

Issayas Afewarki's New Testament versus His Old Testament

"Old Testament vs. New Testament" - In real world the Old Testament lays the foundation for the teachings and events found in the New Testament. As such the Bible is a progressive revelation. If you skip the first half of any good book and try to finish it, you will have a hard time understanding the characters, the plot, and the ending. In the same way, the New Testament is only completely understood when it is seen as a fulfillment of the events, characters, laws, sacrificial system, covenants, and promises of the Old Testament.

How do we grasp Issayas Afewarki's New Testament versus His Old Testament? Issayas Afewarki's New Testament to OLF, ONLF, Gunboat-7 and EPPF supporters (and I guess to the rest of CUD supporters) presumably seems that ethnic-based system should be removed from Ethiopian political arena all together. This very "New Testament" is only completely understood when it is seen as a fulfillment of the events, characters, laws, sacrificial systems, covenants, and promises made of the Old Testament. But during most of the interview session Afewarki held with Elias Kefafle of the Eritrean / "Ethiopian"/ Review, Issayas attacked the ethnic-based regime of Meles Zenawi; and further went on condemning the ethnic-federalist structured constitution created by TPLF with the help of its initial partner OLF. Issayas Afewarki further opposes ethnic-based TPLF manifestos (and those of OLF, ONLF, UEDF, OFDM, ARENA TIGRAY etc). Where did such a world view of Issayas Afewarki come about? The replies made during the interview session are so far away and so far fetched from his principal preaching in his Old Testament where he strived to see a disintegrated and weak Ethiopia. It seems Afewarki's calculated interview message was addressed to the Amhara audience. To one's dismay, just a few months ago, Issayas Afewarki was preaching the old gospel or the Old Testament of ethnic-based self-determination to the Ogaden and Oromo nationalists. So which one does he really support?

What we seem to realize is Afewarki's Old Testament versus Afewarki's New Testament. As such, we are left to wonder what Issayas Afewarki really has in mind. The interview session manifests a confusing content; one observes Afewarki vacillating between his Old and New Testaments by changing his ideological outlook based on who he is talking with. Sometimes he even forgets to adjust his speech and makes a couple of errors by referring to EPPF as an "Amhara organization." He was supposed to accept the idea that EPPF is "Ethiopian" organization. Just like the TPLF wants us to believe EPRDF is "Ethiopian," the Amhara population really wants us to believe EPPF is "Ethiopian." Afewark's error was probably his second mistake during the long interview.

Anyway, will Issayas apologize to his long-standing flirting friends including OLF and ONLF for his revelation of national unity comments during the interview? I wonder and doubt it. Most people I discuss with tell me: 'Afewarki would if he could; but he can't; so he won't'. But the OLF and ONLF probably don't care as long as they get the money and arsenal of arms. That means, Afewarki's the new gospel of becomes even more confusing since he was actually supporting TPLF's ethnic-based system in Ethiopia from its

implementation phase in 1991 up to 1998; until such time that the border war erupted between the two sinister organizations. After this confusing interview, everything I previously assumed were world known about Afewarki's political stand and related facts in politics became false. After listening to Afewarki's interview, I was left with to conclude that: (a) Afewarki has infatuated hatred to Amhara population; that was why he refused to speak Amharic. (b) According to Afewarki there occurs more crime and human rights violation in the Ogaden rather than in Darfur, Sudan. (c) In Afewarki's view, Meles Zenawi has the ambition to annex Assab and to defend Ethiopia's territorial integrity and Ethiopian interests. (d) To Afewarki, Meles Zenawi is the sole cause for clan politics to aggravate inside Somalia. (e) Actually, Issayas Afewarki opposes the ethnic-based ideology of TPLF, of the OLF and ONLF those groups whom he vehemently supported initially and still support those in the opposition. (f) To Afewarki Eritrea is an economic powerhouse and an exemplary democratic country that builds self-sufficiency alone not only within the region but also in the entire globe.

English versus Amharic

I usually care less whether anyone uses Amharic or English or any other language as a means of communication. But it was a moment of surprise to me to watch Issayas Afewarki respond in English for the interview questions asked in Amharic by Elias Kefafle of the Eritrean / "Ethiopian?" Review. Why Afewarki chose that kind of communication? Obviously, most Ethiopians of his generation knew well that Afewarki speaks Amharic quite well since he happen to study both in Dessie and at Addis Ababa during his secondary high and during his 2 years collage education. So was he intentionally trying to prove to his audience his deep-sitting hatred for Ethiopians? May be so; in fact a clue one quickly observes in the interview session comes out when Elias is asking Issayas Afewarki about the Assab Port. The question directed was to find out if Ethiopia will be able to regain Assab port. (*Note, most opposition parties in Ethiopia, including UDJ/CUD, UEDF and even the ethnic-based OFDM consider Assab as belonging to Ethiopia*). In actual fact, Issayas Afewarki's indirect answer to the question was basically NO. He tried to bit about the bush by going around the real question as much as possible especially because the EPPF Ethiopian rebels based in Eritrea have always accused Meles Zenawi of making Ethiopia landlocked. But at the end of the day, Issayas was very bold telling that Ethiopians will have to use the port just as any other country would; by sharing or paying for it. 6 years ago Issayas banned the availability of Amharic music in Eritrea as was reported by the BBC. One can check it at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2632399.stm>.

So what is the purpose of EPPF in Eritrea? The fact is the original EPPF is no more functional while the pro-Afewarki new "EPPF" is simply controlled by Issayas generals. One can check it at: <http://www.abugidainfo.com/?p=3123>. As far as Afewarki is concerned the Assab issue is a done deal. From the start both Meles Zenawi and Issayas Afewarki actually share the belief that Assab belongs to Eritrea. But since the purpose of the interview was to get Amharic speaking Ethiopian opposition to support Issayas, the Afewarki accused Meles Zenawi of trying to regain Assab Port. What? This is funny. Wasn't Meles accused of by the opposition groups alike for having not tried to regain Assab Port? What Elias Kefafle is doing is quite confusing indeed. Issayas Afewarki also

accused stating that the clan politics in Somalia persist because of Meles Zenawi. The naked fact is that the clan politics in Somalia has been going on for many decades and may be centuries. As far as instigating the border conflict is concerned the International Commission in Hague actually blamed Eritrea for invading Ethiopia in 1998. For details please read at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4548754.stm>. So what does Afewarki mean? Generally, although not comparable at the same degree, both Dictators Meles Zenawi and Issayas have failed to create a healthy economy and democratic system between the two sisterly nations. But Issayas was pretentiously lecturing about economy and justice throughout the interview; as if everything is smoothly progressing within Eritrea. Why all this fuss about the entire quagmire?

Back to Basics

Out of curiosity, when we return to the basis of the whole matter, we fall on to the following case in point. The brief research done by the well known British institution Chatham house gives the reader an idea on how Eritrea came about into being.

”Eritrean nationalist discourse has constructed myths to suggest that Eritrea is a rich country, that successful industrial development under Italian rule was sabotaged by Ethiopia, that it enjoyed rapid growth in the early years of independence and that all this could be restored when peace returns.”

Gunter Schroeder questioned these myths and outlined a more complex reality: “an economy that was static and stagnant up to the time of colonialism; an ecology that was already depleted by the start of the 20th century; food production capable of meeting only 60–70% of needs; little evidence of any significant additional natural resources – in short, all the main characteristic of a poor rural economy. Italian warfare against Ethiopia was a powerful motor for social transformation in the 1930s when 150,000 Eritrean men were under arms out of a population of just 750,000. The soldiers gained skills that gave them alternative opportunities for employment and options to leave the land. Preparations for war also drove Eritrea’s early industrial development, which operated in a protected market, catering exclusively for the Italian army. When the Federation was created Eritrea enjoyed a huge comparative advantage for its industry and its skills in relation to Ethiopia’s underdevelopment. Industry was drawn to the political and economic centre in Addis Ababa, resulting in significant population migration from Eritrea. The result was that modern Eritrean economic elite forged ahead inside Ethiopia, before, during and after the war of independence. This all came to an end in 1998, leaving Eritrea for the first time without a protected market for its industry or its skills. Even when the Ethiopia–Eritrea conflict ends and trade resumes, Eritrea cannot expect to recapture the Ethiopian markets – these have been lost to Ethiopian competitors. Eritrea’s industry is too small to compete with Ethiopian producers, let alone with the Chinese producers who now dominate industrial production for African markets.”

All we can say is Afewarki is confusing the whole matter between his Old and his New Testaments. Better late to convey the truth than never, we wonder what those flirting Ethiopian oppositions have to say about Afewarki’s two differing testaments.