. Chase, Jr. Vol. 17. The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Washington, D. C.: Ex Fontibus Company, 2012, 198, 205. This text appears to be an excellent introduction to angelology.

[100] R. K. Harrison, "Angel," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 21; and J. M. Wilson, "Angel," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988), 124.

[101] Whatever the vagaries of angelology and the dizzying array of its hierarchies and names, within the various Abrahamic traditions the most prominent archangels seem to include Raphael, Uriel and Saraphel. Unfortunately, the confusion includes comment from the occult, which only confirms and correlates with Satan's appearing "as an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14), with how the serpent deceived Eve (Gen. 3:1-7, 13; II Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:14), and possibly with the deception of Muhammad (or others as well). Although recognized in Islam as having spiritual powers, at times Satan is presented as more of a nuisance than the biblical supra-human, highly sophisticated being with all-out evil intent.

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from a completely different plane of existence. Although such is likely of common acceptance, it becomes problematic when someone uses a perceived message from "beyond" to in some fashion, good or bad, effectively set themself as an authority over those not having such an encounter. Such a person essentially operates outside temporal confirmation, check, or accountability – there are no earthly mechanisms to "reign them in."[102] In the case of Muhammad, this issue is profoundly compounded, as he not only has a role as the receptor of the message but is its interpreter as well.[103] The second issue is that if the angel is one who is dispatched, the questions arise: on whose authority do they come, and is the sender good or evil? As soon as an angelic visitation is claimed, the above problems engage, and the supposed angelic message, by definition, needs either rebuttal or confirmation.[104]

Given Gabriel's high placement and the unqualified authority attributed to his various apparitions (Christian and Islamic), determining the authenticity of the disparate accounts is necessary. Both Islam and Christianity assert that Jibril/ Gabriel's messages are not his own – that they are from Allah/Yahweh – with the people, the angel visits only being receptors, not initiators of the messages.[105] Though the Christian record likely stands without the Gabriel narratives, in Islam, Jibril's authenticity is existential, and Islam's ensuing and exclusive claims are not mute:

> Islam claims to be the true religion for humankind [3:19]. It affirms that Muhammad is the "Seal of the Prophets," the last and the greatest of all prophets who superseded all prophets before him, including Jesus. The Qur'an is believed to be the verbally inspired Word of God, dictated to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel from the eternal [and uncreated] original in heaven. It is said to contain the full and final revelation of God, surpassing and completing all previous revelations[, and that throughout time not even one letter has changed].[106]

These statements, premised solely on Jibril's visits to Muhammad, must either be affirmed or rejected. Whether by assertions of their divine nature, the challenges to produce something like it, or threats against forgery, plagiarism, tampering, or

[102] Two of the first to purportedly validate Muhammad were Bahira and Waraqa, both of whom were operating outside any recognized or established structure of ecclesiastical authority or accountability.

[103] Vincent J. Cornell, "Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: The Relationship Between Faith and Practice in Islam," *The Oxford History of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 310.

[104] Established truth may not be jeopardized, but neither are such messages to be categorically suppressed: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything" (I Thess. 5:19-21), and "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (I Jn. 4:1). In this author's experience, usually such encounters quickly manifest their veracity or falsehood.

[105] Sheikh Qadhi, as quoted in White, James R. *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2013, 55.

[106] Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb. *Answering Islam The Crescent in Light of the Cross*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002, 11.

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unbelief, Islam's statements are singular, monolithic, and exclusive.[107] Although the Qur'an appears highly affirmative of the earlier (biblical) Scriptures, Islam's later challenges take blunt exception to the biblical text. Whether asserting its internal truth or that there is no external text that can rival it, the Qur'an clearly sets Muhammad's revelations both as the consummate and as the final text. As Geisler and Saleeb conclude, "By any measure these are outstanding claims that challenge all other religions and deserve careful scrutiny by any sincere seeker of truth."[108]

Gabriel, and the Biblical Record

As his position as an archangel is second only to the Godhead, Gabriel is biblically understood to be a serious actor of the highest order. When introducing himself to Zechariah (Lk. 1:19), he says of himself:[109]

ἐγώ	εἰμι	Γαβριὴλ	ὁ	παρεστηκὼς	ἐνώπιον	τοῦ	θεοῦ	καὶ	ἀπεστάλην
I	am	Gabriel	the one	having stood along	before	the	God	and	I was delegated

λαλῆσαι	πρὸς	σὲ	
to	speak	to	you

Whether interpreted as "stood along[side]" or as "before" God, a stronger statement cannot be made that the consequence of any ensuing message is bar none. The trembling that the visited persons displayed is further evidence that Gabriel's supreme, heavenly dimension was immediately recognized and taken as authentic.

Though not nearly as prolific as in Islam, Gabriel's biblical appearances are highly defined.[110] In the first he is beckoned to help Daniel understand what "pertains to the appointed time of the end" (Dan. 8:19, from 8:16-27). Daniel's penitent prayer (Dan. 9) is heard in the highest heaven and Gabriel, the same angel he "had seen in the vision at the first, came … in swift flight" to him (9:21). An eschatological message is given, and like the previous one, it is very unusual in its degree of detail and specificity (and quite in contrast to the often "figurative," vague language or non-committal stance of shallow or counterfeit "messages"). How these details might work out was not apparent to Daniel, yet a very concrete statement is given – one which has proven so accurate that critics have vigorously asserted Daniel wrote *after*

[107] For Qur'anic sources on each of these, see: the assertions of its divine nature – 2:285; 3.7; 4:136; 6:19; 16:102; 26.192-194; 44.2-6; 56.78-80; 85.21–22; for the challenges to produce something like it – 2.23; 11.13; 17.88; 28.49-51; 52:34; and for threats against forgery, etc., see 10:37-39; 11:13; 16:103-105 and 69:39-52.

[108] Geisler and Saleeb. *Answering Islam*, 11.

[109] Eberhard Nestle, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), Lk. 1:19. Unless noted otherwise, all biblical citations are from *The Revised Standard Version.* Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1971, and any emphases are added.

[110] Did Gabriel make biblical appearances other than the four listed here? The "man clothed in linen" of Dan.10:5-14 is identified as Michael, though Dan. 12:1-6 infers that it is someone other than Michael (Gabriel? Christ?). That Daniel specifically identifies both Gabriel and Michael also infers that this is not Gabriel. An identically identified "man clothed in linen" also appears to Ezekiel (9:2-3, 11; 10:2, 6-7), and is variously thought to be Christ, Michael, or an unidentified angelic being. These are reminiscent of Christ, in Rev. 1:13: "one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe."

the events he describes.[111] The strength of the reaction by early-date critics itself suggests Daniel was not "re-mastering" previously generated material (there was no earlier material to "re-master," or critics would have pointed out the earlier material), with the strength of that criticism only underscoring the prophecy's specificity and accuracy. In both prophecies there is an irrevocable, advance, and unambiguous commitment to and certainty of what was yet to happen.

Of particular note is that a man of Daniel's stature is the recipient. Of impeccable character and without blemish or fault, Daniel's training and experience were of the highest caliber (cf. Dan. 1:4-5, 17, 20, and his several promotions to the highest positions in the land). He was also not one given to self-aggrandizement or propagation – he willingly accepted removal from power when political tides turned, and did not fight when sinister actors committed him to the lion's den (cf. Eze. 14:14, 20; and Jesus' validation of Daniel's message in Matt. 24:15).

There is also virtually no way Daniel could or would have defended such a message through self-advocacy: he was not interested in the king's food or advancement (Dan. 1:8), and did not attempt to preempt or compete with the king's magicians in interpreting dreams (or he was the last to step forward to do so – Dan. 2:12-19; 4:7-8 and 5:7-13). Proclaiming anything like Gabriel's visions would have all but ensured near-total ostracism by both friends and foes alike, a turn of events which he would have made no attempt to mitigate (cf. Dan. 6). Instead, he accepted it unpretentiously in the fear of the Lord, faithfully going to his prayer window three times a day ("in secret" – Matt. 6:6). Such a life of quiet but fervent prayer is what his character had steadfastly been – a righteous life, without self-advancement.

Gabriel's next biblical appearances are to Zechariah (Lk. 1:5-25) and Mary (the Annunciation – Lk. 1:26-38). Comment on these is included below in the summary of Gabriel's activities as a whole.

Looking at Gabriel's four appearances as a composite whole, consistent features are manifest:

- In each case, Gabriel is positively identified, and though in Mary's case, it is not clear *how* she knew (Lk. 1:26 – possibly it was deduced after talking with Elizabeth and Zechariah?), it was later conclusively stated that Gabriel was the visitor. When relating her account to her contemporaries, Gabriel's identity was clear and finally unquestioned for Mary. As is common throughout Scripture, the identity of an angel is eventually (always?) clear, and often by explicit statement during the encounter. People were not left wondering who they were speaking to or had encountered.
- The initial responses of near-paralyzing "fear" would be healthy and understandable. It was a holy fear with appropriate inward (if not outward)

[111] This rejection may be a denial of predictive prophecy at large, and is from as early as Porphyry (ca. 260 A.D.). See: Jerome, "Prefaces to the Commentaries," *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley, vol. 6, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 500.

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prostration at someone so holy and heavenly. Anything "para-normal" in Gabriel's visitations is otherwise absent – the recipients were fully conscious and were otherwise living and responding normally, devoid of anything oppressive or suggestive of psychological or demonic torment.

- The biblical record presents Gabriel as only being activated for events of the utmost positive character or of the most sweeping importance in human history at large.
- In each case, the purpose was one of true enlightenment, of provision of something distinctly good, or of both. The purposes were constructive and positive, not degenerative, and were not preoccupied with "submission" but were cast in a relational context, with obedience naturally following. Gabriel's constructive intents are specifically recorded: to Zechariah, he says "I was sent . . . to bring you this *good news*" (Lk 1:19), and to Mary, "the Lord is with you! . . . Do not be afraid, Mary, for *you have found favor with God*. . . . The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and *the power of the Most High will overshadow you*" (Lk. 1:28, 30, 35). Even to Daniel, it was to alleviate his lack of understanding, and although disciplined, even Zechariah's doubt ended with a full, healthy restoration.
- Although the recipients of the Gabrielic visits shared the delivered messages, there is no record that they actively proclaimed or defended them. The recipients recognized the messages were owned by a higher power, so left them for the originating power to propagate (in contrast to Muhammad, who increasingly turned to the sword and *jihad*).
- Each of Gabriel's messages has come to pass, and each fulfillment has been consistent in both the spirit and the detail of the original prophecies.

The integrity of the Gabrielic encounters, from any vantage point, is undisputed and of the highest order.

Jibril, and the Islamic Record

Although Islamic testimony to Jibril is quite prolific, and he is held to be the highest of the archangels, he is only mentioned by name three times in the Qur'an (in part due to his being referred to in other ways – more on this below). This leaves many of Jibril's attested events as being non-canonical, opening the possibility of diverse accounts of what may have transpired. Nonetheless, the total of the Qur'anic record where Jibril is identified by name is:

> Say: 'Whoever is an enemy to Jibril – surely he has brought it down on your heart by the permission of God, confirming what was before it, and as a guidance and good news to the believers (2:97).[112]
>
> Whoever is an enemy to God, and His angels, and His messengers, and Jibril and Michael – surely God is an enemy to the disbelievers' (2:98).

[112] Unless noted otherwise, all quotations from the Qur'an are from the A. J. Droge translation, as presented in Nickel, Gordon D. *The Quran with Christian Commentary A Guide to Understanding the Scripture of Islam*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

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> If both of you [Muhammad, and one of his wives] turn to God (in repentance), both your hearts are (well) inclined, but if both of you support each other against him, surely God – He is his Protector, and Jibril (too), and the righteous among the believers, and beyond that the angels are (his) supporters (66:4).

Though mentioning that Jibril is a protector and that he is not to be opposed, there is nothing here beyond very generic, commonly held knowledge.[113] Are there accounts in the Qur'an or hadith which parallel the biblical records of Gabriel? Daniel appears to be absent from the Qur'an and secondary literature (hadith, siras),[114] and although Zechariah and Mary are present, their stories differ substantially from the biblical accounts. The accounts of Jibril's appearance to Zechariah arguably have a similar outline as in Luke 1, but the accounts of Mary, though expressing very high regard for her (3:42), are much more extensive and have notable departures from the biblical record. Though Jibril announces Jesus' birth and that he would be a prophet and a good man (3:48-63), the variances include that Moses and Aaron are Mary's siblings (19.28), Mary is part of the Trinity (5.116), Jibril is the agent of Mary's pregnancy (not the Holy Spirit – 21.91; 66.12; compare Lk. 1:35), Mary gives birth in the desert (19:23-26), Mary's son is *'Īsā* (not *Yasūa*, the Arabic equivalent of "Jesus"), Zechariah was Mary's step-father (3:37), and more. Such divergences are not just a matter of some "corrupted" scripture: with such open conflicts of fact, the Qur'an and the Bible cannot be said to have come from the same source.[115]

In addition to the major paradigm shift of the Qur'an possibly being an Islamic "theophany" (footnote 5), two other areas of Islam's *modus operandi* differ markedly from Christianity and are crucial for grasping Islam's understanding of Jibril. First, Islam's post-Qur'anic secondary literature – especially the siras and the hadith – are profuse and hold near canonical weight, so they play an oversized role in Islam's understanding of the Qur'an and itself that they are considered here. Second, Islam's understanding of "spirit" and "holy spirit" is much different than Christianity's. Being the pervasive and existential pillars that these two factors are for Islam, Jibril's presence and activity become much more prevalent, and tracking him through the writings becomes a complex and tedious endeavor.

Islam's understanding of Jibril recognizes him as the *rūḥ al-qudus* (lit. "the spirit of the holy," "holy spirit," or a "holy" "spirit"), as in "The holy spirit has brought it [the Qur'an] down from your Lord in truth" (16:102).[116] "Muslim commentators agree that

[113] The lack of substantive historic information in the Qur'an about Jibril is strikingly similar to the Qur'an's lack of historic information about another of Islam's key actors: Muhammad.

[114] Daniel does not appear to be significant in Islamic thinking. Unless mentioned using a different spelling or name, he is not mentioned in the Qur'an (per Droge, Pickthall, Ali, Shakir and Arberry), or the hadith of Tabari, Bukhari or al-Qurtubi.

[115] Further, Nickel delicately observes that "beyond false perceptions [of Jewish and Christian beliefs], . . . many [of Islam's] denials show a keen sense of some of the implications of the deity and death of Jesus." Nickel, "Christian Response," *Quran with Christian Commentary*.

[116] This paragraph is indebted to Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, and especially his commentary at 16:102, 97:4, and 17:85; also, to Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible*, 57, 426, 445.

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the Holy Spirit in these passages means the angel Gabriel."[117] Jibril is often seen as fulfilling the role in Islam which the Holy Spirit fills in Christian belief[118] – that of chief comforter, guide, rebuker, protector, and teacher. When coupled with being the one bringing down the word or spirit from above (2:97; 26:193-194), Jibril must then be the "holy" "spirit" ("holy" and "spirit" generically, not as a proper name, as in Christianity). That *rūḥ al-qudus* can also refer not only to Jibril but also to Jesus or a variety of other entities over a very large, diffracted, and ill-defined area[119] makes any understanding of him quite fraught, if not dubious.[120] From an Islamic perspective, Jibril can be both *the* holy spirit and the bringer of *a* holy spirit - quite in contrast to the Christian understanding and record (although Christianity also recognizes both functions). To further contort the issue, even though these superficially appear to vindicate Muhammad, a dichotomy remains in the Islamic literature of whether the messenger's impartation was one of direct revelation or simply an aide stimulating Muhammad's pre-existent understanding to greater levels (i.e., passive revelation, or inspiration).[121] Regardless, the "spirit" is often understood in Islam to be Jibril, especially when imparting either life or a message.[122]

The hadith universally support the contention that Jibril delivered the Qur'an to Muhammad. From Tabari: "Gabriel (upon him peace) taught this to the Prophet of God,"[123] and from Al-Qurṭubī: "it is clear that . . . the *Fātiḥah* [sura 1]. . . . was revealed in Makkah and . . . Jibrīl brought it down."[124] Also from Al-Qurṭubī:

> 'Purest *Rūḥ'* is said by Ibn 'Abbās and Qatādah to be Jibrīl. Ḥassān said:

[117] Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God* and *The Moslem Christ*. Charlottesville, VA, ANM Publishers, no date. 100.

[118] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018, 427.

[119] John L., Esposito, ed. "Ruh Spirit, breath (of life)," *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 268. Also see Dost, Suleyman. *An Arabian Qur'ān: Towards A Theory of Peninsular Origins (Dissertation)*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2017, 167-168.

[120] Recognizing this maze and the questions Christians will certainly have, see Ibn Taymiyya's response: "A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity," *Aljawab Al-Sahjh*, edited and translated by Thomas F. Michel S.J. Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1984. 123, 261-262, 278.

[121] Further examination of the natures of revelation and inspiration would be truly valuable. In part, one would need to ask if we are made in the "image of God" (Gen. 1:26-27; Rom. 1:19; 2:1), and what is the role of this "image" in both revelation as well as inspiration (i.e. "passive" revelation).

[122] Nickel observes that "Muslim commentators came to identify "holy spirit" in the Quran with Gabriel, . . . [that] if readers understand 2.97 to be in parallel with 16.102, they would tend to identify the holy spirit with Gabriel" Also, that 16:102 "is the last of only four occurrences of the expression 'holy spirit' (*rūḥ al-qudus*, lit. "the spirit of the holy") in the Quran (also 2.87; 2.253; 5.110). In the three other occurrences, "holy spirit" is used only in connection with 'Īsā" (all quotes here from *Quran with Christian Commentary*, commentary to 16:102, emphasis added). This seems to warrant further study.

[123] Tabari. *Selections from The Comprehensive Exposition of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'an*. Translated by Scott C. Lucas. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Cambridge, UK: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought & The Islamic Texts Society, 2017, 215.

[124] Qurṭubī, Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Farḥ al-Anṣārī al- Khazrajī al-Andalusī al-. *Tafsir Al-Qurtubi The General Judgements of the Qur'an and Clarification of What It Contains of the Sunnah and Ayahs of Discrimination*. Translated by Aisha Bewley. Vol. 1: Al-Fātiḥah & Sūrat al-Baqarah 1-141. 4 vols. Diwan Press, No Date. Sūrat al-Fātiḥah: "Topic Two: Its Revelation and Its Rulings," 18.

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> Jibrīl is Allah's Messenger to us
> and the Purest *Rūḥ.* It is not concealed.
>
> An-Naḥḥās said that Jibrīl is called a *rūḥ*, and purity is attributed to him, because Allah formed him as a *rūḥ* without any parent, which is why 'Īsā is also called a *rūḥ*. Ghālib ibn 'Abdullāh related that Mujāhid said, 'The Pure is Allah Almighty, as al-Ḥasan said, and the *Rūḥ* is Jibrīl.'[125]

Lastly, the Prophet himself, when asked about the "spirit," is said to have responded: "Do you not know it is Jibril, he who comes to me?"[126] He not only gives positive identification that Jibril is the spirit, but also that he, Muhammad, is in direct, and by implication, at least somewhat frequent linkage with him.

With Jibril already understood as the "holy" "spirit" and as the one delivering the Qur'an to Muhammad, the following reflect the Islamic understanding of Jibril's broader role:

- Among many other things, his direct interaction with Muhammad includes –
  - Jibril accompanied Muhammad on the Mi'raj to Jerusalem and provided access up to the seventh heaven, to the throne of Allah, where he along the way saw or talked to many of the biblical personalities, including Adam, Noah, Joseph, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, John the Baptist and Jesus.[127]
  - Jibril opened Muhammad's chest, cleansed his heart, and inserted revelation.
  - Jibril saved Muhammad from an assassination plot by the Meccans.[128]
- Jibril is attested, by various Qur'anic and secondary accounts, to having been involved with Adam and Eve, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Pharoah, Jonah, breaking open the well of Zamzam for Hagar and Ishmael, Zechariah, John the Baptist, Mary, Jesus, protecting the Ka'ba from Satan, at Muhammad's birth, at the Battles of the Trench and Badr, and eventually at the final judgment in weighing the deeds of all.
- The *Hadith of Jibril* further elevates Jibril with its unveiling of the Five Pillars of Islam and Jibril's validation of Muhammad's doctrine, thereby very directly bringing both to front and center stage.

More specifically, what of Jibril's revelations to Muhammad? They are said to have begun on the Night of Power (97:1, 3), continuing sura by sura throughout his life. According to tradition, Allah's messages were delivered orally by Jibril to the Prophet, beginning when he was 40 years old. With his earlier travels and exposure,

[125] Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī,* Vol. 1: Ayah 2:87; also 2:253 - Vol. 2, pg. 625.
[126] Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998, 255. Also al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī,* Vol. 3: Surat al-Baqarah 254-Sürah Ali Imran 95. Ayah 2:281, pg. 137.
[127] Esposito, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, 234.
[128] Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 222; also 135.

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he should have had sufficient life experience to have some significant bearings to assess his situation, to sort any "wheat" from the "chaff," or to otherwise challenge anything appearing erroneous. Becoming suicidal and fearing demonic possession though[129] (the *jinn* were too much a part of Arabian desert life to miss a chance to meddle), he was "profoundly shaken."[130] That there are reports of seizures, hallucinations or other unusual psychotic (or evil spiritual) activity concurrent with the revelations is cause for alarm:

> The notion . . . that [Muhammad] was subject to epilepsy finds curious confirmation in the notices recorded of his experiences during the proem [i.e. prelude] of revelation – the importance of which is not lessened by the probability that the symptoms were often artificially produced. That process was attended by a fit of unconsciousness, accompanied (or preceded) at times by the sound of bells in the ears or the belief that someone was present: by a sense of fright, such as to make the patient burst out into perspiration: by the turning of the head to one side: by foaming at the mouth: by the reddening or whitening of the face: by a sense of headache.[131]

Jeffrey further notes Buhl's observation: "hysterical natures find unusual difficulty and often complete inability to distinguish the false from the true."[132] This would be further confirmed by Muhammad's reliance on Khadija, Waraqa and others in looking for assurance that his early encounters were not demonic. If Buhl's observation is correct, it is hardly a credential for any trustworthy prophet of the Almighty.

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[129]Reuven Firestone, *An Introduction To Islam For Jews*. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 2008, 23.

[130]Juan E. Campo, "Muhammad," *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Encyclopedia of World Religions. New York: Fact On File, Inc., 2009, 492. Righteous Gabriel and evil "jinn" being actively and simultaneously present is not possible – they would have first fought to the death (because of the antithesis of their natures). If in fact there was demonic presence (or even the question of it – I Thess. 5:22; Jude 23; also biblical directives to be "pure," "holy" and "above reproach"), when did Muhammad get "cleaned up" to become a true prophet of God? Islam answers, "When Jibril split open his chest and purged it!" But why, over time, the increasing manifestations of the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16-21, etc.), not to mention the justifications of them? Masood, without clear citation, further states Muhammad's revelations were "a different kind of consciousness. Perspiration would pour from his forehead. Occasionally he would snort like a camel . . . Often his eyes would turn red. . . ." (Masood, Steven. *The Bible and The Qur'an A Question of Integrity*. Summerfield, FL: ITL-USA, Jesus to Muslims, Inc., 2012. 24). If so, it's no wonder he may well have seen Jibril as an agent of terror - as a "terrorist"! - and that he then had no qualms about inflicting terror in the name of religion. Also see Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 1, Book 1, #2-4.

[131] Margoliouth, *Mohammed*, 46, as quoted in Arthur Jeffrey, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," in Ibn Warraq, ed. and trans. *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000. 345. In this author's opinion this does not confirm, but may well be evidence of demonic activity, especially given the spiritual import of what transpired (cf. Mk. 1:23-26; 9:17-29; also Mk. 5:1-20). Biblically, in addition to the expulsion of any demons (or "jinn"), an important antidote is God's specific protection: Job 1:10; Hos. 2:6-8. Margoliouth's comment about these episodes often being "artificially produced" is also warrant for further suspicion.

[132] Arthur Jeffrey, "The Quest of the Historical Muhammad," in Ibn Warraq, ed. and trans. *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2000. 346. This corresponds to the definition of "psychosis": "fundamental mental derangement (as schizophrenia) *characterized by defective or lost contact with reality*" (Merriam-Webster, Inc. "Psychosis," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1996, emphasis added).

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As asked above, was there another being physically present as a primary revelator, or was the message actually Muhammad's own thoughts and emotions, with a bit of prompting or guidance by an outside agent? Muhammad claimed Jibril had spoken to him at the Hira cave but that later revelations were more subtle, that "the ideas were dropped into his mind as unconsciously as the bees learned where and how to construct their hives. [This] was *wahy*, inspiration,"[133] not revelation.

Commentary is quite multi-faceted in attempting to explain what happened, with an unflattering interpretation of Jibril's supposed dictates to Muhammad to recite (87:6) being that "we have here a somewhat crude attempt of the Prophet to represent to himself the more or less unconscious process by which his ideas arose and gradually took shape in his mind. It is no wonder if in such confused imagery the details are not always self-consistent."[134]

Regardless, that the resulting text has considerable if not strong overtones of being a derivative of earlier Judaic, Christian, Zoroastrian and other writings is noteworthy. Concerning the very first revelation (surah 96), Firestone notes that "These lines appear in a rhymed prose style known as *saj*`, a form not unlike some pre-Islamic oral poetry recited by individuals who were thought to have been possessed by demons. . . . [who] enabled them to recite complex Arabic forms."[135] Others, too, have with increasing strength shown the likeness of earlier, Syriac-Aramaic and apocryphal texts in the Qur'anic record and Islamic thinking.[136] If the Qur'an is fully "original" revelation, why the prevalent tie-ins to previous, well-known literature?

Also of note are the purported frequency of contact between Muhammad and Jibril, and the often social-only and quite low-grade nature of their interactions. At least once the prophet complained to Jibril about why it had been so long between visits, almost suggesting that Jibril "owed" it to him to visit and inferring that visits were frequent, if not expected.[137] It is unusual, if Jibril is from the highest heaven, for

[133] Peter G. Riddell, and Peter Cotterell. *Islam in Context*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003, 22.

[134] Ibn Warraq, ed. *The Origins of the Koran Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998, 37. See Ibn Warraq, *Origins*, 39, for a yet more scathing assessment of Muhammad's revelatory credibility.

[135] Firestone, *Islam for Jews*, 23. Islamic tradition rebuts this with "the dogma [of Muhammad's illiteracy, which] functioned to emphasize the 'miraculous inimitability' (*i'jaz*) of the Qur'an: Moses could transform walking sticks into snakes, and Jesus could heal and resurrect, but Muhammad spoke directly for God in God's perfect speech" (Robinson, *New Cambridge History*, 186). Also note the demonic dimension in the Firestone quote.

[136] See: Luxenburg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran*; Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*; Nickel, "Bible in the Background," *Quran with Christian Commentary*; Ohlig & Puin, *The Hidden Origins of Islam*; Luling; and others. The question also arises – how were such "revelations" initially validated, that purported visitations by Jibril could be entertained by *any* religion's orthodoxy? Though the Meccan establishment gave stiff resistance, with Muhammad's small but growing band of followers and a progressive seizing of power, he was not only the receiver of revelation but its interpreter and enforcer as well, that he increasingly had a *carte blanche* environment in which to work as he saw fit.

[137] Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*, 137. Bukhari notes Jibril used to meet Muhammad every night of Ramadan (Bukhari, Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail bin Ibrahim bin al-Mughira al-Ja'fai. *Sahih Bukhari* (version 0910112346244624-21). Edited by Mika'il al-Almany. Translated by M. Muhsin

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interactions to have become so commonplace or mundane or for a somewhat "buddy-buddy" inclination to emerge. Elsewhere, when the prophet wanted another wife, Jibril fortuitously gives a revelation allowing such, or in another instance, when Jibril sends greetings for Muhammad's wife: these are all certainly dubious, low-grade social interchanges for any true "man of God." In addition to being a revelator, Jibril seems to be a personal counselor, psychologist, confidante, cheerleader, justifier, teacher, theologian, military strategist, and personal friend (if not Muhammad's convenient servant at times).[138]

Whatever the twists and turns in the story, finally, "the Muslim belief about the Qur'an is that all of its words are dictated by Allah through the angel Gabriel to a human messenger"[139] (cf. 4:136), and have directly come from the permanent tablets in heaven. It's from this that the contention with the biblical record arises.

Evaluation

How does one evaluate the sheer force and claims to exclusiveness which these two narratives present? Biblical Gabriel is limited to only the four historic, self-contained accounts, whereas:

1. Qur'anic Jibril's record is both profuse and pervasive, and
2. He alone is responsible for the delivery of the full Qur'an, that the totality of its content is solely a subset of his activities. Further, there are not only the statements as presented, but there are also the statements which have *not* been made. It is from the latter that the points of departure are further premised - they are where the additional critique must happen.[140]

Included in these are core identity questions that must be answered: Who is the sending deity? What is his nature? Are the identities of all entities transparent and tested (whether they be the initial sources, the "messengers," or the resulting texts)?[141] When asking the question, "What is truth?", which Yahweh/Allah, the Bible/Qur'an, Jesus/Muhammad, and Jabril (but not Gabriel) all attempt to do, if the identity of who is speaking is not fully revealed when claiming either deity or truth, it

Khan. 1st ed. Vol. 1–9, 2009. https://d1.islamhouse.com/data/en/ ih_books/single/en_Sahih_Al-Bukhari.pdf. 1:1:5, pg. 9).

[138] Compare with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, who yes, were approachable and interactive, but without either they or others ever losing a sense of the pure and holy, or the divine purpose in what was happening.

[139] Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, commentary to 1:2, 33.

[140] As here, too often error looks to distract from the truth, to establish other foci, agenda, platforms or concurrences, where the true error or its detrimental consequences are hidden or not clearly seen. If these distractions are successful, the battle is either fatally lost, or is at least very difficult to recover from (cf. II Cor. 2:11, for which supporting examples are many, starting with Eve in the Garden of Eden, Gen. 3:1-7).

[141] Identity and its recognition are the first items of business in any interchange, so all know who they are encountering. In Scripture's angelic encounters, the identity of an angel is usually clear, and often by explicit statement in the moment: Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:6,) Joshua before crossing the Jordan River (Josh. 5:14), Jacob wrestling with the "angel" (Gen. 32:29-30), and though not specifically angelic, Jesus walking on the water (Matt. 14:28-29). The positive establishment of identity, as an evidence of truth, appears to need further discussion.

would be untruth and deception of the greatest magnitude (this is related to abrogation, in terms of its valuation of transparency and permanence). The identity of each of these agents needs to be blameless, above reproach, with full disclosure, and without question.[142]

According to the respective accounts, Gabriel and Jibril do identify themselves: in the Bible, Gabriel is directly identified as an inherent part of what is transpiring, to Daniel in his visions (Dan. 8:16-17) and to Zechariah (Lk. 1:19), while in Mary's case he is later identified (Lk. 1:26). Understanding that the *rūḥ al-qudus* is usually Jibril in Islam's records, then yes, Jibril is identified in the Qur'an as the agent/apparition or revelation, and is prolifically present in the secondary literature.

Although Gabriel/Jibril are at the center of the action, a far more acute issue is on whose behalf they speak – is that source reliable (or not), and is it good or evil? The biblical account of the burning bush in Exodus 3 is central and, as an event, is unparalleled: there Yahweh clearly and transparently presents himself – not just saying his name or who he is (which he does four times in this account), but as a direct and personal presentation *as God* to man. This event is so profound and direct that "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (v. 6, cf. Deut. 34:10-12). Whereas Muhammad only met with an angel, Moses had a direct encounter with the Almighty, which left no ambiguity or question of who he was speaking with – there was a full, complete declaration, and there was no sleight of hand suggesting a mistaken identity or foul play (Islam confirms this, citing the burning bush account three times – 20:9-48; 27:7–14; 28:29–35). Yahweh is also careful to link His identity to what the whole house of Israel already had as established truth: "Say to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, *the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob*, has sent me to you': this is my name forever, and *thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations*" (Ex. 3:15). There was no revision or "updating" of previous, "corrupted" Scripture – Yahweh is clear and direct, that this was, is, and always will be His name, who He is, and how He is to be identified.

Yahweh also presented himself in other, equally immediate and miraculous manifestations to various people: i.e. to Moses on Mount Sinai and in the pillar of fire and the cloud in the wilderness, at the downfall of Jericho, in Gideon's rout, to the boy Samuel, through Elijah on Mount Carm-el, to Isaiah (Isa. 6), and in the sending of John the Baptist. But Yahweh went much further, consummately presenting himself in living flesh and blood, among common man, in the incarnation of Jesus, daily walking as God himself with people, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, delivering the oppressed, and teaching that he is the Bread of Life, the Door, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Finally, by rending the veil in the Holy of Holies at Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead, heaven itself was opened, completing the immediate and direct access for all to God Almighty in heaven! Yahweh has directly presented himself to man and has circumvented the need for angelic (i.e.

[142] A search for the terms just listed, especially "blameless," produces a rich list of findings, including: Gen. 6:9; 17:1; Deut. 18:13 (note that this verse immediately precedes the instruction about true/false prophets, a relevant point for here); Job 1:8; Ps. 19:13; 101:6; 119:1; Prov. 11:20; Dan. 6:22; Lk. 1:6; I Tim. 3:2ff; 5:7; 6:14

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Gabrielic) intermediaries.[143]

Is Allah self-revelatory, and does he declare who he is? Islam also has the burning bush incident, where Allah "spoke to Moses directly" (4.164; also 7:143-144, 20:10-36; 27:7–12; 28:29–35) and "We called [Moses] . . . and We brought him near in conversation" (19.52). True, Allah seems to appear here, and possibly to other earlier prophets as well, but with Muhammad's "new covenant" (i.e. the Qur'an), former direct encounters become archaic and immaterial anomalies needing to be un-"corrupted" (if not abrogated), with the Qur'an denying the possibility of such encounters going forward (4:48).[144] At best, encounters with Allah now appear to always be through Jibril as an intermediary, and are never first person, even with Muhammad as his agent of choice. Several ayahs seemingly contradict Allah's distance, but they in fact, confirm it:

- "When my servants ask you about Me, surely I am near" (2:186). However, this is *Allah's* testimony, not the witness of those he says he is near to. For mere humanity, there is still an untraversable chasm in terms of accessibility.
- That Allah is "closer to him than (his) jugular vein" (50:16) also speaks of being very near, but not of fellowship or relationship; only that Allah is in very close in physical proximity, presumably as a watcher of each one's good or bad deeds, and that none can escape his knowing every detail of what they do.
- Even that "the prophet is closer to the believers than they are to themselves" (33:6) betrays this issue – it is the *prophet* who is near, not Allah (or even Jibril).

Allah is remote: there is no mutually held, interactive relationship.

The Qur'an mentions Allah over 2,500 times,[145] presenting his names, traits, "signs," and roles (creator, king, master, judge, guide, and deliverer[146]). Does Allah reveal his names? As Qur'anically understood, yes, in abundance! It's interesting though, that

[143] Many Scriptures further sow the universality of Yahweh's self-presentation to all mankind: see Eze. 18:23; Rom. 1:19-21; 2:1ff; 3:21-26; 9:22-26; I Tim. 1:16; 2:4; Heb. 8:8-13; 9:24-28 and II Pet. 3:9. Even the angels recognize the far greater revelation in Jesus: "For if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?" (Heb. 2:2-4; also 1:1-2:1).

[144] The Qur'an does allow for one who "only seeks the face of his Lord, the Most High" (92:20; also 96:19); but references to "meeting God" refer to final judgement, not for fellowship or interaction with him in the here-and-now (56:50, 78:17). The Qur'an also speaks of God having covenants with man, or man with God, but such seem to be highly rote, unengaged matters devoid of any comprehensible interaction (13:20-21, 25; 19:87; 33:15, 23; 48:10).

[145] Nickel perceptively notes that "in many important theological passages, the Quran seems to use the name *Allah* deliberately, to distinguish it from other concepts of God" (Nickel, "Use of the Name Allah," *Quran with Christian Commentary*, 19). In other words, the Qur'an recognizes an inherent difference between Allah and Yahweh.

[146] Though roles of father or lover are absent, and that of deliverer is weak (Anderson, Mark. "Allah in the Qur'an," in Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, 572-3). Though supported elsewhere, I am indebted to Anderson's article for much of the information here on Allah.

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"[Allah's] names are important, *as [Allah] has not revealed himself in Islam*"[147] (emphases added): Allah's names are then, in effect, an attempted substitute for the presentation of his actual self. Allah may be above all as "the Being Who exists necessarily, by Himself, comprising all the attributes of perfection,"[148] and that "to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names" (17:110 Ali; also 20:8; 7:180). He may be the "most just of judges" (95.8) and the "most compassionate of the compassionate" (7.151), but if he is irrevocably outside of human experience, what is the meaning of his existence (. . . or ours?)? There appears to be no need for a common or interactively held understanding between Allah and man of who Allah is – Allah only relates to himself and is outside man's reach or ability to apprehend or sufficiently comprehend. He is remote, absolute, inaccessible, and lacking in "essential holiness"[149] – he is austere, if not demanding robotic obedience of people. The Qur'an "stresses that [Allah] is unlike anything created (e.g., 112.4) and makes associating . . . anything created [with him] . . . as the unforgivable sin [*shirk*] (4.48)."[150] By extension, this possibly means anything created cannot or should not "associate" – i.e. relate – with *or to* him. He thus has no need to reveal himself or to present as someone who needs to be known, "leaving Muslims to plead his unknowability, as they have historically done."[151] At best, he only relates through a proxy, an intermediary – Jibril – and subsequently through the Qur'an. One might also ask just what kind of deity or Ultimate Being this is, to second its authority so totally to others to manage and oversee (… and just what *is* he doing while not engaged here?)? *By definition*, Allah is functionally inaccessible: he does not self-identify or provide any full self-revelation; he is not directly accessible. More is to be said contrasting Gabriel and Jibril, but if this is the state of the greater powers they represent, what is there to yet consider?

Why the concern about Allah's self-revelation? It is critical, as Jibril is representing an unknowable and unknown god. Even though Allah is supposedly making his intentions known through Jibril in the Qur'an, he is not making himself – *his person* – known or accessible. Parallel to that, Allah's only avenue of revelation is an angel (and subsequently, the Qur'an) – there is no mortal dealing with deity to directly verify that he is, who he is, or that he is the one speaking through the angel.[152] Allah, therefore, has no basis for speaking or entering an exchange – he is only remotely "dishing out" commands and verdicts, but is not directly verifiable. The Qur'an

[147] Dr. Christine Schirrmacher, in a book review of Hamid Molla Djafari. *Gott hat die schönsten Namen ... Islamische Gottesnamen, ihre Bedeutung, Verwendung und Probleme ihrer Übersetzung* [God has the most beautiful names. God's names in Islam, their meaning, use, and problems with their translation]. Peter Lang: Frankfurt 2001, from "Names of Allah, the 99 Beautiful," Answering Islam, https://www.answering-islam.org/ Index/N/names_of_allah.html (accessed Mar. 25, 2023).

[148] From Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon, as quoted in "Allah, the unique name of God," The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, https://www.muslim.org/islam/allah.htm, accessed Mar. 25, 2023.

[149] Mark Anderson, "Allah in the Qur'an," in Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, 573.

[150] Mark Anderson, "Allah in the Qur'an," in Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, 572.

[151] Mark Anderson, "Allah in the Qur'an," in Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, 573.

[152] In contrast, Moses spoke *with God* (Ex. 3:6 – not with or through an angel), as did Adam and Eve (Gen. 2-3), Abraham (Gen. 18), Jacob (Gen. 28:13), Gideon (Judges 6:12; 6:36), Samuel (I Sam. 3), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5ff), Paul on the Damascus Rd (Acts 9:1-22), the disciples in the Upper Room (Jn. 20:19-29), and John on Patmos (Rev. 1:9).

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describes what Allah does, says, and who he is *like*,[153] but does not present him in person-to-person interface.

Additional Matters

There are other direct, essential contrasts between Gabriel and Jibril that should at least be briefly identified (with some re-stated here, in the interest of a comprehensive summary).

Canonical inclusion: Gabriel's place in the biblical canon is clear and secure. The Qur'an hardly mentions Jibril by name, and even then, without concrete historical information, it does not place much weight on his temporal activity and provides little, if anything, specific for Muslims to believe with *canonical* certainty.[154] That the secondary literature is held in such high regard and attests to Jibril's being the transmitter of the Qur'an,[155] as well as his being the agent of many other things, makes his stature very high, but the lack of canonical inclusion leaves much to be desired.

Moral excellence: Gabriel's moral veracity is above reproach, while Jibril's is highly in question, especially if seen against the universal moral credence of James 3:1: "… you know that we who teach [or even more so, we who claim revelation,] shall be judged with greater strictness." The higher the spiritual authority, the greater the strictness, and the greater the chastisement should be if in error. If as exalted as each is said to be, Jibril and Gabriel should be subject to the very highest and most stringent order of moral excellence and purity (also see James 3:17-18; Matt. 5:3-9; Phil. 4:8).[156] That over time the standard that Jibril is held to is increasingly relaxed contraindicates this type of stringency.

Nature of activity and frequency of appearance: Gabriel was only activated for events of the utmost importance and so rarely appeared, as is fitting for one of such rank. That Jibril is frequently not just involved but seemingly entangled in common, mundane daily affairs seems to diminish and rather grossly overplay his role.[157]

Immediate responses: In all cases, appearances by Gabriel/Jibril were understandably met by profound trembling and utter alarm by those they visited

[153] Though not completely the same and often only implicitly stated, Allah's continuous use of the "like" mechanism in the Qur'an and Islamic thinking (i.e. inferring likeness to Yahweh, the earlier scriptures, etc.) does not appear to ever "upgrade" to "I am …" or that he is the final standard (except for blunt statements that this is so). In being analogous to Lucifer's wanting to be "like" God (Isa. 14:14b), this is a truly disturbing semblance.

[154] It should be noted that Islam could well say the same about the Trinity.

[155] Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī,* Vol. 1, "Topic Two: Its Revelation and Its Rulings," 17-18.

[156] A major issue concerning moral excellence is that Islam prefers a "power model," that if someone can overcome another, he is therefore justified, irrespective of the means used to do so. When "push comes to shove," gaining temporal control (political, military, economic, etc.) is the determinant issue for Islam, not whether one is of moral purity, character or virtue. If Allah himself is not held to a virtuous standard, but only one of absolute control, it follows that his people would hold to the same.

[157] Jesus was also very involved in the mundane, but lived above such, and was free of entanglement.

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(save after Jibril's visits to Muhammad became commonplace). In the case of Gabriel, the fear was healthy and appropriate for one suddenly in the presence of an archangel, and he frequently reassured the one visited (i.e. Lk. 1:30). In the case of Jibril however, Muhammad's response appears to have been characterized by terror, and was abusive and destructive enough that it left him fearing for his life and suspecting demonic activity.[158] Such may be the way Allah works, but it is not the way of Yahweh, who may pass judgment or effect discipline, but with the goal to redeem, not to further trouble or estrange His creation.

Purposes: The immediate responses of the ones visited closely reflect another comparison, that in each appearance, Gabriel's purpose was either to provide something distinctly good, of enlightenment, or of both. To Zechariah, it was to "bring you this good news" (Lk 1:19), to Mary, "Do not be afraid," and "you have found favor with God" (Lk. 1:30), and to Daniel, it was to help understand the vision and to give him assurance (Dan. 8:15–17; 9:21-23). Gabriel's objectives were positive and constructive and quite in contrast to Jibril's conditional preoccupation with total "submission." Gabriel's purposes were relational, with obedience and "submission" naturally following, while Jibril's were first ones of domination, then, hopefully, of some sort of limited relationship. Even in Zechariah's case, though he was disciplined, a healthy, full restoration ensued.

Warrior, or "non-resistant"?: Although the recipients of Gabriel's messages may have shared his tidings, they did not actively proclaim or defend them – they left the proclamation and defense of those messages to the higher power who had sent them. Initially, Muhammad may have been "meek and mild," but as his political power increased, force became an authorized modality having Qur'anic codification, with justification of the sword and armed *jihad* following in its wake. Muhammad looked to human agency (i.e. his own) to fulfill Jibril's messages, while Daniel fully left such in Yahweh's hands. According to David Margoliouth, "in order to gain his ends [Muhammad] recoils from no expedient, and he approves of similar unscrupulousness on the part of his adherents, when exercised in his interest."[159] More broadly, instead of countering with force, many of the earlier (Old Testament) prophets were killed as a result of their proclamations, and even the Qur'an acknowledges this (2:61, 91; 3:21, 112; 4:155, etc., and cf. Matt. 22:35). "God is not a god of confusion, but of peace" (I Cor. 14:33) – where does Jibril stand against this standard? Even if Muhammad might have failed to understand Jibril's peaceable intentions, is there any record of Jibril bringing correction to restore a peaceable posture?

Predictive prophecy: Each of Gabriel's messages has come to pass, and each without contest, being consistent in both the spirit and the detail of the original prophecies. Gabriel's New Testament prophecies are recognized by both Islam and Christianity. Did Jibril's prophecies come true? One must first ask if they are in the

[158] As Spencer notes, if Muhammad was recognized as a prophet long before the first revelation (by Bahira, others), why was he so terrorized by Jibril's first appearance? (Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist?*, 106).

[159] Margoliouth, in Spencer, Robert: *Did Muhammad Exist*, 100.

canon of the Qur'an – further study may reveal otherwise, but at this writing, it does not appear that any are. This leaves them as somewhat nebulous and non-committal that their significance as predictive prophecy is quite diminished. There is the supposed forth-telling of the death of Muhammad's grandson, Husayn,[160] but given the greater context, was this a one-off perceptive insight into the near future about one detail, or chance (. . . or a redaction into the record)?[161] Muhammad's denial of working any miracles (save presenting the Qur'an) further questions any predictive prophecy in Jibril's messages.

Textual precedence and duplication: There were no extant documents for Daniel to draw from concerning the events about which he prophesied, confirming that his writings are "original." The failure to identify earlier documents by those making the outcry against the traditional early dating of his writing only confirms the absence of earlier writings and more so from the magnitude of the outcry's vehemence. For Muhammad, though, there were voluminous earlier historical writings from many streams of thought, of which he would have been familiar to some degree (through verbal transmission if not otherwise, and so irrespective of any "unlettered"ness on his part). As noted, recent scholarship increasingly confirms a close correlation and possible sourcing of significant parts of the Qur'an from these documents, despite the claim of its original being in heaven and having come down untouched to the Prophet. As this becomes more fully documented, it will betray "revelation."

Character & righteousness of those visited: Daniel, Zechariah, and Mary were people of the highest moral and spiritual character – there is no record of any faults or issues with them, save Zechariah's initial doubting (but see Lk. 1:6), which was then fully rectified. Muhammad, though, was increasingly bent on tyranny, polygamy, terror, subjugation, and death. While he had a growing following, he seemed to be a rogue element, while Gabriel's guests all lived within normal, stable societal and spiritual norms and accountability (see Micah 6:8).

As a case in point, though Islam correctly cites Moses as a prophet (and hopes to see Muhammad as his successor), it overlooks several major points:

1. Moses was the meekest man alive (Num. 12:3),
2. he did not fight to establish his authority (it was God, supernaturally "plague-ing" Egypt and effecting Israel's successful departure from Egypt), and
3. when contested, he left the matter in God's hands to render a rebuke (God again supernaturally intervened – Num. 12; 16).

Though Islam would counter that its conquests are full validation and answer these challenges, the spirit of Muhammad is progressively counter to that of Moses – it is not one of peace, life, or meekness (Deut. 30:19; Num. 12:3): Muhammad is *not* in

[160] Campo, "Gabriel," *Ency. of Islam*, 254-255.

[161] Whether looking at Gabriel's or Jibril's pronouncements, the terse injunction of Deut. 13:1-11 must be applied, that any forthtelling must come to pass as stated, in both letter and spirit, or capital punishment is to be swiftly executed. Cf. Deut. 18:20-22; Jer. 14:14-15; 23:13-15 (note "adultery" here, and its applicability to Muhammad); 28:9; Zech. 13:3; Matt. 7:15 (Muhammad certainly became a "ravenous wolf"!); 7:22-23; 24:24; II Cor. 11:13-15; Thess. 2:9-11; II Pet. 2:1-2; Rev. 2:2.

the same prophetic stream or likeness.

Errant inspiration: Muhamad had a serious, readily acknowledged retraction of messages previously given – the "Satanic Verses."[162] No such issues exist for biblical Gabriel or his recipients.

Textual disagreements/variances of fact: These are numerous and substantial and are explicitly stated (they are not limited to omissions by one text or the other). The variances concerning Jesus' life alone are major:

- Although Islam believes in the virginal conception (3:47; 19:19), it is Jibril who effects conception, not the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk. 1:35). Since in Islam neither angels (Jibril) nor Mary are seen as divine. Therefore, Jesus is not divine either.[163]
- The Qur'an says Jesus was *created* in Mary's womb (3.47; 19:18-21), that he did not exist before the point of conception. This is in categorical contradiction to there being "one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (I Cor. 8:6) and that "through [Jesus, the Word] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Heb. 1:2). Jesus' life did not "begin" with conception in Mary's womb; he always was (also: Col. 1:15-17; Jn. 1:1-3; Heb. 2:10).[164]
- Gabriel instructed that his name should be "Jesus," which comes from "Joshua," of which "the Hebrew meaning . . . is 'the Lord [Yahweh] saves' – a rich meaning utterly lost in the qur'anic name 'Īsā."[165] This shift in nomenclature is in full compliance with Allah's unknowability, which is very much in contrast to another of Christ's names, "Emmanuel," meaning "God with us" (Matt. 1:21-23).
- The Qur'an states that "'Īsā is only a servant (or slave, '*abd*)"[166] (43.59), he is not the Messiah (5.17, 72), and that he is not Lord (9.31; cf. 3.64 – note Phil. 2:9-11; I Jn. 4:2-3).
- Jibril's messages deny that Allah has a son (19.35, 22-92, and elsewhere).
- Jibril whisked Jesus to heaven when death was imminent and spared him.[167]

With such divergences, Jibril and Gabriel (and their messages) can hardly have come from the same source – they really are not even "ships passing in the dark" –

[162] Muhammad was supposedly duped by Satan to give these ayahs (53:19-20 in particular), and was later "corrected" by Jibril. See footnote 68 for Scripture's rebuttals, especially Deut. 13:1-5 and Jer. 28:9.

[163] Lubanska, "Muslim Religious Narratives," 197.

[164] Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, commentary to 3:47 & 19.21, 86 & 312.

[165] Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, commentary to 19:21, 312.

[166] Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, commentary to 43:59, 491.

[167] This posits that Jibril is greater than Jesus, since he supposedly had the power to save Jesus, whereas Jesus did not have that power (to save himself). The biblical record states otherwise: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53), meaning, given the rest of the Gospel account that angels did *not* appear, that Jesus therefore did *not* summon angelic intervention (though angels "came and ministered to him" after his wilderness temptation – Matt. 4:11). The course of events was at *Jesus'* initiative, power and control, not Jibril's.

and irrespective of any notion of a "Common Word" (3:64). The laws of identity (B=B, B is Not Non-B, etc.[168]) deny that Gabriel and Jibril can be the same entity. Scripture is clear that both the fruit *and* what it comes from must be consistent - they cannot be of contrary character: "Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh" (James 3:11-12).[169]

Limitations of Jibril being understood as the "holy spirit": "The lack of a clear explanation of the 'spirit' in the Qur'an – and its inconsistent use whenever it appears – contrasts with the Bible, which offers a wealth of information about the Holy Spirit of God. Islam's eventual limiting of the spirit of God to [Jibril] . . . closes off a dimension of the human experience of God's presence and power"[170] in people's lives, which is an essential part of Christian salvation.

Miracles, by Gabriel/Jibril, or by the ones visited: It is noted that Gabriel's (as well as other biblical angel's) appearances are often linked to explicit and supernatural physical miracles, not just to messages or visions. Save for the provision of the Qur'an, Muhammad plainly testifies that he was *not* an agent of any miracles (13:7; 29:50). Though Islamic testimony attests to miraculous Jibrilic activity elsewhere (as the source of water for Hagar, at the Battle of Badr, with each "ayah" as a "sign" of divine manifestation, etc.), these were not part of miraculous activities which Muhammad directly affected or was linked to.

Conclusions

Gabriel and Jibril cannot be reconciled – they are not only two different entities but they are headed in very opposite directions. Further, the information above seems to point not to either one of them but to the veracity of their sending agents. Gabriel and Jibril will never reconcile until Yahweh and Allah are reconciled – the issues are from far beyond the two reputed archangels.[171]

The respective character – righteousness – of Gabriel and Jibril, as well as of those they visited, also stands out in stark relief. One might accept either archangel on the basis of respective texts or arguments, but finally, it should be noted that we become like those we admire. Where does one want to go? How does one want to live? How does one want to be treated or to treat others? Role models must be chosen wisely! (ICor. 15:33-34).

Scripture has much to say about character (righteousness). In Jesus' words, "You will know them by their fruits. . . . Every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

[168] Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998, 250ff.

[169] Also: Matt. 7:16-20; 12:33-35; Lk 6:43–45, and by extension, Jer. 2:21; Mat. 23:26; Jn. 15:4-7, and many others.

[170] Nickel, *Quran with Christian Commentary*, commentary to 97:4.

[171] Though this may not be of immediate consequence, II Cor. 6:14-18 seems worthy of inclusion, and being where the Gabriel/Jibril discussion is finally headed - one cannot head opposing directions at once.

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. . . Thus you will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16-20). The incredible irony of this text is that his immediately preceding words are "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (v. 15). He directly links character (fruit) and prophetic authenticity! How apropos! It's by one's *fruit* that a person is to be known: testing is to be of the stature and character inherent in one's life, not particularly or solely by their teachings, philosophy, "ministry," or "theology."[172]

These things first presume a deep and expansive undergirding of Scripture and, second, a purposing to know God in all things. As the cited Scriptures abound, in knowledge *and* in practice, one will not be able to linger in a grey zone or lack clarity about who Jibril and Gabriel really are, who the recipients of their messages are, or who they represent. "If any man's will is to do [Yahweh's] will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God" (Jn. 7:17).

Lastly, Scripture warns that Satan prowls about as an "angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14), "seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8). "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8–9). It seems that Islamic Jibril is one of these manifestations: very well crafted and appearing as light and as truth to any who might be so willingly beguiled. Yet, in not truthfully or completely giving the full declaration of his intents and by disguising the final price of accepting his presentations, his work is stunningly expert in distraction and deception, leading followers away from the real truth.[173] As an archangel Satan would have been on par with Gabriel, and he would have the capacity in some way to mimic Gabriel's likeness, degree of light, and other powers: he *does* have the capacity to replicate and imitate Gabriel's created spectra. The sheer effort needed to expose and overturn his stratagems is evidence of Satan's "fingerprints" in the Islamic story, with Jibril as his "alter ego." Islam itself openly attests to seeing Jibril as "light": "God [and by extension, his chosen agent Jibril] is the light of the heavens and the earth" (24.35 Ali).

The twin issues of character (righteousness) and of the capacity and provision to see and interact directly with God (as in Christianity) appear central and core to the contest between Jibril and Gabriel. By Islam's clear and direct profession, neither Jibril's message nor Muhammad's example concur with either of these, especially

[172] Let the contemporary Western church take note (and maybe elsewhere as well)! It seems there are terrible, perpetuating failures due to a failure to *first* reckon with this scripture, before engaging in "ministry." Beyond this, the Scriptures defining righteousness and upright character are clear: Jas. 3:13–18; Gal. 5:19–24; Phil. 4:8-9; Rom. 12:2 (we are to *prove* God's pleasure by irrefutable fruit, not by stiff-armed disputation, ecclesiastical force or the like – cf. the examples of Daniel, Zechariah and Mary, as already discussed), Psalm 15; 51, and others. There are also commands to test, to "sift" the spirits, with direction of how to do so: I Jn. 4:1–6; Jn. 10:4 (Christ's sheep *know his voice*); Jn. 8:31–32.

[173] Eve's temptation is an excellent case study of these tactics: Satan presented himself as a messenger of truth (i.e. false/incomplete identity – the "hook"), Satan told the truth (partially) and promised good things (the "bait"), but he carefully disguised, left out, and hid the disastrous outcomes.

the latter. From both the Old and New Testaments come stark contrasts and rebuttals: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel *like Moses*, whom *the LORD knew face to face"* (Deut. 34:10) – Moses, the meekest man, actually saw God. Even if disagreeing with him, that Islam would dare to "take on" a man of such stature is utterly and brazenly audacious and devoid of the fear of the Lord (… will the earth cleave, as it did for Dathan and Abiram? Num. 16). The witness of the New Testament concurs, with the Lord Jesus himself stating so simply these two criteria and their being so tightly intertwined: the necessity of character, and the purpose in life of actually seeing the Lord:

> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8).

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Religious Leaders with Self-Assumed Authority, But Who Don't Know the Way!

Dennis Dyvig

Mark 11:27-30 They came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him,
*Mark 11:28 and began saying to Him, "**By what authority** are You doing these things, or **who gave You this authority** to do these things?"*
Mark 11:29 And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things.
*Mark 11:30 "Was the baptism of John **from heaven, or from men**? Answer Me."*

At that time there still was no church. I almost wrote, "At that time, there still was no church and no church authority structure." But then I chose not to mention the church authority structure because I am not sure even today that the Bible supports authority structures—the authority of power and position.

This passage and the verses to follow were dealing with religious authority. There is authority that comes from a person's integrity or from power. The authority of integrity comes from earned respect. The authority of power comes from fear.

Here, the religious leaders seem to assume they had authority derived from fear of their position and their power. These leaders probably *thought* that they were being "biblical." They were widely assumed, at their time, to be "authorities" on the Old Testament, the Jewish law, and the prophets. After all, they were in The Temple, the center of Old Testament religion at that time. Plus, they were the Chief Priests. Not just priests but THE Chief Priests. Also, the authority group included the scribes. Some translations put that as "*teachers of the law*" meaning Moses' law, the 10 Commandments. And finally, THE elders were also part of this group.

These religious leaders constituted an intimidating power base for the general public. Few people would have enough courage to question this group of power-people. But Jesus did not fear them, did not see integrity in them, and did not submit to their authority in this situation.

Types of Authority

I have already briefly compared the authority of integrity to the authority of power or fear. We can analyze this a bit more. A person in authority may have more than one of these types of authority mentioned below.

Positional or structural authority. Examples of this type of authority would be president so-and-so, general so-and-so, officer so-and-so, etc, The CHIEF priests. They could be fairly ignorant and self-serving, lacking integrity, but still hold the authority of position. We have these in our world today.

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Authority of knowledge or study or achievement. Examples would be Dr. so and so. Captain (in an airplane) so and so. The scribes had studied and had to be learned to achieve their positions as scribes (or experts on The Law). Scribes did not always have integrity or good moral standing. People respected their **achievements**, although they had no positional authority. They generally had no structural power to back them if they issued an order.

Authority of age or maturity or experience. The elders had a lot of life experience, but age doesn't guarantee wisdom or integrity. Elders do not automatically have positional authority. They can speak with authority but might not have the power to enforce their decisions.

These men who challenged Jesus ***thought*** that their authority was genuine. But Jesus did not accept their authority. Jesus did not do what they demanded of Him. It is VERY easy to abuse authority, and these men at the Temple did. One major abuse of authority is when people assume they have more power than they really do and use that perceived authority to seek to control or use others or even harm others.

Jesus' disciples argued over positional authority. They asked Him to let them sit one on His right and one on His left. But Jesus did not accept that.

Some humans crave authority, and those who crave authority usually abuse their authority. Authority that is not based on integrity and truth is probably illegitimate authority. I think that is Jesus' point here.

Jesus' response was to ask those who assumed they possessed unquestionable authority in religion and in the Temple what they thought about John's baptism. Jesus' point was about the **teaching** and authority of John the Baptist's **teaching** and not specifically about the role of the water or John's **personal** authority. Jesus was probably referring to the authority or the teaching or beliefs that would accompany John's baptism. Whose idea was it that John should baptize people? Who decided which persons could and would be baptized? What benefit would you incur from being baptized? Who could do such baptizing? Who sanctioned or approved such baptizing? Did that authority come from heaven (God) or man?

Sources of authority

Jesus' question, "*Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men . . .*" was not about location, heaven or earth (the abode of men). Jesus' question was about what is the ultimate authority behind the teaching that went with John's baptism. Thus, the real issue was what authority John's baptism had. Why didn't the religious leaders take John's baptism seriously? Should they have taken it seriously? If so, why?

This is the ultimate question behind all religious teaching and all authority, especially all teaching about God and eternity. By what authority is any teacher doing their teaching? What authority is behind the teaching itself? Should people accept the teaching or question it as being merely human ideas rather than God's truth?

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One Bible, Two Messages
I have written before on "One Bible, Two Messages." In this passage in Mark, we have the same issue: human thinking versus God's thinking, God's truth. Those are the two messages we find in our one Bible.

We see a similar comparison of the same two different ideas or thoughts or beliefs all through the Bible—from heaven or man. We see them in flesh versus spirit. First birth versus the second. Jacob I loved but Esau I hated. The two mountains in Gal. 4 and Heb. 12. The two doors (wide and narrow), two paths, one with many people and one with few people, two eternal destinations, two different ideas about salvation, and so on. Most importantly, I think there are two covenants or testaments in one Bible. One about heaven's thinking, one about man's thinking. Man's thinking is religion. Heaven's thinking is the Gospel that John the Baptist came to introduce.

The two comparisons in every set of two (above), I believe, are comparing what God does or what man does, or thinks he can do, and says he tries to do. Jesus could have said in *Mark 11:30 "Was the baptism of John from GOD (heaven), or from men?*

The Two Distinctions Blurred
In a broken man's effort to make himself valuable and worthy, he is tempted to remove the distinction or distance or difference between God and man. Jesus keeps the distinction clear when He asks *is John's baptism was from God or man*?

As Satan deceived Hawa in the Garden of Eden, saying that she could be **like God**, so insecure humans still try to be "*like God*" in taking upon themselves the authority to judge others and teach that people can save themselves. Thus, they no longer need God to do the judging, teaching and saving.

Authority Without Truth and Integrity
Authority without truth and integrity is what human nature often desires. Human insecurities tend to want to make a person larger than they really feel inside themselves. They seek this sense of importance, worth, and power from seeking authority positions, which may or may not be legitimate.

Unfortunately, religion is one of the platforms broken people often use, and perhaps even prefer to use, to try to make them seem bigger than they know they really are. They use religion to attain raw power.

Authority and Responsibility
Immature and/or insecure people crave authority. It makes them feel powerful even when they aren't truly powerful. They seek authority because they think once having attained it, their inner fears and self-doubts will leave them. It doesn't work.

Authority makes decisions. **Responsibility** carries them out and accepts responsibility for the outcome, good or bad. The responsible person does not seek credit or praise. In contrast, the person seeking authority often does seek credit and

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praise, and responds in anger if he is challenged. That authority-seeker needs others to bow to him, to submit to him. Then, he feels good about himself. But this is a fake way for a person to feel content.

Who Can Save Us?
Religious humans assume way too much authority. No human can save themselves or any other person, yet they assume responsibility to judge and punish other humans as though they themselves were actually God, the Savior, and God, the Judge. This is not acceptable.

Salvation is Our Greatest Need!
Salvation means delivery from danger. To provide salvation, the one doing the saving must be more powerful than the danger. Otherwise, the victim will not be saved. Religious leaders like to assume the authority of position but do not have the power that would make their claim to authority legitimate. They would like you to think of them as your savior(s), but they lack the power to truly save you from all dangers. So Jesus asks if John's baptism was from heaven (and thus has more than enough power to truly save people) or from men (and thus has no power to truly save anyone).

Salvation and Authority / Power
If someone does not have the power to meet my greatest need, why should I accept his authority? In order to be a true Savior, One must be stronger and have higher authority than all others. If he lacks that authority, why should I respect him any more than any other human? I should not. If he does not have infinite authority and power, he can't really be my savior.

Authority for Helping Self or Others?
His disciples asked Who will sit on Jesus' right and left, and who is the greatest? Jesus answered, "He who serves," meaning the proper use of authority is to serve others, not themselves. Legitimate authority is never selfish. It must serve others.

We must look at Phil. 2 now:
Phil. 2:5-11 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil. 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
Phil. 2:7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.
Phil. 2:8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
Phil. 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NAS95)

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Who Can Truly Raise People Up to Authority?
Satan sought to raise himself up. Satan convinced Hawa to likewise seek to raise herself up to be like God. However, the true God, Jesus Christ (Jehovah in a human body), LOWERED HIMSELF to serve and save others. As a result, the true God raises Jesus and gives Him the highest of all names—*Jesus.* Then it says that in the Name of Jesus every knee will bow (must bow). In the end, Satan, who sought to raise himself up, will be lowered by God Himself.

Jesus' Humility Was Based on Knowing His Security
John 13:2 *During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,*

Remember that Lucifer (Satan) sought to raise himself up—to be like God. Once Satan enters Judas, Judas also seeks to raise himself up and lower Jesus Christ. To betray Jesus is to seek to lower Jesus, and for Judas to seek to raise himself. Insecurities and self-doubts are serious and dangerous.

In the very next verse, we see Jesus lowering Himself, the very opposite of Satan and Hawa and many religious authorities of our day.

John 13:3-5 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,
John 13:4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.
John 13:5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Jesus **knew** that He had all power and all authority. Jesus **knew** where he came from, and He **knew** where He was going. Jesus, being God in the body, could not have questions, insecurities, and self-doubts as we do. I believe these three "knowledges" are written here for our sakes. If we also **know** we have power and authority (in and under Jesus Christ), we will not fear. If we **know** where we came from and especially **where** we are going (implying full assurance of going to heaven no matter what), we will not need to try to grasp after authority but instead can lower ourselves to serve others, as Jesus Himself did. This knowledge and the resultant security comes to us:

1. if we are truly born again and
2. if we are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If we know we have true value and worth, we do not need to seek it for ourselves. That is logical, isn't it? Thus, we may conclude those who (wrongly) seek more authority for themselves, in so doing, are revealing their lack of understanding of the Gospel and the security and assurance that can and should be experienced and felt in believing the Gospel.

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Glory is directly connected to power, worth, value, ability, actions that are commendable, etc. Those who seek to raise themselves up (as did some of Jesus' disciples and often today's leaders) have not understood that they ***have*** glory (value) ***already*** in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Is the Chief End of Man to Glorify God?

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says yes, God created people to glorify Himself! But Jesus disagrees with this catechism. How did "the Divines" who wrote this catechism expect us to believe what directly contradicts the Bible? Did you know that's what those who wrote this catechism called themselves, "The Divines?" Does that sound a bit arrogant to you for humans to call themselves *The Divines*? Note what the Bible says about who gives glory and who receives it:

John 5:41 "I do not receive glory from men; (NAS95)
John 17:22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them (Jesus' believers)*, that they may be one, just as We are one;* (NAS95)

The Old Testament agrees.
Psa. 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
The LORD gives grace and glory;
No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly (the Hebrew for *uprightly* also means *complete, sound*). (NAS95)

Teaching that we should or must or **can** give glory to God is a false teaching. I believe such false teaching leads to people feeling insecure. Seeking to give glory to God is the opposite of God's revelation and, as such, will leave us not feeling affirmed by our God but feeling alone and weak. One who feels alone and weak will then seek to satisfy his need to feel value and worth, and that may drive him to seek authority in illegitimate ways. The leaders who questioned Jesus' authority had done precisely that. They took upon themselves illegitimate authority, and Jesus confronted them on that.

The Rejected Stone Becomes Chief

Mark 12:10 "Have you not even read this Scripture:
'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,
THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone;
Mark 12:11 THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD,
AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?"
Mark 12:12 And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

Two Builders?

In these verses, there are two builders and one Stone. The TRUE Builder is the true God. He designated Jesus Christ as the Chief Corner, which means that God does his building upon Jesus Christ. So once again, we see God is comparing two different ways, two different beliefs. Does God do the building, or does man do it? So

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these verses are continuing the same subject Jesus introduced in *Mark 11:30 "Was the baptism of John from heaven (God), or from men?*

Those are the two builders: God and men. I believe ALL religions and religious teachings, apart from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, are built by men (with help from Satan).

Who are the builders who rejected the Stone? People. Religious people. Religious people who rejected the Stone, Jesus.

When I Google, I find there are 45,000 "Christian" denominations on earth. These denominations have been built by men. There is one Bible, one God, one Jesus Christ, and one plan of salvation. How can there be 45,000 different denominations? Because men are seeking to build for themselves, rather than accept that there is one Builder and that is the true God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A missionary friend of mine from the USA recently said he thinks 5% of the "*evangelized*" Africa, that is of the Africans who say they are Christians, are actually saved and truly going to heaven. What about the other 95%? They are the ones who have been taught by the builders **who rejected the Stone**.

In this passage about builders they are contrasted with the Lord— ***Mark 12:11***
*THIS CAME ABOUT **FROM THE LORD**,*
*AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN **OUR** EYES'?"*

The religious builders do not recognize what the true Builder is doing, nor do they even really know the Stone, Jesus, in a personal and saving way. They might talk about Jesus, and say they love Him so much, but they do not really know Jesus. ***John 17:3*** *"This is eternal life, that they may **know** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*

Opposition to the Stone
. . . and those who do not reject the Stone

Psa. 118:23 *This is the **LORD'S** (Jehovah's) doing;*
*It is marvelous in **our** eyes.*

Who does the true building? Heaven or men? In Mark 12 it is the Lord who did the building that people did not understand. It is a quotation from Psalms. The Hebrew in Psalms 118:23 is YHWH, Jehovah.

Thus, we know that Jehovah is the true Builder, and He builds by means of the true Stone, Jesus Christ. They are not two different Gods. They are One God. The Name, Jesus, means Jehovah Savior. Jesus said if people do not believe that He in fact is Jehovah (I AM), they will die in their sins (John 8:24), meaning they will die without salvation and will not get eternal life and heaven.

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Jesus said *he that does not have me does not have the Father*. Many religious leaders talk about God. But many also leave out Jesus Christ or teach about Jesus Christ in a way that brings in Jesus' Name but not His all-essential work on the Cross by His sacrificial death.

Many of the builders do not totally reject the Name of Jesus and do not totally reject everything about Jesus. But many DO reject that it is **only** by Jesus' death on the Cross that any of us can have a relationship with the true God and get true salvation.

Many people tell me they are saved by Jesus' death on the Cross. When I ask them why did Jesus die on the Cross? What does His death mean? Why did it require His death? They have no answer. I think that means they do NOT REALLY believe in Jesus' death on the Cross. They have heard the words and repeat them to me, but they have no idea why Jesus needed to die? I believe such a person is not a Christian.

A teacher who teaches the need for Jesus AND our good works has **rejected** the Stone and is doing **his own building** by promoting man as his own savior and not truly teaching the only way any person can reach heaven.

A teacher who teaches the need for Jesus AND obedience has rejected the Stone and is promoting man, not heaven.

Today, most ***builders*** do not explain clearly the difference between any teaching possibly being from heaven or men, and thus do, in effect, reject the Stone and His salvation.

Today, we do not have the Chief Priests and Scribes and Elders and the Sanhedrin of Jesus' day, but we do today have religious leaders and teachers, functioning in similar roles as God's human representatives on earth, but who are just as lost as the official religious leaders of Jesus' day were.

Application:
What are we promoting by our teaching and our lives? Are we different than the Chief Priests, Scribes, Elders, and the Sanhedrin of Jesus' day? I fear that much of what passes as Christianity today is not really different than the religious leaders of Jesus' day. What do we do about this? Do we just let the false religious teaching continue because we fear addressing the issue with those who use their authority to make us fear to question them?

Jesus came to save people for eternity. The Chief Priests, Scribes, Elders, and Sanhedrin of Jesus' time were all about fake authority and power that did not come from integrity and truth. Is our work today truly from heaven? Or men?

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The Gospel is Two Simple Things!
Jesus told the woman at the well that she needed to **know** ONLY TWO THINGS!

*John 4:10. If you knew the **gift** of God and **Who** it is…*
Salvation is a gift, totally free for us because it was purchased by Jesus, paying with His life, and given to us by God's grace, if we believe. *If you **knew** . . .* means if you accept as true, if you believe. He briefly explained that eternal life is a free gift and that He Himself was the I AM (Jehovah) of the Old Testament. That is all anyone needs to know to go to heaven. If you do know (believe) that, then He said you would ask Him for that gift, and He would give it to you. I have seen three-year-olds understand that and ask Jesus for His gift of eternal life!

This is not complicated. Paul summarized his preaching and teaching in two words: Christ Crucified (1Cor. 1:23).

Why Does it Matter?
Eternal life is gained only by trusting in the Stone, Jesus, for salvation and eternal life in heaven, for deliverance from hell, the lake of fire, which burns forever and ever.

Let's be sure, by God's grace and will and word, that we are not rejecting the Stone as we build and build and build something different.

Every human being (as in *from heaven or men*) has insecurities and fears and self-doubts that draw them away from the Stone into building something that is from men and not from heaven.

Are You Going to Heaven?
If you answer yes, you are going to heaven, I would ask on the basis of what authority did you make that confident answer? Heaven or men?

Attaining forgiveness and salvation, being born again, defeating sin, Satan, and death, and traveling from earth to heaven ALL require great power and authority! In fact, I believe salvation from hell requires INFINITE power and authority. Hell is eternal, which is infinite time. The power of hell, multiplied by infinite time (eternity), equals infinite power. Who has that infinite power that alone is able to save us from hell? Only God does. That means only the true God can save you. He does that through Jesus Christ and His infinitely valuable and powerful sacrifice on the Cross.

Most religious teaching wrongly assumes you **do** have enough power and authority to reach heaven by yourself. Most religious teaching says that if you try hard enough, and you do enough good and you resist sin and Satan well enough, you ***might*** succeed in reaching heaven—by your own efforts. But the Bible says you are wrong. Romans 3 should remove any idea that you are able to save yourself.

Rom. 3:9-24 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;
Rom. 3:10 as it is written,

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
Rom. 3:11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
Rom. 3:12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."
Rom. 3:13 "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,"
"bTHE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";
Rom. 3:14 "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";
Rom. 3:15 "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
Rom. 3:16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
Rom. 3:17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."
Rom. 3:18 "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."
Rom. 3:19 Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;
Rom. 3:20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be righteous in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.
Rom. 3:21 But now apart from Law righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,
Rom. 3:22 even righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;
Rom. 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
Rom. 3:24 being made righteous as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

What will get you to heaven? A work done by the power and authority of heaven? Or a work done by the power and authority of man—you yourself?

Where Was John's Baptism From?

By the way, where indeed was John's baptism from? Heaven, or from men? It was from HEAVEN! *Acts 19:4* Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." And we know Jesus came from heaven with all of heaven's authority.

Repentance (as in John's *baptism of repentance*) means *a change of mind*, a change in belief. John the Baptist's message was clearly to stop believing in what they had believed up to that point, the work of men, and then begin to believe in Jesus Christ instead. John the Baptist clearly believed that himself, and taught that it was heaven that could and would save them and not they themselves. He told those he preached to that they must believe in Jesus Christ (who again and again testified that He had come from heaven).

Those who teach, preach, and lead must be certain that all they do is with the authority of heaven and not of men. Of course it is not easy to know in any given act

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if you are serving under heaven's authority or man's, but we can bow before the King of heaven and humbly request that He change us where our beliefs are wrong and instill in us a very strong sense of our own brokenness and emptiness and the absolute need to depend upon heaven, not men, in all we do.

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.

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! The author can be reached at ddyvig@gmail.com

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Romans 1:1-7 The Law and The Gospel of Grace – Part A

Russell Cross

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son…" Romans 1:1-3.

"For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John." Matthew 11:13.
"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 5:20-21.

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons…" Galatians 4:4-5.

Introduction

This is the fourth paper in this study based on Romans 1:1-7 looking at the New Testament fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation of a coming Messiah and the Kingdom he would establish and the Salvation that he would bring.

In the last paper I looked at the human context into which the gospel came. Mankind stands condemned for his sin and is liable to face the wrath of God. We need next to look at how the law prepared the way for the coming of the good news of the gospel. When God created Adam and Eve and put them in the Garden of Eden, they were without sin, and they had free will. They could have obeyed God. But they did not. But when God redeemed his people out of Egypt and gave them the law before leading them into a new Eden, a land flowing with milk and honey, they were not in the same condition as Adam and Eve when God first put them in the original Garden of Eden. They were flawed people, corrupted by sin within. From Adam to Moses, there was no law to rebel against (Romans 5:14) so the true nature of sin as rebellion against God could not be seen. But when the law came, it stirred up that latent rebellion within. Paul expresses this from his own experience in Romans chapter 7:7ff.

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So, the law is holy, and the commandment is

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holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin." As an illustration of this, my father was once working in the garden. He had spilled Jayes fluid, or some other product, on the ground. He called me out to see what had happened. Lots of worms had come to the surface at that spot. The law does something like that to us. It not only shows us our sins, but it also provokes our latent rebellion to show itself.

The Law: From Moses till Christ

Now, what the law did in Paul, it also did in Israel. John Stott, in his exposition of Romans chapter 7, interprets the man spoken of in Romans 7 as the Old Testament Jew under the law. Paul himself, in Romans and elsewhere, has a lot to say about how the law exposed sin and prepared the way for the coming of the Messiah. "The law came in to increase trespass." Rom 5:20.

"Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, …"

Is the law contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith." Galatians 3:19 – 26.

In Deuteronomy chapter 28, before the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses set before the people the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience. The curses would come upon the people if they broke the covenant and would culminate in exile from the land if the people persisted in their rebellion and did not repent. But, even when (not if) the nation does go into exile, there is the promise of restoration if they repent while they are in exile.

"And <u>when</u> all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey His voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and He will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so

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that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live…"[174]

Michael D. Williams says:
"For example, in Deuteronomy Moses lays out the coming history of Israel (Deut. 4:21-31). Long before the events transpire, Moses sets down the recurrent pattern that will typify Israel's covenant failure (sin, judgement, restoration). He explicitly refers to Israel's entering the land and possessing it, its apostasy and corruption, its exile to foreign lands, the survival of the remnant, Israel's repentance for its sin, and Yahweh's restoration of his people." [175]
One has only to read the indictments against the people in the prophets to see how the curses came upon the people.
The book of Isaiah starts off with:
"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken: "Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me…"[176]
And he goes on to describe their sins and the consequences.
And in Isaiah 42:21-22 Isaiah says:
"The LORD was pleased, for His righteousness' sake, to magnify His law and make it glorious. But this is a people plundered and looted; they are all of them trapped in holes and hidden in prisons; they have become plunder with none to rescue, spoil with none to say, "Restore!"
And the book of Lamentations describes the end result:
"How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave. She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; …
Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude; she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress…" Lamentations 1:1-3

The Significance of Hosea 6:7
The Prophet Hosea compares Israel's sin to that of Adam.
Hosea 6:6 & 7 in the ESV says:
"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me."
Benjamin Warfield has written a very useful paper on the meaning of Hosea 6:7 entitled "Adam or Man." After discussing the different ways that the verse has been translated and interpreted in the history of the church, he takes the side of those who translate the verse as it is translated in the ESV above. At the end of the paper, he quotes the 19th Century German OT Commentator, Franz Delitzsch and Prof. Given:
"We shall let Delitzsch, however, outline for us the considerations which commend this interpretation; and to his remarks we shall append the discussion of Prof. Given,

[174] Deuteronomy 30:1-6.
[175] Michael D. Williams. Far As The Curse Is Found. P.202-3.
[176] Isaiah 1:2.

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as a specimen of the comments which are conceived in a more practical vein. Says Delitzsch (on Job 31: 33): "Most expositors have taken ke'adham (in Job 31:33) 'after the manner of man'; but appropriate as this meaning of the expression is in Psalm 82:7, in accordance with the antithesis and the Parallelism (which see), it would be as tame here, and altogether expressionless in the parallel passage, Hosea 6:7 – the passage which comes mainly into consideration here – since the force of the prophetic utterances: 'They have ke'adham transgressed the covenant,' consists in this: that Israel is accused of a transgression which is only to be compared to that of the first man created: here as there, a like transgression of the expressed will of God' (as also according to Romans 5:14 Israel's transgression is that fact in the historical development of redemption which stands by the side of Adam's transgression). And the mention of Adam in Hosea cannot surprise one, since he also shows himself in other respects to be familiar with the contents of Genesis and to refer back to it… (see Genesis, pp.11-13 (A reference to his commentary on Genesis?)"

"Says Prof. Given: "They like Adam have transgressed the covenant: this rendering, supported by the Vulgate, Cyril, Luther, Rosenmuller, and Wunsche, is decidedly preferable and yields a suitable sense. God in his great goodness had planted Adam in paradise, but Adam violated the commandment which prohibited his eating of the tree of knowledge, and thereby transgressed the covenant of his God. Loss of fellowship with God and expulsion from Eden were the penal consequences that immediately followed. Israel, like Adam had been settled by God in Palestine, the glory of all lands; but ungrateful for God's great bounty and gracious gift, they broke the covenant of their God, the condition of which, as in the case of the Adamic covenant, was obedience. Thus, the comparison projects the shadow of a coming event, when Israel would leave the land of promise."[177]

The Exile

So, we see that the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai led inevitably to the exile. There could not have been any other outcome. By 722 BC, the 10 tribes of the Northern kingdom had been carried away by the Assyrians. The process was completed by Sargon II (722-705 B.C.)
R.K. Harrison writes:

"Sargon followed the current practice of replacing deported peoples with others who would be loyal to the regime. Accordingly, he brought groups of Semites and others from Babylonia, Elam, and elsewhere and settled them among the artisans and peasants who had been left behind in the northern kingdom. As the result of intermarriage, a mixed population arose, which ultimately took the name of Samaritans, after the capital of the fallen kingdom. They gradually assumed the nature of a religious sect rather than a nation, and they came to occupy an important position in the history of later religious developments in Palestine."[178]

[177] Warfield Hosea VI :7: Adam or Man? In Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield – 1 P128-129.
[178] R.K. Harrison. Old Testament Times. P. 231.

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Not all of the people in the 10 tribes were taken away and lost. The Levites had been spread throughout the land and after the separation of the 10 Northern tribes from Judah and Benjamin, Jeroboam 1 set up high places at Bethel and Dan and he appointed a different priesthood, so the Levites moved to Judah and Jerusalem and so did some of the people from all the other tribes "to sacrifice to the LORD God of their fathers."[179] After the deportation of most of the people of the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom and after lions had killed some of the new inhabitants, a Priest was sent back by the Assyrians to teach them the law of the god of the land.[180] Between about 605 BC and 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into exile by the Babylonians, the Temple was destroyed, and the vessels were carried off to Babylon. Jeremiah had predicted that the exile would last for 70 years. Erich Sauer, the German dispensationalist writer, wrote:

"…Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and carried the population of the two-tribed kingdom to Babylonia (606, 597, 586 B.C.).
In a double sense, the Babylonian captivity endured 70 years, politically and religiously.

Strictly, the carrying away of the southern kingdom to Babylon took place in three stages. It commenced with the first invasion by Nebuchadnezzar in the year 606 B.C., and thus exactly seventy years before the later return of the remnant from Babylon (536) …"

"But also, the destruction of the temple had lasted seventy years. Here naturally the year 586, in which the temple itself was destroyed, must reckon as the starting point. The close of the seventy years thereafter would then be the year 516, and this is the very year in which – after twenty years of interrupted building – the restored temple was consecrated and devoted to its true use…"[181]

The Return from Exile

Only a small proportion of the Jews returned to the land after the exile. Those who returned were still under the rule of the Persians, who were later conquered by the Greeks, who were, in turn, conquered by the Romans. The Jews in Palestine were ruled by others for most of the time up until the coming of Jesus Christ. The Temple was rebuilt, though F.F. Bruce says somewhere that the ark of the covenant had been lost. There was a period of several centuries between the last of the Prophets and the birth of Christ. Hosea had prophesied:
"For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods…" Hosea 3:4.
This corresponds to the third section in Matthiew's genealogy "from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ." Matt 1:17.
So, there were the centuries of darkness and waiting. There was a realization that the exile was not really over, even though a remnant of the people had returned to

[179] 2 Chronicles chapter 11.
[180] 2 Kings Chapter 17.
[181] Erich Sauer. From Eternity to Eternity. P 28.

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the land and would not be until Messiah came. The medieval hymn that we sing at Christmas time captures this well:
"O Come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel."
The law that had promised life had brought judgment and death. But Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied of a new covenant that God would make where He would give His people a new heart and write His laws on that heart so that they could love Him and obey Him.[182]

The book of Hebrews, chapters 9 and 10, explains how all the OT sacrifices could not take away sins and reconcile us to God; only the one perfect sacrifice of Christ could do that. So, Paul says in Romans 3:25 that God had "passed over" those sins committed beforehand in anticipation of the atoning work of Christ.
Michael Williams quotes Thomas R. Schreiner's reflections on 2 Corinthians chapter 3: "The defect in the law was due to human inability to perform it. The law provides no power to obey so that "the letter kills" (2 Cor3. v.6), and it results in "death" (v. 7) and condemnation (v.9). The new covenant ministry of the Spirit is superior because the Spirit writes the law on the heart (v. 3) and "gives life" (v.6). Moreover, the new covenant is superior. Its glory lasts forever (vv. 8, 11) and it provides righteousness (v. 9)."[183]

And Williams himself adds:
"Since the Mosaic law demanded obedience to the revealed will of God but in itself was powerless to effect that obedience, we may consider it a ministration of death and condemnation. The new covenant, however, is a ministry of the Spirit and a ministry of righteousness, for it effects the forgiveness of sin and the power to live out the righteousness of God."[184]

In Romans, Paul shows how the gospel meets the needs of both the Jew and the Gentiles. Since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"[185] in the gospel righteousness is provided through Jesus Christ for those who believe the message. Jesus Christ has died to make atonement for us, to redeem us, and to reconcile us to God. All who believe in Jesus Christ and that he died a propitiatory death for us to atone for our sins are justified (declared not guilty) by God. That deals with our guilt. But Paul also says that when we believe, we are also united with Christ so that we are considered to have died with him and risen again with him to new life. The Holy Spirit now lives in us and unites us with the risen Christ and empowers us to put sin progressively to death and live the life God wants us to live. We can now obey the spirit of the law and not just keep the letter of the law.

[182] Jeremiah 31:31-34 & Ezekiel 36:24-27.
[183] Quoted by Micheal D. Williams. Far as the Curse is Found. P. 237.
[184] ibid P. 237.
[185] Romans 3:23.

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As Paul says in Romans 8:1-4:

"For there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Conclusion

God has an ultimate purpose for His people and for His Creation.
Paul tells us what God's purpose for every Christian is:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son…"[186]

God's purpose for us is to progressively make us holy and righteous in order to make us conform in the end to the holy and righteous and blameless character of our Lord Jesus Christ. We won't get completely there in this life, but the work will be completed and we will be made like Him when we are raised for the age to come. Paul also says in Romans chapter 8 that the whole creation has been subjected to futility and corruption and groans with us as it awaits the completion of God's work of salvation when God will make all things new.[187] Hope looks forward to that day when we will be made perfect and live in a world set free from its bondage to decay and purged of all sin and imperfection and where God can again dwell with man. There, in resurrected and glorified bodies, we shall worship God and live in perfect fellowship with each other. The law pointed us in that direction but could not take us there. Only Jesus Christ can do that.

Paul ends the doctrinal part of Romans with a doxology:
"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his Counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."[188]

In Part B of this study we will look at how God used the exiled Jews to prepare for the world-wide expansion of the Church after Pentecost.

[186] Romans 8:28-29.
[187] Matthew 19: 28 and Revelation 21:5
[188] Romans 11:33-36.

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About the Author

Russell Cross went to Kenya in 1983 with the Africa Inland Mission as a short term missionary for 4 years. He worked among the Turkana people in North East Kenya where he oversaw an irrigation scheme at Elelea. The scheme was under the Turkana Rehabilitation Project and the Kenyan Government. Russell also helped in planting a church in the new village of Elelea which came into being as people working on the scheme settled there. In 1990 he went to Chad as a full term missionary, after 1 year of French study. Again with AIM. In Chad he worked with the Evangelical Church of Chad in various towns. In 1993 he married Mireille, a French nurse working in a Mission hospital. They were based at Kouno and Ba-Illi along the south side of the Chari River and lastly at Koutou in the South of Chad between 2006 and 2008. At Koutou Russell taught part time in a French language Bible School and helped in a Print Shop.

Russell and Mireille now live in Auckland, New Zealand. He has been involved in a Rest Home Ministry and teaching an ESOL class for immigrants. Russell has a B Sc and a Bible College diploma and has done some other Biblical Studies. He likes reading books and collecting useful quotes. The author can be reached at rm.cross64@gmail.com

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SBS 2023 Census Feedback

Bureau of Statistics, Somali Bible Society

Number of People Groups 22	People Groups Unreached 20 (90.9%)	Progress Level
Total Population 18,643,000	Population in Unreached 18,584,000 (99.7%)	Largest Religion Islam (98.6%)
% Christian Adherent 1.30%	% Evangelical 0.84% Joshua Project: Somalia, 2024	Evangelical Annual Growth Rate 8.1% (Global Rate = 2.6%)

According to Joshua Project, the Somali Church is one of the fastest-growing churches in the world.[189] The evangelical annual growth is 8.1%, while the global rate is 2.6%. This means the Somali Church is growing faster than the Kenyan (3.4%) and Ethiopian (4.3%) churches combined.[190],[191].

In December 2023, the Bureau of Statistics of the Somali Bible Society (SBS) released its much-anticipated census results. The Somali Bible Society Journal published these findings and invited selected Somali Christian leaders and mature believers to provide feedback. Below is a list of all the Christians who have responded so far, arranged alphabetically by their first names.

[189] Country: Somalia, Joshua Project. https://www.joshuaproject.net/countries/KE (accessed on 08 January 2024).
[190] Country: Kenya, Joshua Project. https://www.joshuaproject.net/countries/KE (accessed on 08 January 2024).
[191] Country: Ethiopia, Joshua Project. https://www.joshuaproject.net/countries/ET, (accessed on 08 January 2024).

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As we mark the census's first anniversary, we would like to share one of the most intriguing insights into southern Somalia. For security reasons, we will provide only limited details about this finding.

Christian al-Shabab Amirs
In several villages in southern Somalia, where the Swedish Lutheran mission and the Roman Catholic Church have a long-standing presence, local Christian communities in al-Shabab-controlled areas have persevered in their faith. Combining charisma and pragmatism, these Christians have found ways to survive while maintaining their cherished beliefs.

These third and fourth-generation Christians have operated incognito and have managed to establish some of their own underground Christians as al-Shabab *amirs* (ruling leaders). When asked why they chose to lead villages and towns as al-Shabab leaders, one of the Christian *amirs* responded, “I am a Christian, and al-Shabab rules my village; if I do not become as wise as a serpent and as innocent as a dove, senior al-Shabab leaders will appoint a radical Muslim *amir* to rule and oppress my village. To save my village, I reinvented myself as a Salafi Muslim, and the al-Shabab leadership appointed me the most senior *amir* in the village.” This middle-aged third-generation Christian added, “There are several other Christian *amirs* in other regions, including [names withheld].””

Feedback
This feedback was sent to the Somali Bible Society by Somali church leaders shortly before the census was released in December 2024. This is the first the feedback was made public. All the feedback that was sent to SBS is here. No feedback was rejected or changed.

Aaliyah Khalid *(pseudonym)*
Director, Beth Amani Ministries

I want to thank SBS for conducting a census of Somali Christians. However, the accuracy of such a census may be compromised due to the difficult circumstances in which Somali Christians live. Nevertheless, the fact that Somali Christians can now speak for themselves is a testament to progress made over the past few decades. While I appreciate the effort, I am concerned about the listing of the Somali clans with the most or least Christians. I am still determining why this information was deemed necessary. Nonetheless, I commend SBS for conducting the first-ever comprehensive census of Somali Christians.

Abdi Du’ale
Somali Gospel TV

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Numerous local Christians practice their faith secretly, and we may need to find their exact numbers. As a senior Christian minister involved in radio and social media ministry, I can confirm that Somali Christians are far more in number than what the 2023 SBS census shows. However, given the challenges on the ground, the census was a remarkable success.

Abdi Osman
Church Planting Evangelist

I was overwhelmed with joy when I read the SBS census report. I felt grateful to God for the increasing number of people in the Somali Church. Now, it is evident that the enemies of the Somali Church cannot stop its growth as the Lord is safeguarding it. My fervent prayer is that someday, millions of Somalis will follow Jesus Christ, and the light of righteousness will shine upon the Somali Peninsula and beyond. May God bless and protect the brothers and sisters of the Somali Bible Society.

Abdisalan Henok
Bible Translator

I have thoroughly analyzed the census data and am confident that the number of Somali Christians documented in the census is accurate. This is because there has been a noticeable rise in the population of Somali Christians in the Somali Peninsula over the past thirty years.

Abdulkadir Sh.
Hymnodist

After years of uncertainty, the recent SBS census has brought a sense of liberation to the Somali Church. It was always puzzling why a church with a history of 142 years did not know the exact number of its members. However, this confusion has finally been resolved, and we now have an accurate count of our members. This census is a significant milestone for Somali Christians and has accomplished what was once deemed impossible.

Rev. Abraham Abdirahman, BTh, MA
Ministry Leader

The recent census results overjoy me. All my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren live in Somalia and faithfully practice the Christian faith. This census was the best Christmas gift I have ever received. I am grateful to SBS for mobilizing the Somali house churches to conduct this census. I can now walk with my head held high, with a sense of dignity. This census is a remarkable achievement, and the

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Somali Bible Society deserves credit for their hard work and dedication. The census has provided a better understanding of the Somali Christian community and will help serve and minister to the Christians in Somalia.

Rev. Abukar Ma'alimu
Retired House Church Pastor

Bishop Venanzio Filippini's claim that Roman Catholics in Italian Somaliland represented 3.5% of the Somali population in the 1930s is accurate. There were considerable Italian mission schools in Somalia, with many Somali Roman Catholic students. Additionally, many Roman Catholic churches, chapels, and other places of worship were operating freely in Somalia before they closed in 1991 due to the Somali civil war. Somali Christians openly attended these houses of worship. The high number of Somali Christians (171,227) in Somalia is encouraging. However, the Somali Church must develop concrete plans to disciple these professing Christians.

Ahmed Philip
Linguist

It is truly remarkable news that we finally have accurate data on the number of Somali Christians. Although long overdue, the release of this census is an outstanding achievement. It is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the census takers who devoted their time and resources to this vital task. By God's grace, the census team completed this work with power, endurance, and wisdom. Let us give thanks to the Lord for this significant milestone.

Rev. Adawe Ali , Dip.Th., BA
Educator

This census challenges the common belief that all Somalis are Muslims. The recorded number of Somali Christians strongly indicates the Somali Church's tenacity and endurance. This census brings hope to many Somali Christians who were previously unaware of the size of the Somali Church. We give thanks to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amin A. Ahmed
Hymnographer & Author

Members from my house church participated in the 2023 SBS census to help count the number of Christians in the South West State of Somalia. It was a wonderful experience to interact with fellow Somali Christians whom we had never met before. Unfortunately, not all Christians could be counted due to security and logistical issues. Nonetheless, it was a momentous occasion for the Somali Church and a

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demonstration of the truth that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church. We decided to be counted, and we are proud of it.

Amina Nur, Dip.Th, BScN
Midwife & House Church Pastor

I am thankful for the commitment of SBS to completing this historic census. This significant work will be studied in Somali church history textbooks for generations. The census is a prime example of the positive outcomes that have resulted from the collaboration between expatriate missionaries and local Christians.

Budul Da'ud
Evangelist

I was surprised to find many professing Christians in southern Somalia. This census will help us understand how we can better serve and minister to these Christians and the larger Somali community. The hard work and dedication put into this census will advance the Kingdom of God among the Somali people.

Dahir Abdalla, BSPH, MDiv
Public Health Worker

Kudos to the SBS census team for conducting a comprehensive census of Somali Christians. The team gave us a reliable estimate of the Somali Christian community's numerical state.

Eed Ahmed, B.Th.
Church Planter

It was a noble task to count the number of Christians in Somalia. The census has been a great success; all Somali Christians should take pride in it. We need to conduct more research on the Somali Church to understand our community of faith better.

Hussein Gure
Evangelist

Although I was not involved in planning or collecting the Somali Christian census released by SBS, I believe it is a positive step in the right direction. However, I do have some concerns about the methodology used to collect the data. As far as I understand, the report relies on interviews and individual estimates. If every Christian in Somalia or the surrounding region is asked how many Christians they

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know, the resulting number will likely be much lower than the current statistics suggest.

Rev. J. Suufi *(pseudonym),* ***BTh, MA (candidate)***

In the past, I found it difficult to confidently answer the question, “How many Somali Christians are there?” The Somali Christian community faces challenging circumstances that make it hard to answer accurately. However, thanks to the efforts of the SBS census team, we now have a valuable resource to cherish. Although more research is needed to perfect the SBS census, I appreciate the support provided by everyone who contributed. I am proud to say that I was one of the first church leaders to submit statistics about the community of faith I serve in Kenya.

Jibriil Sasa *(pseudonym)*
Church Planting Pastor

The 2023 Somali census uncovered the presence of a large “hidden” Somali Christian community, which should be celebrated in all Somali Christian literature. It is time for a discipleship campaign to help these many professing Christians.

Rev. Jourd Abdi Da’ud
Media Personality

As a Somali Christian, I became a part of the Somali Church 37 years ago when I started my spiritual journey with the Lord. Over this time, no census of this kind and scale has ever been undertaken. Therefore, we are grateful to SBS for taking on such a heavy responsibility to conduct this census. Some may question the high number of Christians, but it results from the many decades invested in the Somali ministry.

Rev. Mahad Birik, Dip.Th., BTh, MA
Regional Coordinating Chair
Somali Believers Ministry Network

Due to the region’s security concerns and lack of tolerance, I had severe doubts about the feasibility of conducting a census in the Somali Peninsula. However, SBS had ambitious goals and proved the skeptics wrong by demonstrating that Somali Christians are competent and resourceful.

Mo Hirsi
Evangelist

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My house church and I chose not to support the census as we believed it could pose a security threat and considered it unnecessary. We preferred to wait until the security situation in Somalia improved. We were convinced that revealing the approximate number of Somali Christians could anger many local Muslims. However, I must admit that the census was a great success and was primarily positive. As a result of the census work, our house church met 21 professing Christians through a friend who was involved in the census work. We are now discipling them.

Mo'alim Mohamud
House Church Pastor

This is the first-ever census of Somali Christians conducted in the Somali Peninsula. The dedication of the census enumerators to producing high-quality work is commendable. SBS has given the Somali Church a voice that we never had before. The courage and conviction of the SBS leadership are astonishing.

Rev. Omar Ali
Evangelist

To begin with, the number of Christians in Southern Somalia is unusually high. The Dagodiya clan has many Christian converts in Ethiopia and Kenya, which SBS did not acknowledge. Similarly, the Garre clan has many Christian converts in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya. However, SBS mistakenly classified this clan as having the lowest number of Christians. The Ogi Somali Bantu clan has the most prominent converts in Southern Somalia, yet SBS left it out. Additionally, the Murille clan in Mandera has many Christian converts. Finally, it was unnecessary to list Somaliland as a separate country. The accuracy of this census could have been improved by consulting more competent stakeholders. Despite some apparent shortcomings, I congratulate SBS for conducting such a comprehensive census in such a challenging time. This is a remarkable work. SBS should also look into the large Somali Christian population in Yemen. I know several large Christian families in Sana'a, Aden, and Hudaydah.

Rev. Mohamed Gurhan
Somali Lutheran Church

I am thankful to God for the valuable work the Somali Bible Society (SBS) carried out in conducting a vital census of Somali Christians. The SBS worked tirelessly inside and outside the country, where its workers and volunteers faced increased dangers.

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This census provides essential information for those who wish to understand the current state of Christianity in the Somali Peninsula.

Quule M. Egal
Somali Christian Elder

I thank everyone who dedicated their time and effort to complete this census. The census provides valuable information, such as the number of Christians, their gender, and their Christian background. The census also highlights the clans with the highest and lowest numbers of Christians. I pray that this census will draw more Somalis to our Heavenly Father.

Samsam Ebert
Ministry Leader

According to the census report, most ethnic Somali Djiboutian Christians reside outside the country. Nonetheless, I am pleased that SBS was able to count as many ethnic Somali Djiboutian Christians within the country as possible. SBS has once again made history. *Cad ceed soo baxday calaacali ma qariso* (no hand palm can hide a shining sun).

Sadiq Mursal *(pseudonym),* ***BA, MA***

The SBS census has been executed commendably, although we believe the actual number of Somali Christians is greater than the census reveals. However, we are concerned about the mention of clans in the census report. Clannish ideology still causes too much suffering among Somalis. Christians believe we are a new creation and belong to Jesus' "clan." We pray that our heavenly Father blesses and safeguards the SBS census team for their outstanding effort.

Shino and Shania Gabow
Somali Christian TV & Media Ministries

Feedback from Muslims

After the public release of the census, an uproar erupted on social media among Somali Muslims. Muslim preachers expressed their discontent regarding the rising number of Somali Christians in Somalia. One notable Muslim preacher, who is also a member of the Somaliland parliament, criticized the census while weeping at the mosque pulpit: https://youtu.be/MoKUZQ_SGUg?si=S5E7WyolN6DWicsZ. Additionally, some leaders of the Somali Bible Society received death threats. However, some Somali Muslims defended the Somali Christian community.

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We remain amazed by the results of the recent Christian census conducted in the Somali Peninsula, particularly the noteworthy number of Christians identified. We are thankful for the dedication of the SBS census team and commend their outstanding work. Our heartfelt desire is to see the Somali Church grow and develop into a more Christlike community. We pray that the divisions among God's people, including those based on clans, cultures, and class, will diminish, allowing us to unite under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

End Note

The Somali Christian Census can be accessed at:
Somali Christian Census, 2023. Vol. IV, Issue 2, December 2023. Bureau of Statistics, Somali Bible Society. https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/census-of-somali-christians-2023.pdf (accessed 25 November 2024).

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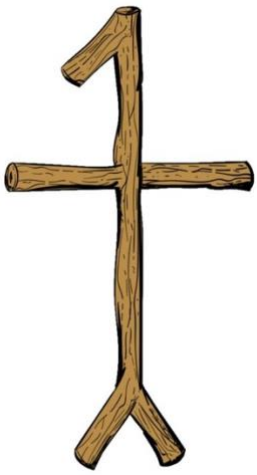
A Brief History of the Somali Cross

Aweis A. Ali

Description



The Somali Cross was christened *hankutallaab*.[192] This specific design is inspired by the traditional Somali *hangool*, which nomads and shepherds use to move thorny branches out of their way and pull taller branches closer to grazing animals for them to eat. It can be referred to as a shepherd's staff- Somali style. The *hangool* is an essential tool for Somali nomads, as it helps them navigate the harsh environment that they live in. It is used to protect themselves and their animals from harm, and it is also used to nurture the animals by providing them with food.

The Somali Cross, a unique symbol, encapsulates the cultural heritage of the Somali people. It's not just a cross but a testament to the resilience, creativity, and resourcefulness of the Somali people who have adapted to their harsh environment. The cross is a fusion of the *hangool* and a horizontal line, resembling a Latin cross with a Somali touch, creating a unique and beautiful design. The Somali Cross was crafted to represent the unity and interconnectedness of the Somali Christian community.

Cultural Relevance

Hangool

In some regions in the Somali Peninsula, when a clan chief or elder is crowned, they are given a *hangool* as a symbol of authority, nurture, and protection. The Somali Cross takes this tradition to a new level by attempting to represent the entire Somali Christian community and their cultural heritage.

I, Aweis A. Ali, designed the Somali Cross in 2023. The design, a true work of art, has been widely praised for its beauty and cultural significance. The Somali Cross symbolizes hope and unity for the Somali Church, a testament to the creativity of the Somali community of faith.

See this link for different crosses and their names:

[192] "Han" from ***han****gool* and "*kutallaab*" from *is****kutallaab***, a Somali for cross.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_cross_variants

Somali man shows off his hangool and other cultural artifacts

A North American missionary to the Somalis tattoos the Somali Cross on his calf.

Eng. Faisal Ali Warabe, Chairman of the Somaliland political party, UCID, with his trademark hangool.

A Somali goat with a cruciform branding.

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Somalis and Crosses[193]

Somalis are a transnational ethnic group that lives in their ancestral homes in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. The symbol of the cross holds a significant place among Somali Muslims.[194] The crosses observed by Richard Burton during his visit to the Sool and the Sanaag regions of British Somaliland looked more Greek than Latin.[195] The Abyssinian Church, which had the most influence in British Somaliland, uses a variety of crosses, including the Greek and the Latin.[196]

This Church also has selections of elaborate indigenous crosses.

Sada Mire, a Somali archaeologist, describes the annual Aw-Barkhadle Muslim religious celebrations in present-day Somaliland, "People come to the site and paint a cross on their foreheads."[197] Sada describes in Aw-Barkhadle "where there is at least one burial with stelae decorated with a Christian Orthodox cross in Situ."[198] Sada adds "Other Christian burials also exist across the country."[199] Aw-Barkhadle is a Muslim shrine near Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Sada Mire once again describes Christian burial sites in Somaliland, which demonstrate clear evidence of Abyssinian Christianity. This is not surprising, as ancient Abyssinia sometimes included areas that are now part of Somaliland, such as Hargeisa and Berbera:

> There are also megalithic burials where the stones are arranged in a cross. The area of Dhuxun (62), in Saahil region, has many cruciform burials…. There are many isolated, single Christian burials, massive in their design…. Dhubato in the Hargeysa region and the Saahil area have many ancient Christian burials which are aligned as a cross. Sites such as Suuqsade…contain ancient Christian burials. There are also finds of Christian codices in Somaliland.[200]

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[193] This section has been adapted from: Ali, Aweis A. Understanding the Somali Church. Nairobi, Kenya: KENPRO Publications, 2021. Used by permission. https://somalibiblesociety.org/download/understanding-the-somali-church.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2024)

[194] The cross very often used by Somali Muslims is a hybrid of the Greek, and the Latin crosses. The Greek cross has arms of equal length while Latin cross has a vertical beam that sticks above the crossbeam.

[195] Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 318.

[196] The official name of this Monophysite Church is the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church (Amharic: የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ ቤተ ክርስቲያን).

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

[198] Ibid. 26.

[199] Ibid. 30.

[200] Sada Mire, "Mapping the Archaeology of Somaliland: Religion, Art, Script, Time, Urbanism, Trade and Empire." Afr Archaeol Rev 32, 111–136 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10437-015-9184-9 (accessed 30 December 2020).

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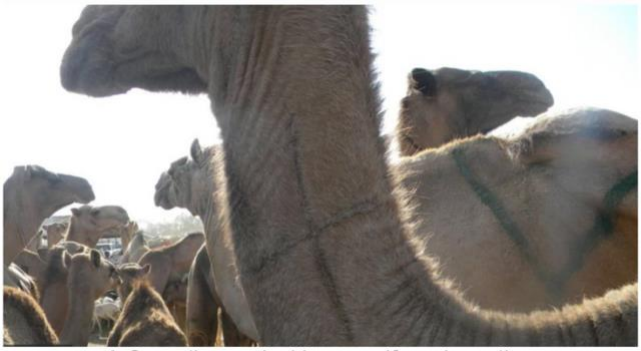
In certain regions of the Somali peninsula, students at religious schools traditionally receive a temporary cross on their foreheads or cheeks from their teachers as a symbol of blessing. The teachers use black ink, the same ink that the students use to write the Qur'an on their wooden tablets. However, this practice has been in decline in southern Somalia over the past twenty years due to the rise of radical Islam, which opposes all practices it deems non-Islamic.

In the early 1970s, Somalia was struck by a devastating cholera outbreak. Due to a lack of medical resources, many lives were lost. Dehydration was a common cause of death among cholera victims. One of the ominous signs that a patient might not survive was the development of pruney feet, known as "cago miin" in Somali. Muslim traditional healers would burn a cruciform on the soles of the feet, as it was believed to have medicinal value. Many Somali Muslims who survived the cholera epidemic still have these markings on their feet today. This deadly period in Somalia's history is referred to as "Daacuunki" (the cholera era) or "salaan diid" (the no handshake era).

In pre-civil war Somalia, it was very common for metal gates to have crosses embedded in them for decoration. In the Somali peninsula, people who cannot read use a cross symbol to mark their possessions so they can easily identify them. Crosses serve five purposes: decoration, blessing, protection, healing, and identification. Identification crosses are akin to signatures, as everyone has a unique way of drawing their own cross. Sometimes, the difference lies in where the cross is placed or how many crosses are present on one's possession, such as a sack of millet.


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

In some Somali Muslim clans, particularly the Hawiye sub-clans of Murusade, Harti Abgaal, Isaaq Daa'uud, Sheekhaal, and Gaal Je'el, as well as the Isaaq sub-clans of Ciida Gale, Habar Yonis, and Habar Je'lo, especially those in the Haud Reserve area of the Somaliland-Ethiopia border, and a few members of the Abdalla and Mohammed Subeyr of the Ogaden sub-clan, and the Marehan sub-clan, all of whom are part of the Darod clan, brand their livestock, such as camels and cattle, using the cross symbol.

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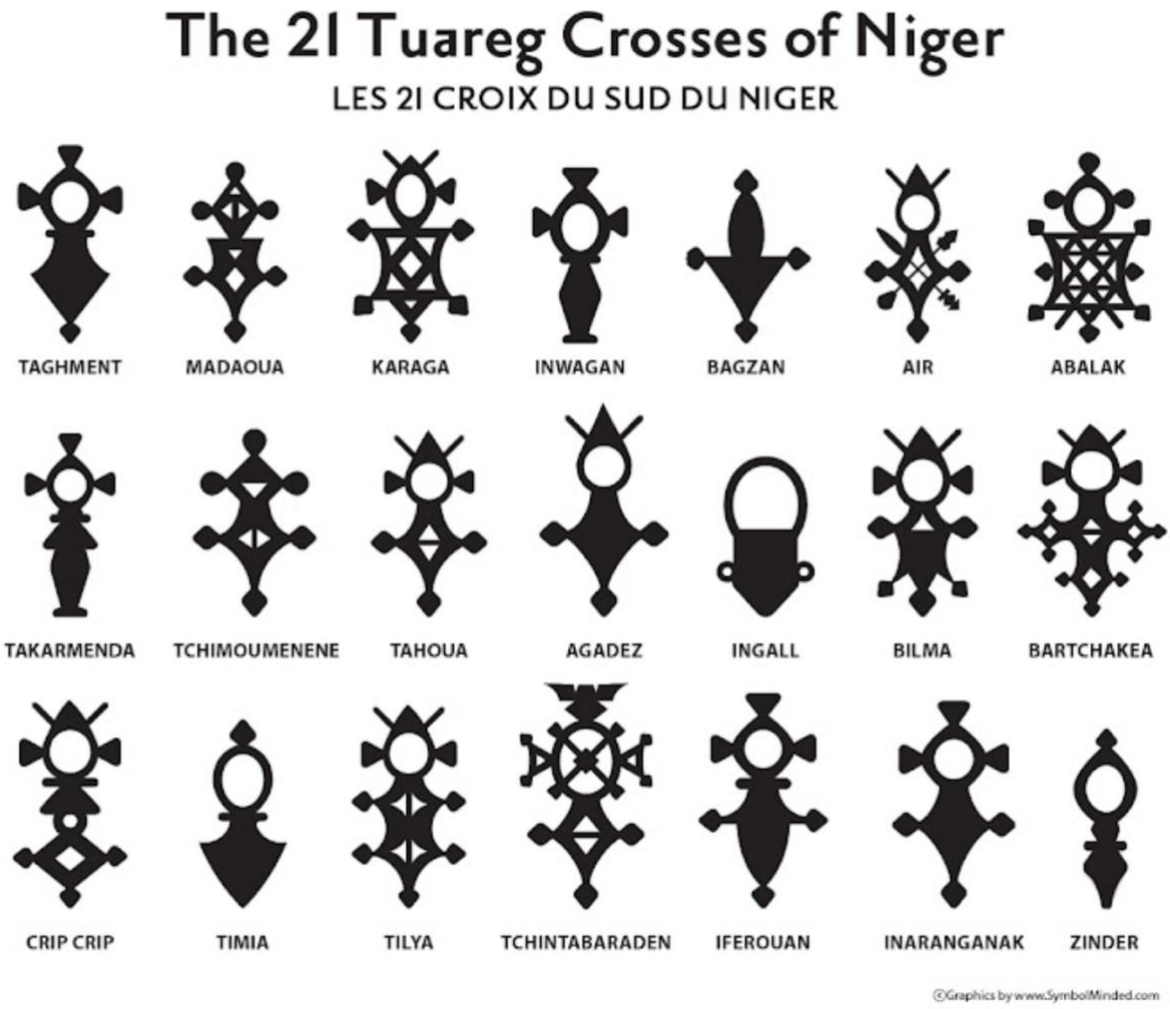
Crosses in Other Cultures



Throughout history, the global Christian community has created various types of crosses that carry profound meanings. Here are a few selected examples that showcase the richness and creativity of the worldwide church:

1. Greek Cross: With four equal arms, this crux quadrata symbolizes the four directions and the universal spread of the gospel. Its design reflects accessible faith.

2. Latin Cross: Also known as crux missa, this cross features a longer vertical arm and powerfully reminds us of sacrifice, which is central to Christian teachings.

3. Celtic Cross: The Celtic cross, with its distinctive circle, was prevalent in Ireland, Great Britain, and France from the 9th to the 12th centuries. It symbolized faith intertwined with culture.

4. Saint Andrew's Cross: Named for the Apostle Andrew, who is believed to have died on an "X"-shaped cross, this cross embodies courage and dedication to belief.

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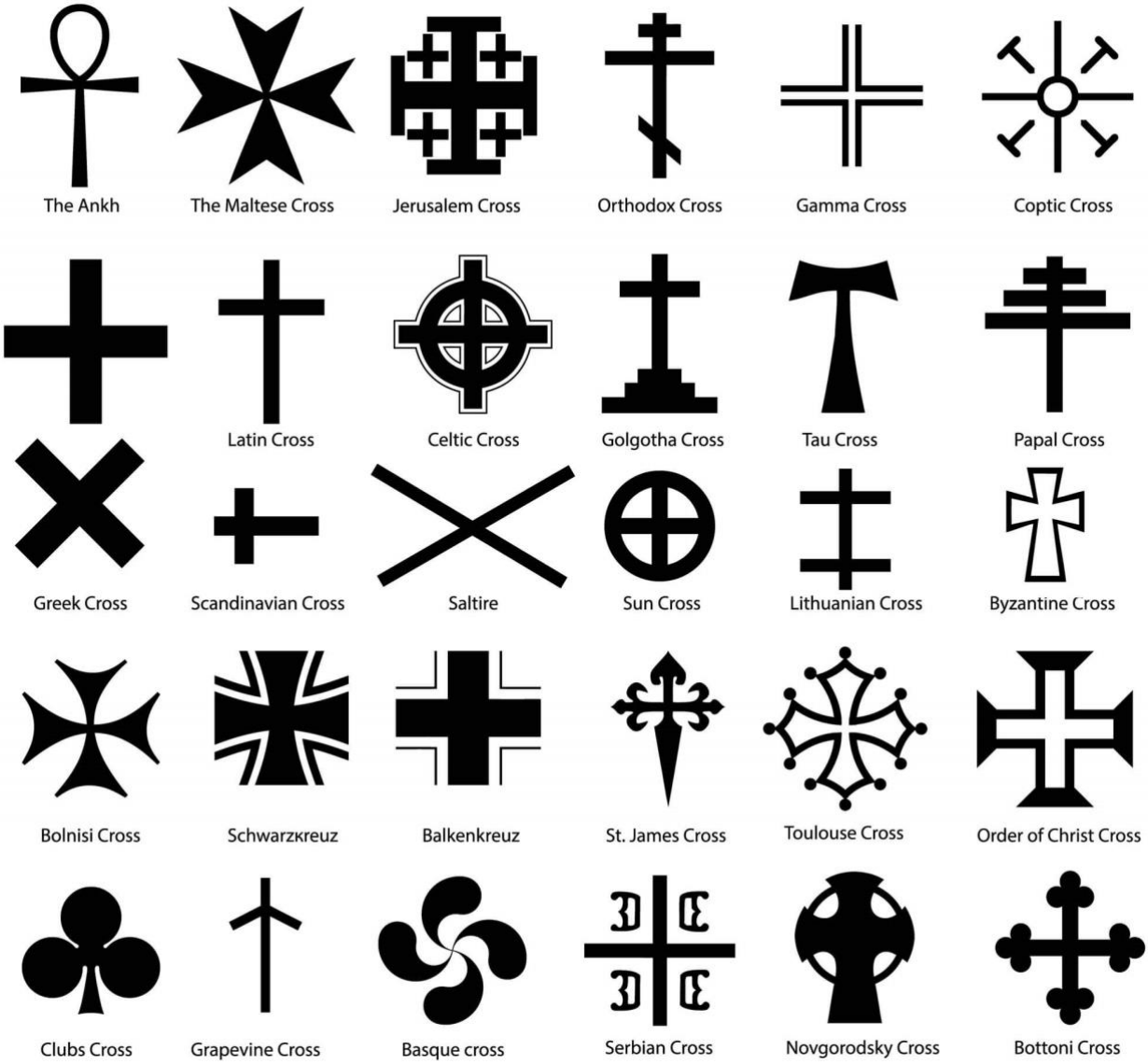
5. Jerusalem Cross: Associated with the Crusaders, this cross features a large center cross and smaller corner crosses, symbolizing the spread of Christianity.

6. Anchor Cross: Its anchor shape represents hope and salvation, reminding us that faith anchors us in challenging times.

7. Saltire: The saltire's diagonal "X" design is a striking symbol of active faith.

Each cross is not only a religious icon but also a powerful message of hope and history.



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Feedback from Believers

The *Hankutallaab* Somali Cross beautifully combines Somali culture and the Christian faith by incorporating the *hangool* into the Christian cross. This design represents Somali cultural heritage while maintaining Christian symbolism and serves as a visual metaphor for Somali Christianity, fostering a stronger sense of community and belonging. It demonstrates a deep understanding of Somali culture and Christian symbolism and serves as a model for contextualizing Christian symbols for specific cultural settings.

Hadliye Baashe Amani
Education and Discipleship Director
Somali Bible Society

The traditional Somali cross represents the rich cultural heritage of the Somali people. It symbolizes unity, faith, and the resilience of a community deeply rooted in tradition and shared values. I am impressed by how beautifully this symbol encapsulates the essence of Somali culture and the significance of the Christian cross.

Noor Hassan
Abuur Cusub Ministry

The cross became a symbol of Christianity in the second century AD. More important than the symbol is the fact that our Savior died on it for our sins. The *hangool*, a traditional Somali shepherd's crook, is important in Somali culture. Giving it symbolism for the Somali Church is an interesting idea. May it positively impact the spiritual growth of the Somali Church!

Sam O.
A Cross-cultural Minister

In the history of Christianity, various cross symbols have emerged, such as the Jerusalem Cross, Greek Cross, Roman Catholic Cross, and Coptic Crosses. The Somali Church is considering adopting the Somali Cross as its symbol to reflect its community's identity and connections. The Somali Cross represents love, forgiveness, and resurrection, reflecting Jesus' teachings on the value of serving others with kindness and love.

Ahmed Philip
Linguist and Bible Translator

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The Somali Cross, or *Hankutallaab*, is a beautiful fusion of cultural heritage and spiritual symbolism. It represents the strength and resilience of the Somali people, embodying unity and hope for the Somali Christian community. Dr. Aweis' design is a testament to Somali Christians' rich traditions and enduring faith.

Dr. Naol B. Kebede
Physician and Missionary

I believe the Cross of Jesus Christ represents the greatest work ever done by the true God and the most powerful accomplishment He ever undertook. The Cross is the perfect demonstration that our God is able to turn any situation, no matter how bad it appears, into something good! This distinctly Somali depiction of the Cross testifies that Jesus Christ died for the Somali people as well as all people of all times.

Dennis Dyvig
A Minister to the Somalis

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The Anti-Semitic Song, Israel And Two Response Songs

Aweis A. Ali

Song name: Israel.[201] The song is also known as "Waa Boqol Yuhuudduye," The Jews are a few.[202]

Singer: Hassan Adan Samatar (He lives in Minnesota, USA)

Lyrics and melody: Ali Diriye "Ali Gaab" (He died in January 2018)

Year written: 1973

Genre: Antisemitism

Occasion: This song was written in response to Israel's liberation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank during the June 1967 War.

The song on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yat_q1EYchE[203]

Details: Hassan Adan Samatar, a popular Somali singer, sang this antisemitic song during the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting in its Twenty Third Ordinary Session in Mogadishu, Somalia, from 06 to 11 June 1974.[204] The resolution of this meeting included: "RECALLING all previous OAU Resolutions on the Middle East reaffirming that the total withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories and the exercise of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people are pre-conditions for any just and lasting peace in the Middle East;"[205]

Translation reason: To expose the deep-rooted antisemitism in the Somali culture.

The Jews Are Few Ali Diriye "Ali Gaab"	**Waa Boqol Yuhuuddu** Translation by Aweis A. Ali
Israa`iil ma boodeen *Bari Dhexe intuu dego* *Birta kuma afaysteen* *Waa boqol Yuhuudduye* *Rag baa biirinaayoo* *Baarka u fidhaayee* *Barqo laguma gaadheen*	*Israel could not have been arrogant* *They would not have settled in the Middle East* *Sharpening their murderous knives* *The Jews are a few in number* *But some foreign men defend them* *Making them look grandiose* *The Jews could not have lasted a day*

[201] Xasan Aadan Samatar Israa'iil Lyrics 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yat_q1EYchE (accessed on 11 July 2024).

[202] The literal translation is, the Jews are only one hundred.

[203] This is a short version of the song. The complete version is available here: https://youtu.be/UEC3ifa30vo?si=QvKbm4nocRItq8YE

[204] The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was renamed African Union (AU) on 26 May 2001.

[205] "Resolutions on the Twenty Third Ordinary Session Of The Council Of Ministers, Mogadiscio, Somalia, 6 - 15 June 1974, P. 2. https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9582-council_en_6_15_june_1974_council_ministers_twenty_third_ordinary_session.pdf

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Badda kuma ciyaareen	*They could not have pillaged the sea*
Barbaartana ma laayeen	*They could not have killed the Arab youth*
Haddaan muruqa buuxiyo	*Without the mighty muscle*
Isticmaar ku baal jirin	*Of the supportive colonizers*
Bayda u garaacayn	*Colonizers who cheer them on*
Waa bahal gumaystuhu	*The invaders are a cruel beast*
Kala baahsanaantiyo	*They like us to be disconnected*
Baylahdaada jeceloo	*They want us to be vulnerable*
Intuu baadka kula helo	*They hit us with their gun butts*
Kaa bogo qaniinyoo	*They bite into our flesh*
Burka kuu dhex gelayoo	*They hide in the bushes*[206]
Bishimaha dushoodiyo	*They are only a lip service*
Been weeye nabadduye	*These peace talks are a lie*
Baaruudda qiiqdiyo	*Explosions that are fiery*
Bundukh weeye dunidu	*And guns are the only solution*
Afrikaay is biirsoo	*O Africa, come together*
Isa soo bahaysoo	*Unite your forces*
Ninka baal u leexdana	*If one of us disagrees with us*
Basar wax ugu sheegoo	*Reason with them diplomatically*
Ku ballama dagaal	*Let us agree to fight the Jews*
Israa'iil ma boobeen	*Israel could not have robbed the Arabs*
Carab uma badheedheen	*They could not have targeted the Arabs*
Nabad kuma bariisteen	*The Jews could not have lived in peace*
Beytkii Ilaahiyo	*The House of Allah [Al Aqsa Mosque]*
Barxaddii Rasuulkiyo	*The holy ground of Prophet Muhammad*
Waxaan loo banayniyo	*Something that was not permitted to them*
Bakhti kuma dhex kariyeen	*Like cooking their carrion there*
Kaare kuma burburiyeen	*They could not have destroyed sites with tanks*
Batar kuma ciyaareen	*Dancing their horah dances*
Haddaan muruqa buuxiyo	*Without the mighty muscle*
Isticmaar ku baal jirin	*Of the supportive colonizers*

Background Story: While growing up in Islamic Somalia as a Muslim, I was always troubled by the notorious and hateful antisemitic song "Israel." Even as a child, I recognized the dangers of this song, yet Somali Muslims continue to play and enjoy it. After converting to Christianity in 1986, I promised to write a response song to it, and I have finally accomplished that. I plan to release the two response songs as

[206] The bites allude to snake bites, snakes that hide in the bushes.

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soon as possible, and they will be heard on Somali airwaves by many Somalis so they become a counterbalance to the hateful antisemitic song, Israel.

A Direct Response

Waa Bilyan Yuhuuddu Aweis A. Ali	**The Jews Are Many** Aweis A. Ali
Israa'iil ma boodin	*Israel is not arrogant*
Bari Dhexe Allaa dhigay	*God put them in the Middle East*
Birtu waa difaacoo	*Their weapons are for defense only*
Rabbi yaana badiyoo	*God multiplied their numbers*
Uma baahna biirin	*No foreign men defend them*
Baar loo firaa iyo	*No one makes Israel look grandiose*
Barqo laguma aado	*Israel cannot be defeated in a day*
Badna kuma ciyaarin	*They do not pillage the sea*
Barbaartana ma laynin	*They do not kill the Arab youth*
Waxaa buuxa muruqood	*Their own muscles are mighty*
Uma baahna isticmaar	*They do not need colonizers for help*
Bayda u garaacee	*Or colonizers to cheer them on*
Rabbaa barakadeeyee	*God blessed Israel*
Kala baahshay cadawgood	*He disoriented their enemies*
Baylahdooda bidayoo	*He made their enemies more vulnerable*
Ku burburiyay baadka	*He destroyed them with gun butts*
Iyo qaniinyo booga leh	*And bites that are infectious*
Burka uga timaadee	*Bites that come from the bushes*[207]
Bushimaha afkoodiyo	*They are not a lip service*
Been maahan nabadduye	*These peace talks are not false*
Cadaw belada jecel baa	*The enemies that love wars*
Buur sare ka tuuraye	*Ruined the peace talks*
Afrikoo is biirsata	*If Africa came together*
Isa soo bahaysta	*If they united their forces*
Ninkii baal u leexdana	*If one of them disagrees with the rest*
Basar wax ugu sheegta	*Is reasoned with diplomatically*
Ma burburin karaayaan	*They cannot destroy*
Dhulkii barakadaysnaa	*The Holy Land*
Israa'iil ma boobin	*Israel did not rob anyone*
Carab uma bareerin	*They did not target Arabs*
Nabad ayay ku baaqeen	*Israel called for peace*
Birtaa loo afaystay	*They were threatened with weapons*
Weerar lagu balaariyay	*They were attacked from all corners*
Yom Kippur dagaal biday	*They were attacked on Yom Kippur*
Barxaddii Ibraahim	*The Holy ground of Abraham*
Bakhti kuma dhex kariyaan	*They did not cook carrion in it*

[207] The bites allude to snake bites, snakes that hide in the bushes.

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Kaare kuma burburiyaan	*They did not destroy it with tanks*
Iyagaa bidhaanshoo	*In fact, they made it more beautiful*
Cadawgii bareeriyo	*Challenging the aggressive enemies*
ka difaaca bahalada	*They defended it from the aggressors*
Khoosher badarki mooyee	*A food that is not kosher*
Bushimaha ma saaraan	*Does not touch their lips*
Boqorkaana doortee	*God Chose the Jews*
Ad-Dukhaam siduu baray	*Surah Ad-Dukham teaches this*[208]
Noo sheegtay Baqarah	*Even Surah Bakharah told us this*[209]
Dhulka Barakadaysan	*The Jews did not acquire*
Baad kuma ay heline	*The Holy land by force*
Baaxadsooraa siiyee	*But God gave it to them*
Al Maa'idah bal eega	*Take a look at Surah Al Ma'idah*[210]

An Indirect Response

Israel La Beegsay Aweis A. Ali	**Israa'iil Has Been Targeted** Aweis A. Ali
Israa'iil la beegsay	Israel has been targeted
Cadaw soo bareeryoo	The enemy is in the open
Baallahay ka marayaan	Surrounding Israel
Belaayay la maageen	Wanting to inflict harm
Buurti Guriga Eebbee	On the Temple Mount
Rabbi yaa badbaadshoo	God has saved it
Baalashiisa hoos dhigay	Placing it under His wings
Israa'iil la boobyoo	Israel has been robbed
Bari Dhexe dhulkoodii	Its land in the Middle East
Birta loo afaystoo	Is being targeted with weapons
Rabbaa barakadeeyee	God blessed Israel
Uma baahna biirin	It has enough manpower
Barqo yay difaacdeen	In one morning, it defended
Badda iyo berigiye	Its land and sea

[208] "And We chose them [Israelites] aforetime above the nations, knowingly." Qur'an, Ad-Dukham 44:32. Yusuf Ali.

[209] "O Children of Israel! call to mind the special favour which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all others." Qur'an, Al-Bakharah 2:122. Yusuf Ali.

[210] "O my people [Israelites]! Enter the holy land which Allah hath assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously." Qur'an, Al-Ma'idah, 5:21. Yusuf Ali.

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Israa'iil bir weeyee	Israel is strong
Muruqooda buuxoo	It is very powerful
Isticmaar ka baqanine	It does not fear colonizers
Ku hubaysan beebe	Who are armed with wheeled tanks
Bulshadoodu waa mide	Israelis are united
Waa barwaaqasooran	They are prosperous
Been lagu aqoonine	They do not lie
Israa'iil bal maqaloo	O Israel, listen
Waa bahal cadaawuhu	Your enemies are beasts
Shaydaan bulaalshoo	Supported by Satan
Baylahdiina jeceloo	They want you to be vulnerable
Baadka idinla dhacayoo	They hit you with their gun butt
Beerihiina dhiciyoo	They steal your farms
Beledkiina dumiyee	They destroy your cities
Yaa Benu Israa'iil	O people of Israel!
Bulshadii la doortaay	You are the chosen ones
Baaqa cadawga diida	Reject the calls of your enemy
Been weeye nabaduye	Their peace talks are a lie
Bohol cadawgu qodayee	A trap they set up for you
Foojignaanta badiyoo	Be alert, be watchful
Yaan belaayo idin helin	That you may not suffer
Yuhuuddooy is biirsoo	O Jews, be united
Bah quraad tihiine	You are one family
Midkii Ballanta diidana	If one of you rejects the Covenant
Bara wiixii la soo maray	Teach them the past suffering
Dabxasuuqi beri hore	The past Holocaust
isdifaaca boowe	O brethren, defend yourselves
Ha baroorto cadawguye	May your enemy wail
Israa'iil ma baqatee	Israel is fearless
Ma baryaan facooda	It does not beg others
Rabbaa barakadeeyee	God blessed it
Muruq balaaran siiyee	He made it powerful
Beerkay uga turaayaan	It is kind to its enemies
Cadawga is bahaystaye	Who are united against it
Barqay jebin lahaayeen	Israel can defeat them in a day

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About the Author

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

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Baroordiiq – Mourning

English translation by Aweis A. Ali

About Amina

Amina Mahamad, a prominent Somali Christian, passed away in the Netherlands on May 15, 2024. She is best remembered as a wonderful mother to her children and a fearless evangelist. Amina regularly shared her testimony with Somali Muslims on various social media platforms. She also provided financial assistance to persecuted Somali Christians in the Somali Peninsula. Amina's untimely passing was a shock to the Somali Christian community. We find comfort in knowing our sister finished the race. "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:4, NIV

The Somali Bible Society honors the life and ministry of Amina Mahamad with the following Somali dirges:

Aamina geerideedii Y. B.Xirsi	**Amina's Passing** Y. B.Xirsi
Ayaan weeye murugo leh *Idilkood walaaluhu* *Ay barooranaayaan* *Tacsi ay dhigaayaan* *Aamina geerideedii* *Anfariir ka qaadnoo* *Uurkutaalo wayn iyo* *Xasuus weeye aan go'in* *Tiirbay ahayd adag* *Damal bay ahayd wayn* *Iftiin bay ahayd baxa* *Abuur bay ahayd dhala* *Eebboow Ilaahoow* *Adigaa awoodloon* *Aaboow ku tuugnee* *Albaabada Fardawskii* *Aloow ay ku waartaa*	*This is a sorrowful day* *All brothers and sisters* *Are mourning* *They organize a memorial service* *Amina's passing* *Was a shock to us* *It is a deep sorrowfulness* *A loss that can't be forgotten* *She was a strong pillar* *She was a powerful defense* *She was a shining light* *She was a fruitful disciple* *O God, our Father!* *You are the powerful one* *We beseech you, Father* *In the eternal Heaven* *May she dwell in it forever*

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Adeegay ahaydoo	*She was a minister of the gospel*
Injiilkay aduunyada	*She took the gospel*
Aloostay u sheegtoo	*To the people of the world*
U ahayd ilays baxa	*She was a shing light for them*
Iyadoon baqayn bay	*She was fearless*
Awoodloow Ilaahay	*O powerful God*
Amaantiisa badan bay	*Your limitless praise*
U ahayd mid daacada	*She was faithful to you*
Eraygiisa nool bay	*Your living Word*
Aduunyada u sheegtoo	*She told the world*
Aamin bay ahayd wacan	*She was trustworthy*
Aynaan ilaabayn	*We will never forget her*
Eebboow Ilaahoow	*O God, our Father!*
Adigaa awoodloon	*You are the powerful one*
Aaboow ku tuugnee	*We beseech you, Father*
Albaabada Fardawskii	*In the eternal Heaven*
Aloow ay ku waartaa	*May she dwell in it forever*
Xanuunkii adkaayee	*A painful illness*
Aamina haleelee	*Affected Amina*
Jidhkeedii asiibaa	*It tormented her body*
Nagu reebay uurxumo	*We are distressed by this*
Iyaduna awood iyo	*She was a strong woman*
Samir aad u wayn bay	*An immense patience*
Aamini lahaydoo	*Was her trademark*
Isu dhiibtay Eebbaha	*She surrendered to God*
Istefanos sidiisii	*Just like Stephen*
Iftiin baa u baxay sare	*She witnessed the light*
Udgoonkii janada iyo	*She is with the Father*
Aabbahay la joogtaa	*In the fragrant Heaven*
Eebboow Ilaahoow	*O God, our Father!*
Adigaa awoodloon	*You are the powerful one*
Aabboow ku tuugnee	*We beseech you, Father*
Albaabada Fardawskii	*In the eternal Heaven*
Aloow ay kuwaartaa	*May she dwell in it eternally*
Ubadkiyo caruurtii	*The children of Amina*
Aamina kasoo hadhay	*Whom she left behind*
Idilkood walaaluhu	*All the Somali Christians*

Aabbo iyo hooyiyo	*Are like their own parents*
Ehel baan u wada nahay	*They are like a family to them*
Sayidoow Ilaahoow	*O Lord God!*
Caruurtaa agoonta ah	*The maternal orphans*
Kuu dhiibnay adigee	*We place them in your hand*
U gargaar Ilaahoow	*Give them the help they need*
Ifka nolol saraysoo	*A good life in this world*
Ruuxaagu uu hago	*A guidance by the Holy Spirit*
Ugu deeq Ilaahoow	*Give them these two gifts*
Ka ilaali aafada	*Save them from malevolence*
Uu sido ibliiskii	*And the malice from the evil one*
Kuwo kuu adeegoo	*Let these kids serve you*
Ka adkaada shaydaan	*Protect them from Satan*
Eebboow ka yeeloo	*Be their aide*
Hadyadaha u waawayn	*Give them, O God*
Ugu deeq Ilaahoow	*Some great gifts*
Eebboow Ilaahoow	*O God, our Father!*
Adigaa awoodloon	*You are the powerful one*
Aabboow ku tuugnee	*We beseech you, Father*
Albaabada Fardawskii	*In the eternal Heaven*
Aloow ay kuwaartaa	*May she dwell in it forever*

Inantii Ilaahee *Muse Bashir*	***The Daughter of God*** *Muse Bashir*
Aaminaay amaaneey	*O the praised Amina*
Inantii Ilaahee	*The daughter of God*
Aadmigu u bogayeey	*The one loved by the people*
Abaalkii ad gashatiyo	*The folks you helped*
Iimaankaagii weynaa	*Your strong faith*
Aadmigu la wada yaab	*All these amaze the people*
Markii aad aroorteed	*When you passed away*
Aakhiro u hoyataan	*When you went to Heaven*
La amakaagnay geerida	*Your death shocked us*
Iilka kuu taxaabtee	*The death that took you to the grave*
Inaga kaa fogaysee	*It created a distance between us*
Ilmadaa na qubatoo	*We are shedding tears for you*
Dhammaantayo abaariyo	*We are experiencing a drought*
Ilima iyo barooriyo	*Wailing and mourning*

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Uurkutaalo xanuunliyo	*Our hearts are broken*
Oohin naga dhammaatee	*We keep on wailing*
Eebbe waxaan ka tuugnaa	*We beseech God*
Inuu adi ku qaato	*That he will bring you closer to Him*
Albaabada jannada iyo	*May you enter the Heaven*
Udgoonow Masiixiyo	*And be with our beloved Messiah*
Awliyada la doortaa	*May you be with the chosen saints*
Aad agtooda joogtoo	*May you fellowship with them*
Inta aad ka timidiyo	*The people you left behind*
Ehelkaagi baannoo	*We are your family*
Kuu wada aloosnoo	*We are here for you*
Ilmadaa na qubatoo	*We are shedding tears*
Eraygii aad beertiyo	*The people you witnessed to*
Injiilkaa ku tabayoo	*The ministry misses you*
Loo waa adoo kale	*There is none like you*
Aaminaay mid kula mid	*O Amina, no one is like you*
Kuma arag adduunyada	*I have never seen anyone like you*

About the Translator

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

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A Call for Papers (CFP)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

The *Somali Bible Society Journal* is a biannual online publication that accepts any papers that contribute to the understanding of the Somali Church, its history, mission, and ministry. The *SBS Journal* also publishes interviews, book reviews, and poetry. No particular footnoting or bibliography style is required as long as the author is consistent in their chosen writing style. Because of the Somali ministry"s nature, authors can use their real names if they wish or pen names when there is a security concern.

The length of the papers is negotiable but a minimum of 2,500 words are recommended. Longer papers are appreciated. Papers must be single-spaced, and Microsoft Word. Papers are accepted throughout the year. The authors are encouraged to send an abstract of about 250 words before sending a complete paper. If your paper is already completed, we would still consider it for publication. The author should send a brief biography with their abstract or completed paper and a photo unless there is a security concern. The author's email address is included in the published brief bio unless requested otherwise.

The *SBS Journal* does not republish already published papers. Please do not send any paper that is being considered by another publication. The *SBS Journal* contributes to the literature development of the Somali Church. Your paper could inspire, strengthen, and encourage the persecuted but growing Somali community of faith worldwide. Your sacrifice of submitting quality papers to the *SBS Journal* will become the Somali Church's everlasting heritage.

The SBSJ is the official Journal of the *Somali Bible Society* (SBS). SBS is fully registered and represents Somali Christians in the Somali peninsula and beyond. The SBS is a non-denominational and not for profit parachurch organization. Please email your abstract or complete paper to any of the below email addresses.

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, PhD, a missiologist and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. 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, Missouri, and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. The Editorial Board can be reached at info@SomaliBibleSociety.org or amazingwisdom@gmail.com*

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Advertise in the SBS Journal

Aweis Ali was recently interviewed by Open Doors (Norway), in which he tells the story of the deadly persecution of his 14-member house church, where his friends were martyred for Christ. Aweis also talks about the SBS of training evangelists to lead 250,000 Somalis to the Lord in the next 10 years.

This is a must-see video!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrXxV_fwUFY

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Faithful Movement for Change
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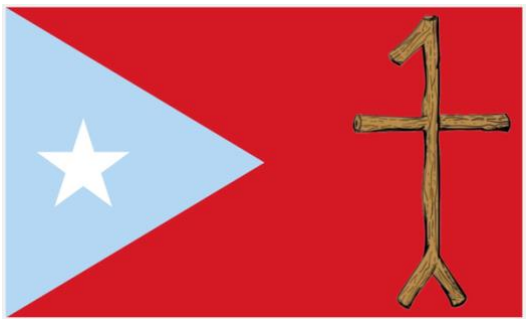
Somali Christian Forum (SCF) is a coalition of Christians devoted to making Christ-like disciples, planting churches, and empowering church leaders to promote peace, healing and transformation among the Somali people in the Horn of Africa.



Welcome to the Somali Christian flag, designed by Aweis Ali in 2024. The blue and white star represent the Somali flag, while the red background symbolizes the blood of Christ. A Somali cross prominently features against the red section of the Somali Christian flag.

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