

English translation:

N: Nafkote M: Woman on the left

M: So, about Ethiopia's religion, in brief.

N: Are you a follower of the [Ethiopian] Orthodox religion?

M: I am a follower of the Orthodox religion.

N: One of the things that I love about Ethiopia is the religion. About 50% of the population follows Islam and the remaining 50% follows Christianity. Within Christianity, about 70% -- I think, but it could have changed by now -- are Orthodox Christians. Then there are Catholics, there are Protestants...

M: Jehovah's [Witnesses]. There are many.

N: Yes there are many kinds. What I love is that, when it's our [the Orthodox] Easter or our Christmas, they come celebrate with us and fast when we fast. And when it's their time of fasting or celebration, we do the same for them.

M: Yes, that's right. Ethiopia can serve as an example to other countries in this case, because it's been many hundreds of years since Christianity and Islam were introduced into Ethiopia, and for all these years, we've been able to live together in peace and love, and I think this sets a good example.

N: Do you know anything about the arrival of religion?

M: Why don't you explain it to us?

N: Isn't there something you can tell me?

M: To tell the truth, I don't have any deep knowledge of the subject apart from having heard one or two stories.

N: Okay. You'll tell me those stories but first let me tell you a little bit of what I know.

M: Okay.

N: Towards the third or fourth century A.D., Christianity came through the king of Axum, King Ezana. After that, you know if the king and royal family adopt a religion, then everyone imitates the king; in any country, people do as the king does. But before

that, there were many kinds of religions. People that came from Greece came with their own religion. People from Arabia came with their own religion. All this was due to trade. But after King Ezana came to power, Christianity spread in the Axumite civilization. And then, up until Emperor Haile Selassie, religion and leadership were linked together. And I think this is why it became strengthened... For instance, the Orthodox Church has very many followers. And Islam – this is one of my favorite stories – in the time of Emperor Armah in the sixth or seventh century, the Prophet Muhammad's followers were persecuted in South Arabia, so they sent their children and relatives to seek refuge in Ethiopia. And after having stayed with us, while half of them returned, half stayed. At that point, Islam began to spread little by little. And then, because of trade, it was reintroduced to Ethiopia. And although this instance was peaceful, about four to five hundred years ago, a lot of people suffered; there was a lot of fighting.

M: Many churches were demolished.

N: Indeed, in the time of Gragh Ahmad.¹ But overall, what amazes me was our ability to live peacefully together with different religions, despite having differing ways of thinking and doctrines.

M: This is true. It became apparent that the Orthodox Church had become very widespread in the 16th century when Emperor Susenyos attempted to make Catholicism the main religion. And he did not succeed, so Orthodox remained as the main religion.

N: Catholicism first came during the war against Gragh Amhad.

M: The war between Gragh Ahmad and Libne Dengel.

N: Between Christianity ... and on the Muslims' side, there were the Ottoman Turks who supported them. And on our side, the Portuguese supported us. The soldiers that came from Portugal came with their own religion, Catholicism. They tried to convert people and they succeeded a little, but the majority of the people and the king prevented their success.

M: But now religion and the state are separate.

N: Yes.

M: In 1974, when Mengistu Haile Mariam came to power, imperial rule through Haile Selassie was stopped.

N: And there was communism.

M: Yes, there was communism. And it doesn't seem to me that the government that is in power now has any connections with religion.

¹ Ahmad the Left-handed.

N: Yes, you're right.

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