

Review: Michelle Waters, *Eritrea: A People Imprisoned, Living Sacrifice* Book Co., Bartlesville, OK, 2012

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Gospel-Deprived Land, Soul-Destroying Tortures

Given the proximity of Eritrea to Saudi Arabia, Christian persecution would not be surprising at all, however, what is surprising is its largely non-Islamic source.

The country has a long history of Eastern Orthodoxy from the Coptic Church, since the 4thC. While Islam sought to dominate from the 8thC and achieved some success, it was stopped in the 16thC after an attempted jihadi invasion under General Gagn of Adal.

What arose in modern times were: Roman Catholic sectarian persecution; invasion by Italy in WWII; war with Ethiopia; and finally a Marxist revolution. The end result is a Socialist country with religious persecution outside of four “approved” church groups.

The most memorable part of this account are the beating and shipping container tortures, as recounted by Christian Helen Berhame who endured with great courage. Thankfully, she has managed to escape the country.

Eritrea achieved independence from Ethiopia in the early 1990s.

In 1998, war broke out with Ethiopia for two years. The Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) were critical in defending the country and won power, but turned the country into a closed and repressed nation.

In May 2002, only four religious groups were recognised: Islam; Orthodox Church; Catholic Church; and the Lutheran-affiliated Evangelical Church.

Helen Berhane became an evangelical Christian and was soon imprisoned and persecuted. She was eventually released and wrote her story in *Song of the Nightingale*.

Every day, hundreds are held in shipping containers, often overcrowded with more than a dozen locked inside.

“The helicopter” punishment involves tying up hands and feet behind the back, then being left outside for days or even weeks.

Coptic Christianity arrived in Aksum via two Syrians boys, Frumentius and Aedisius, in the 4thC. Frumentius was eventually a Bishop in Aksum.

Roman Catholicism arrived in 1557 via a Jesuit bishop Andre de Oliviedo.

In the 1800s, several European missionaries arrived with the scriptures in Amharic.

In March 2005, Fill Gospel Church Kidane Weldou “disappeared” and has not been found since...

Arabs arrived in the 8thC at the Red Sea coast and settled on the Dahlak islands.

In the 16thC, the Muslim state of Adal in the east (modern-day Somalia) waged jihad on Eritrea. Adal’s leader was General Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al Ghazi called Gagn, the “left-handed”. He was killed in 1543 in battle, ending the jihad.

By the mid-19thC, Abyssinia was surrounded on all fronts by foreign forces. In the 1930s, Italy invaded Eritrea, Abyssinia and Somaliland forming Italian East Africa.

In 1950, the United Nations announced Eritrea would become an autonomous federation of Ethiopia. By 1962, this had been demoted to a province.

In the 1960s, Marxists began a guerilla war in Ethiopia. Civil war continued till 1991, but the EPLF became the ruling party and rebranded to the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).

Eritrea is the only African country without privately-owned media.

Religious minorities are only 2% of the population.

Every week, up to 500 Eritreans risk minefields, crocodile-inhabited rivers, and border guards with “shoot-to-kill” orders to try and flee the country.

An estimated 160,000 Eritrean refugees live in Sudan.

President Afewerki calls himself a “Christian” and is a member of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church.