EMBRACING ADVERSITY:
HOW PERSECUTION SHAPED THE MESERETE KRISTOS CHURCH IN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: This article explores the impact of persecution on the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) during the Derg regime in Ethiopia (1974-1991). It highlights how governmental repression forced the MKC into underground operations, compelling its members to adapt their faith practices and strengthen communal bonds. Utilizing a combination of literature analysis and interviews with church members, the study examines the theological, psychological, and social consequences of persecution, notably the transformation in understanding God's nature and the cultivation of resilience among believers. Despite facing violence, imprisonment, and social stigma, MKC members developed a profound sense of solidarity and an urgency to evangelize. The findings reveal that rather than diminishing faith, persecution galvanized the church's growth, leading to increased membership and institutional resilience. Ultimately, the article underscores the enduring power of faith and community amidst adversity, illustrating how persecution can foster deeper spiritual commitment and proactive engagement within marginalized religious groups. Additionally, it addresses the negative psychological and social impacts on individuals, including trauma, isolation, mental health challenges, and long-term societal distrust.

INTRODUCTION

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia is an indigenous charismatic church with its roots in the mid-20th-century evangelistic efforts of Mennonite missionaries from North America.[1] Initially established within the confines of Hailemariam Mamo Memorial Hospital, the church grew from humble beginnings into a significant movement committed to holistic ministry, encompassing educational services, healthcare, and social outreach.[2] By fostering a focus on community needs while maintaining a rigorous commitment to evangelical teachings, the MKC has profoundly impacted the lives of countless individuals.

MKC was one of the ten founding members of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia during the Derg regime. It is one of the mainline Protestant denominations that has Pentecostal beliefs and practices.[3] It is also one of the largest national Mennonite bodies in the world.[4] MKC was one of the evangelical churches in Ethiopia that was severely persecuted by the Derg regime.[5] As the church navigated through the challenging times during the Derg regime from 1974 to 1991, it was forced to shift to underground operations due to strict governmental restrictions against Christian gatherings. When it went underground, the church had fourteen congregations and about five thousand members all over the country. Some members of MKC displayed remarkable resilience, organizing themselves into small cell groups that maintained their faith and communal ties despite the risks involved.

Over the years, MKC's leadership demonstrated adaptability in fostering spiritual growth among its members through Bible studies and evangelism, methodically preparing for eventual re-establishment as a visible community of believers once the political climate changed. The church's ability not only to

[1] Tibebe Eshete, "Evangelical Christians and Indirect Resistance to Religious Persecution in Ethiopia," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2010): 13–21.

[2] Nathan B Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers: Anabaptist Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1948-1998* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020).

[3] David J Garrard, "Witchcraft and Deliverance: An Exaggerated Theme in Pentecostal Churches in Central Africa," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 37, no. 1 (2017): 52–67.

[4] Adam M. L. Tice, "Sound Faith: Mennonite Hymnals and Identity," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 23, no. 1 (2022).

[5] Lewis Rayapen, "Religious Liberty in Africa," *International Journal on World Peace* 6, no. 3 (1989): 49–60.

survive during these oppressive years but to thrive upon re-emerging into the open following the fall of the Derg regime in 1991 reflects the deep-rooted Christian faith and tenacity of its members.

This article analyzes how the historical persecution experienced by members of the Meserete Kristos Church has influenced their understanding of faith, community cohesion, and interpersonal relationships. The exploration focuses on the transformative impacts of challenges and adversities on the believers’ reliance on God, their sense of solidarity with one another, and their collective resilience.

The author undertook a comprehensive analysis of the persecution faced by the Meserete Kristos Church during the Derg regime. This analysis incorporated a review of academic literature and historical accounts, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 26 MKC members. The aim was to understand how persecution affected their individual and collective beliefs, attitudes, and practices as a church community. Spanning from November 2024 to August 2025, the research focused on specific incidents of persecution, such as arrests and social ostracism. It revealed the resilience strategies that the MKC community developed in response to these challenges. The study was conducted in the cities of Adama, Addis Ababa, and Nekemte.

OVERVIEW OF THE DERG REGIME

Derg was a military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991 after overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie I, who had governed for forty-four years (1930-1974).[6] The Derg adhered to a Marxist-Leninist ideology that was anti-religion. Its rule was authoritarian, involving political repression of dissent and violent campaigns against opposition groups.[7] As an atheist state, it introduced an anti-religious policy that suppressed religious freedom, including evangelical Christians.[8] Members of the Meserete Kristos Church were among those affected by its religious repression.

During the Derg regime, there was a significant social stigma attached to being an evangelical Christian in Ethiopia. The Derg regime employed the term *mete*, an Amharic word that suggests evangelical Christianity is an imported religion, alien to Ethiopian culture. While there is no record of when this term was first used with this negative connotation, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church adopted it to caution its followers against embracing evangelical Christians before the coming of the Derg regime. They portrayed this faith as foreign, urging their adherents to distance themselves from evangelical groups and reinforcing the idea that Orthodox Christianity was the true indigenous religion of Ethiopia.

The Derg extensively utilized this terminology to isolate evangelical Christians from the broader society further, branding them as outsiders who did not belong among their fellow Ethiopians. This labeling served as a powerful means of stigmatization, casting evangelicals as opponents of the country’s roots, traditions, beliefs, practices, and social norms. They were labeled “anti-culture.”[9] The labeling allowed the Derg regime to paint evangelical Christians as anti-revolutionaries, influencing public perception and paving the way for attacks against them. This propaganda tool served to justify the regime's persecution of evangelical Christians.[10] Furthermore, the state utilized the term "Pente," a shortened form of "Pentecostal," to stigmatize all Protestant churches. This term was employed derogatorily to refer to Protestant adherents in Ethiopia.[11]

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[6] Jan Záhořík Aderemi Opeyemi Ade-Ibijola, and Segun Oshewolo, “Historical Perspectives on the Accommodation of Diversity in Africa: A Study of Nigeria and Ethiopia,” *Insight on Africa* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2025).

[7] Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974–1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[8] Mulatu Alemayehu Moges and Terje Skjerdal, *Media and Religion in Ethiopia: A Research Report* (Fojo media institute, Linnaeus University, 2024).

[9] Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience* (Baylor University Press, 2009).

[10] Samuel Deressa, “Church and State in Ethiopia: The Contribution of the Lutheran Understanding of the Community of Grace,” *Word & World* 37 (2016): 363–72.

[11] Jörg Haustein and Terje Østebø, “EPRDF’s Revolutionary Democracy and Religious Plurality: Islam and Christianity in Post-Derg Ethiopia,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 5, no. 4 (2011): 755–72.

RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE, TENSIONS, AND FORMS OF PERSECUTION DURING THE DERG REGIME

When the Derg came to power in 1974, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) was the state religion, wielding considerable influence and control over resources such as land and buildings.[12] One of the Derg's initial actions was to dismantle the EOC's dominance, declaring that all religious organizations were to be treated equally. As a result, the EOC lost its official status, and the Derg subsequently deposed the church's patriarch, nationalized its properties, and installed a puppet archbishop to assert its control further.[13]

To bolster its legitimacy, the Derg recognized Islam as a valid religion, allowing for the observance of major Muslim holidays as national holidays.[14] But Derg did not want to see a strong and meaningful organizational existence of Islam in the country.[15] Although there were Catholic followers in the country, their numbers remained small. The Derg imprisoned several of its leaders, including a young priest who would later ascend to the position of archbishop of the Ethiopian Catholic Church. Remarkably, after their imprisonment by the government in 1991, this priest visited the Derg officials and demonstrated profound forgiveness towards them.[16]

Derg chose the path of Marxist ideology, which was atheist in its very nature, and hating religion in general was not surprising. It is noteworthy to ask why the Derg regime took such a harsh stand against the evangelical churches in Ethiopia. The Derg may have feared challenges from evangelical church leaders. When the Derg came to power, Protestant Christians constituted a minority. Additionally, national church denominations that emerged during the 1950s and 1960s were still in their formative stages when the Derg regime seized power,[17] lacking the maturity and strength to pose a significant threat to the state.

While it seemed reasonable for the regime to be wary of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which had historically been the state religion and wielded significant influence over the majority of the population, its focus on the Protestant minority was heavy-handed.[18] Derg targeted the evangelical Christians because of its perception that they were associated with Western countries that could influence their relationships with the government. Furthermore, the Derg suspected that evangelical Christians could be an asset to Western countries' intelligence collection on the state.[19] Nevertheless, within this minority, evangelical church leaders resisted the regime's pressures. One notable figure among them was the General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, who stood firm against the Derg's authoritarian measures.[20]

Leaders from the Meserete Kristos Church also played a significant role in resisting the Derg regime. They educated their congregants—members of the MKC and other evangelical churches—about the dangers of Marxist ideology and its fundamental contradictions with biblical teachings. By

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[12] Sileshie Semahagne Kumlachew, “When Politics and Religion Fuse: The Nature and Implications of the Meskel Square Controversy in the Ethiopian Media,” *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 543.

[13] Dereje Melese Liyew, “Politics of Secularism in Ethiopia: Repression or Co-Option towards the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church?,” *ESI Preprints)* 20, no. 11 (2024): 33–33.

[14] Patrick Desplat and Terje Østebø, “Muslims in Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy, Identity Politics, and Islamic Reformism,” in *Muslim Ethiopia: The Christian Legacy, Identity Politics, and Islamic Reformism*, ed. Patrick Desplat and Terje Østebø (New York: Springer, 2013).

[15] Dereje Feyissa and Bruce B. Lawrence, “Muslims Renegotiating Marginality in Contemporary E Thiopia,” *The Muslim World* 104, no. 3 (2014): 281–305.

[16] “Ethiopian Cardinal Welcomes Man Who Jailed Him,” Caritas, March 20, 2015, https://www.caritas.org/2015/03/ethiopian-cardinal-welcomes-man-who-jailed-him/.

[17] Jörg Jörg Haustein, Abduletif Kedir Idris, and Diego Malara, *Religion in Contemporary Ethiopia: History, Politics and Inter-Religious Relations* (Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2023).

[18] Dahay Daniel, “The Comforts of Coffee: The Role of the Coffee Ceremony in Ethiopians’ Efforts to Cope with Social Upheaval during the Derg Regime (1974–1991)” (Master's thesis, Carleton University, 2016).

[19] Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia,* 5.

[20] Samuel Deressa, “Gudina Tumsa: The Prophet, Martyr, and Distinguished Church Leader Shaping Justice and Theology in Ethiopia,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 58, no. 1 (2024): 28–41.

highlighting the fallacies inherent in the regime's ideology, they empowered Christians to resist state doctrines and emphasized the supremacy of the Word of God.[21] This form of resistance struck at the very core of the regime, challenging its ideological foundations and encouraging spiritual resilience among the faithful. Tibebe Eshete posited that the Derg regime opposed evangelical Christians due to their challenge to the Marxist narrative that the government sought to impose in Ethiopia.[22]

The Derg regime viewed religion as a significant obstacle to the nation's progress and development, and blamed religion for Ethiopia's backwardness.[23] For Derg, religion was incompatible with its vision of nation-building.[24] Indeed, the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church influenced both work ethics and the broader transformation of the country, including its governmental bureaucracy. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church commemorates saintly days throughout the month, which often hinders its followers from engaging in productive labor.[25] Although an alternative perspective suggests that the observance of holidays may not have had a significant effect on agricultural production in rural Ethiopia.[26] Additionally, many devotees allocate substantial resources, including harvested crops, to celebrate various cultural and religious festivals. When the emperor sought to modernize the country, one significant challenge he faced was resistance from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

It remains unclear why the Derg specifically linked Protestant Christians to the country's backwardness. Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia were advocates for modernization and the country's transformation. One of the primary reasons the emperor welcomed Western Protestant missionaries, including Mennonite missionaries from North America, was to support Ethiopia's modernization efforts.[27] The emperor recognized the value of the education and healthcare provided by these missionaries and sought their assistance in educating the youth who would play a crucial role in the nation's development.[28] The Protestant missionaries offered some of the best educational and healthcare services available to citizens. One such institution was the Nazareth (Adama) Bible Academy, a boarding secondary school founded by Mennonite missionaries in 1959.[29] Therefore, it is perplexing that the Derg regime labeled evangelical Christians as anti-progress.

To undermine the efforts of evangelical churches to modernize the country, the Derg regime propagated various fabrications portraying evangelicals as lazy and unwilling to work. They repeatedly circulated stories suggesting that evangelical Christians would gather for prayer meetings, where their leaders deceived attendees into believing that God would shower them with money from the heavens.[30] Such fake stories told again and again during public meetings implied that evangelicals relied on the notion of unearned wealth rather than putting forth the hard work necessary to achieve financial success. This strategy enabled the Derg to position evangelical Christians as obstacles to their promotion of diligence and industry as pathways to national prosperity.

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[21] Brent L. Kipfer, "Thriving under Persecution: Meserete Kristos Church Leadership during the Ethiopian Revolution (1974-1991)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 91, no. 3 (2017): 297–370.

[22] Tibebe Eshete, "Persecution and Social Resilience: The Case of the Ethiopian Pentecostals," *Mission Studies* 34, no. 3 (2017): 309–26.

[23] Mohammed Girma, "Religion, Politics and the Dilemma of Modernising Ethiopia," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018).

[24] Terje Østebø, "The Derg and Processes of Change," in *Localising Salafism: Religious Change among Oromo Muslims in Bale, Ethiopia* (Brill, 2012), https://brill.com/display/book/9789004217492/B9789004217492_008.xml.

[25] Hailu Cherenet Biru, *"A Question of Balance: A Theological Examination of the Ethiopian Orthodox Understanding of the Relationship of Adoration, Contemplation, Work, and Leisure in the Light of Gordon Preece's Theology of Work" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2011)*

[26] Yoko Kijima and Horacio Gonzalez, "Does Observance of Religious Holidays Affect Agricultural Productivity and Household Welfare? Evidence from Rural Ethiopia," *The Journal of Development Studies* 49, no. 9 (2013): 1188–201.

[27] Jason E Craig, *Haile Selassie and the Religious Field: Generative Structuralism and Christian Missions in Ethiopia* (PhD diss., Temple University, 2010).

[28] Girma, "Religion, Politics and the Dilemma."

[29] Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*.

[30] Abiyu T., interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, April 21, 2025.

To incite societal hatred towards evangelical Christians, the Derg also spread a fabricated narrative claiming that members of this group gathered in secret locations to engage in immoral activities, including promiscuous sexual encounters. This malicious propaganda prompted parents to issue stern warnings to their children, advising them to avoid evangelical church meetings lest they be "defiled" by these perceived immoral associations. Such incendiary tales were particularly effective in a conservative society that valued religious holiness, further isolating evangelicals and portraying them as moral threats to the community.[31]

The Derg’s newspapers published articles that accused evangelical Christians of colluding with foreign imperialist nations. They claimed that these groups fostered a sense of hopelessness, undermined self-confidence, distracted students from their studies, and promoted the belief that prayer alone could resolve injustices rather than encouraging proactive measures. Below is an excerpt from the *Yezareyitu* (The Today’s) Ethiopia newspaper, published on January 18, 1975.[32]

> Since then, various Christian denominations have entered our country in significant numbers. Some of these “mete” (imported religions) appear to have a direct connection to imperialism, evident in their teachings and actions. They have fostered a sense of hopelessness and insecurity among the populace, trying to persuade citizens to adopt the belief that “this world is not my home.” In doing so, they have indirectly hindered students' educational pursuits. During the struggle to overthrow the previous government, many young people who adhered to these religions refrained from participating. Their message often centered around prayer: “We pray to God; the violence stems from excessive worldliness. Instead of criticizing others’ sins, accept Jesus, and you will no longer worry about the struggles of the world—you will find peace.”

By framing evangelical Christians as agents of foreign imperialism,[33] The Derg aimed to delegitimize their influence and reduce their credibility among the populace. This tactic sought to undermine any potential opposition to their regime, particularly if evangelical Christians were involved in social or political activism. The Derg sought to promote a Marxist-Leninist ideology, which emphasized collective struggle and materialism. By attacking the teachings of evangelical Christians that prioritized spirituality and a focus on the afterlife, they aimed to redirect people's attention toward the party's goals and ideologies, reinforcing socialist principles over religious ones.

By portraying evangelical Christian groups as divisive forces, the Derg was trying to cultivate a sense of national unity among the people. They wanted to discourage sectarianism and promote a homogeneous national identity that aligned with their political agenda, positioning themselves as the defenders of the populace against perceived foreign influences. The Derg recognized the importance of youth mobilization in effecting revolutionary change. By accusing evangelical groups of discouraging youth participation in the political struggles of the time, the Derg sought to galvanize young people around its cause, “Ethiopia First,” suggesting that their loyalty should be to the revolution rather than to religious teachings that preached passivity and resignation. The defiance exhibited by evangelical Christians, particularly among the youth, in opposition to the Derg regime prompted the authorities to implement severe measures against Pentecostal and Charismatic churches across the country.[34]

One of the key reasons the Derg targeted the Meserete Kristos Church was its significant influence on the youth. During a period when the Derg sought to mobilize young people to support its revolutionary agendas, the church was successfully engaging high school and college students through its services and activities.[35] The Derg could not passively observe as the church inspired and shaped the aspirations of the very youth they aimed to co-opt for their own goals.

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[31] Felekech, a youth ministry leader during Derg, interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, April 21, 2025.

[32] Getachew Belete, *Agonies and Hallelujahs: The Story of the Kale Heywet Church: 1974-200 (Amharic)*, vol. 3 (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2000).160

[33] Daniel, "The Comforts of Coffee," 110.

[34] Jörg Haustein, “Charismatic Renewal," 48.

[35] Eshete, “Evangelical Christians and Indirect Resistance,” 16.

By depicting evangelical Christianity as a tool of imperialist manipulation, the Derg aimed to consolidate its authority. The Derg cadres sought to position themselves as the champions of the 'true' national identity, control narratives around faith, and prevent any challenges to their rule from emerging or already existing religious communities. Bypassing more pressing political criticisms by focusing on evangelical groups allowed the Derg to redirect public discourse. Instead of addressing their own shortcomings or the socio-political issues at hand, for instance, the infamous famine in Wollo, northern Ethiopia, they shifted the narrative to one of defending the nation from religious influences.[36]

The imperial regime and the Derg regime frequently denied the MKC's applications for official government registration as a religious organization.[37] The lack of official recognition by the state meant the church was deemed illegitimate and did not have the same rights and protections afforded to religious organizations. The members of the church could easily be accused of illegal meetings when they gathered for worship. When the state denied church recognition, the citizens could not welcome such an organization.

Burial rights for church members were often denied, forcing them to seek alternative arrangements that did not reflect their beliefs. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church did not allow the evangelical churches to bury the bodies of believers in their cemetery. The church taught its members that such bodies would desecrate the graveyard of the saints. Evangelical Christians of Addis Ababa, the capital city, and its surrounding areas could benefit from a communal burial site; others, far away from the capital city, opted to bury their loved ones in their backyards when a formal cemetery was not accessible.[38] In a society where people gave special places for burial ceremony, and the place of burial, denying the burial place for believers was humiliating. The opponents of the gospel used such cases to convince their followers not to accept evangelical Christianity, thereby keeping many people from following Jesus.[39]

The Derg regime closed thousands of Protestant churches across the country.[40] It confiscated schools, clinics, and church buildings, and froze the bank accounts of the Meserete Kristos Church congregations.[41] Confiscating the church building, which was a symbol of the church's presence in the community, was an attempt to remove the symbol representing the followers of Jesus. In society, the presence of a religion was often identified by the place of worship. Having a building where they gathered for worship gave evangelical believers in the community recognition. Closing and confiscating the church building not only disheartened the believers but also aimed to erase the symbol of their presence so that the community would forget them. It also provided a basis for the oppressive regime to accuse believers when they gathered in private homes for worship, as followers of religion were expected to meet in recognized places. Many believers were arrested and jailed for meeting in secret private homes.

In conversations recounting that time, many believers expressed a longing for their spiritual house, reflecting on the importance of the church as a center of hope and community. They witnessed firsthand how faith could provide strength amid chaos, finding encouragement in the solidarity of their fellow believers. As the years passed under the Derg regime, some church members lamented the loss of their vibrant church community and faced increasing challenges in keeping their faith alive. Yet, their determination to reclaim their place of worship remained strong, and many continued to pray for God’s intervention. However, the attempt to reclaim the church building, especially in Adama at the end of the 1980s, was unsuccessful.[42]

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[36] Nigussie T., interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, April 21, 2025.

[37] Kipfer, “Thriving under Persecution."

[38] Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers,* 132.

[39] Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 375.

[40] Christopher Rhodes, “(Un) Locking the Church Doors: Regime Legitimacy and Political (de) Mobilisation of Churches in Ethiopia,” in *Conflict, Politics, and the Christian East* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[41] Tilahun Beyene, *The History of Meserete Kristos Church 1951-2001 [in Amharic]* (Addis Ababa: Day Star Publishing, 2001).

[42] Kebede Bekere, *The Journey of the Faithful: History of the First Anabaptist Congregation in Ethiopia* (Rehobot Printers, 2025).

The Derg regime arrested and imprisoned leaders of the MKC for years, often without due judicial process or credible evidence. These leaders faced baseless accusations of opposing the government and conspiring with Western imperialist nations.[43] In Addis Ababa, one of the six MKC leaders imprisoned explained the harsh conditions they endured in jail simply for expressing their faith.[44] Similarly, numerous church leaders and members throughout the country were incarcerated for resisting the ideology of the Derg. The imprisonment of these church leaders resulted in congregations losing invaluable experience and guidance, leaving them vulnerable and devoid of the mature leadership crucial for their growth and direction.

IMPACTS OF THE PERSECUTION

THEOLOGICAL CHANGES

The policies and actions of the Derg profoundly reshaped the theological understandings within the Meserete Kristos Church. One significant change was in the perception of God. Interviews with believers who experienced persecution during the Derg regime revealed their struggle to reconcile their faith with the circumstances they faced. Many found it incomprehensible that an all-powerful God would allow atheists to close the church, confiscate its property, and impede their worship. These believers had witnessed God's might through miraculous healings, such as the recovery of individuals suffering from chronic illnesses and even those who had lost limbs due to various disasters at the Bole MKC church.[45] Yet, the same God permitted those who rejected His existence to shut their doors. This contradiction left many feeling that the Almighty they had worshipped suddenly appeared weak and defenseless, failing to protect both the church building and the devoted followers.[46]

Through individual and collective study of scriptures and the church’s training materials on prayers, divine guidance, and being disciples of Christ, believers began to understand that while God is unchanging, His methods can vary across different times and situations.[47] They came to recognize His sovereignty and that He acts according to His own will. God's responses to prayers might be affirmations, denials, or even silence. They learned that God cannot be manipulated by human thoughts or actions, including those of the state. He has a divine purpose that transcends human understanding.

Interestingly, believers noted that while God allowed some MKC leaders to be imprisoned for years, He also delivered many church leaders and members from the clutches of Derg cadres on numerous occasions. This led them to conclude that God was indeed at work, albeit in ways that often defied their human expectations. Through this lens, they began to see their faith and the very nature of divine intervention in a new light, one that recognized the mysterious, often unfathomable workings of God amid their suffering.

Persecution sparked a quest for justice among believers, cultivating a deep sense of righteousness as they experienced injustice firsthand. This experience deepened their understanding of God’s concern for the oppressed and marginalized, shaping their prayers and community life to reflect a strong desire for divine intervention and justice. After the fall of the Derg regime, the MKC took on a new responsibility to promote justice by standing firmly for the truth. The church's faith statement has been updated to include a commitment to advocating for truth and justice. A key scriptural reference that emphasizes this commitment appears in the Gospel of Matthew, where John the Baptist rebukes King Herod and ultimately faces death for his unwavering stance for truth and justice.[48]

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[43] Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*,183.

[44] Beyene, *The History of Meserete Kristos Church*.

[45] Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*.

[46] Bekere, *The Journey of the Faithful*.

[47] These training materials were prepared by selected church leaders during the underground period and taught to the believers in the small groups.

[48] Meserete Kristos Church (MKC), *Meserete Kristos Church Faith Statement (Amharic)* (Addis Ababa: MKC Head Office, 1994).

In addition to advocacy, the church established a prison ministry to serve inmates, who are often marginalized because of their crimes. Over its more than 25 years of service through this ministry, the church shares the message of love, offers psychosocial support, and provides essentials such as clothing and reading materials. Furthermore, MKC teaches peaceful conflict-resolution strategies that prioritize dialogue and understanding.[49]

One particularly noteworthy initiative is the use of restorative justice, which brings offenders and victims together in a safe environment to discuss the offenses and engage in mutual forgiveness. This approach fosters the restoration of broken relationships and has proven effective in reducing the cycle of violence within communities where the culture often leans towards vengeance. Through these efforts, the church embodies its commitment to justice, compassion, and reconciliation.[50]

Persecution deepened the faith of the believers. As believers faced oppression and hostility, many found their reliance on God deepening. They turned to Scripture and prayer for strength. This reliance fostered a sense of closeness and intimacy with God, as they perceived Him as their refuge and source of strength amidst trials. Many believers learned to view suffering as part of their identification with Christ's suffering. They found comfort in Scriptures that spoke of enduring trials and persecution for the sake of righteousness (e.g., Matthew 5:10-12). This understanding redefined their perception of hardship, helping them see it as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

> *Jijee O. was a follower of Christ in the Limmu district of East Wollega in Oromia Region. She became a believer in Jesus when she heard the gospel being preached in the area in the early 1970s. She came from a traditional religion and believed in Jesus after Jesus healed her from an illness that kept her in bed for years. She rejoiced in her newfound faith. Her husband did not follow her path to follow Jesus, but he did not oppose her because Jesus healed her from her illness and eased his burden. Now his wife could support him.*
>
> *Jijee endured significant persecution for her faith in Christ, which profoundly shaped her spiritual journey and reinforced her commitment to her beliefs. After converting to Christianity in the early 1970s, her unwavering faith led to severe repercussions when the Derg, a Marxist-Leninist military regime, sought to impose its ideology on the local population. Despite facing beatings, imprisonment, public humiliation, and torture, Jijee remained resolute in her refusal to renounce her faith. One day, she was taken to the village meeting by the local militiamen, who told her to renounce her faith. As usual, she responded, "I do not deny Jesus Christ, who liberated me from Satan." Then, they beat her several times. The militiamen were angry with her and wanted to torture her more.*
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> *They took her to the main road that leads to a marketplace, undressed her, and tied her to a tree beside the road. She stood there for half a day. She saw people laughing at her. Some were ashamed to look at her. She heard people talking to each other, saying that it was strange to see a woman willing to humiliate herself for an unknown faith. The militiamen were watching her from nearby. Then, they came and asked her, "If you renounce Jesus, we will set you free." She responded with the same thing. They were agitated and untied her from a tree, tied her to a male donkey, and hit the donkey to drag her to the ground. To the great surprise of many people who were watching the event, the donkey did not want to move. They beat it repeatedly, but it refused. The people who were watching were amazed. The unusual incident with the donkey, which refused to move despite being beaten, became a powerful testament to her resilience and the remarkable nature of her faith.*
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> *The next morning, they took her to Gelila, a district town, and handed her to the officials. She was ordered to fetch water from the river with a clay pot for the whole day.*

[49] Ruth Haile Gelane, "Living Cloud of Witnesses to Ethiopia," *Anabaptist Witness* 11, no. 1 (2024): 73–81.
[50] Amdetsion Woldeyes Sisha, "Breaking the Cycle of 'Black Blood,'" *Anabaptist Witness* 11, no. 1 (2024): 107–13.

> *Then in the evening, they let her go home. Since then, she has followed Christ faithfully, describing her experience as a profound influence on her faith in Jesus. She noted that the challenges she faced during that time ultimately strengthened her belief, and she expressed a sense of humility in being someone who could bear witness to Christ through her suffering for His name’s sake.*[51]

Jijee's journey of illness and spiritual healing underscores a transformative moment in her life, catalyzing her conversion to Christianity amid personal and cultural crises. The intertwining of traditional beliefs with her newfound faith portrays how personal experiences can drive significant religious transformation. Her relationship with her husband reflects the complexities that conversions can evoke within familial dynamics; his initial indifference hints at potential tensions yet also highlights a nuanced understanding shaped by her healing. This dynamic raises poignant questions about how individual faith decisions impact not only personal conviction but also communal and family relationships, especially where religious differences exist.

The story's depiction of Jijee's persecution starkly illustrates the challenges faced by those who embrace minority faiths in oppressive conditions. The violent actions of the Derg and local militiamen against her serve as a stark reminder of the trials faced by believers who stand firm in their faith despite systemic oppression. Symbolically, the donkey's refusal to move parallels her unwavering commitment to her beliefs, transforming her suffering into a powerful narrative of resilience and empowerment. Through her public ordeal, Jijee not only witnesses her faith but also evokes a spectrum of community reactions that challenge local perceptions of Christianity. Ultimately, her experiences cultivate a deeper spiritual maturity, demonstrating how suffering can reinforce commitment to one’s beliefs and inspire impactful testimonies that resonate within the wider community, emphasizing themes of spiritual perseverance and the transformative power of faith in the face of adversity.

ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEW

Persecution has nurtured a strong sense of hope and resilience among believers. It has pushed them to focus less on the world's transience, leading to detachment from worldly matters and a deep longing for a more enduring, eternal home. The church often compares this to Abraham, who lived in tents, symbolizing the hope of someday reaching his eternal home beyond his temporary dwelling (Hebrews 11:8-10). During the underground period, MKC included Abraham's life as one of the courses in its discipleship curriculum for members. Instead of immersing themselves in the pursuit of wealth and material stability, many believers have adopted a more passive approach to the world.[52] Their sermons and songs echo this eschatological hope, emphasizing the promise of fulfillment and salvation at the end of times.[53] This emphasis on the future has shaped a collective mindset that cherishes spiritual riches over earthly gains, reinforcing the belief in a divine promise awaiting them beyond this life.

The oppression experienced during the Derg regime—characterized by the closure of churches, the imprisonment of religious leaders and believers, social ostracism, and hate speech directed at evangelical Christians from the regime—prompted many to believe that the end times were imminent. They likened their suffering to the signs of the end times outlined in Matthew 24 and 2 Timothy 3. Tibebe Eshete highlighted this perspective by comparing the new religious movements that emerged after 1991 with those that had previously endured Derg-era oppression. He noted that the evangelical churches that experienced persecution during that time remained focused on spiritual matters, preaching messages of salvation and urging people to prepare for Christ's imminent return by confessing their sins.[54]

In MKC, a strong focus on the afterlife caused some believers to overlook their present responsibilities, including personal, social, and community duties. This disconnect from worldly affairs

[51] Jijee, interview with the author, January 19, 2025.

[52] “The Life of Abraham," training material prepared by the Meserete Kristos Church to teach believers during the 1980s (Addis Ababa: MKC Head Office, 1987).

[53] Qajela, interview with the author, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, August 9, 2025.

[54] Eshete, *Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 305-306.

slowed both personal growth and societal progress. The emphasis on an eternal home promoted escapism, leading people to avoid real-life challenges and injustices by believing their suffering was temporary. This outlook prevented them from actively working to bring about positive change in their communities. A firm belief that a better life awaited after death fostered fatalistic attitudes, making some believers feel powerless to alter their circumstances and lowering their motivation to pursue change or advocate for justice, even during persecution. Additionally, some saw their suffering as a necessary step toward eternal reward, which could lead them to glorify suffering rather than seek help or intervention to ease their struggles. Overall, while hope in divine promises served as a strong motivator, it became clear that individuals and communities needed to balance spiritual aspirations with practical involvement in the world.

WORSHIP AND PRACTICAL ADAPTATION

Despite the upheaval caused by the confiscation of the church buildings, believers responded with courage and determination. They quickly organized underground meetings to continue their worship and fellowship, utilizing a cell system to meet in small groups within homes. This clandestine setup fostered a strong sense of community and support among members, allowing them to maintain their spiritual life in the face of persecution. Elders and other mature church members took the lead in this endeavor, carefully coordinating logistics to ensure the safety of all participants. Their strategy involved rotating meeting locations to minimize the risk of detection by government agents.[55] This not only allowed them to continue practicing their faith but also demonstrated their unwavering commitment to God, reinforcing their resilience during this challenging period.

Persecution compelled believers to alter their way of worship. By practicing in secret, they adapted their rituals to their suffering, which deepened their understanding of God as beyond the physical world and as approachable anywhere. This shift resulted in more genuine and heartfelt worship, grounded in their deep experiences with hardship. In a society where worship typically occurred in dedicated buildings, losing access to a church felt like losing contact with God's presence. The lack of fellowship and the shared experience that came with worship in those spaces was strongly felt. When church members were instructed to gather in small groups in private homes, many initially thought it was wrong, but they reluctantly followed their leaders' guidance. However, they soon realized that these small gatherings were far more meaningful than the larger groups they had attended before the church closed.[56]

Persecution compelled believers to adjust their worship practices, leading to underground gatherings that fostered a deeper relationship with God. This adaptation was not just a survival tactic but an enriching experience. The lack of formal structures allowed for a more personal, intimate connection with the divine. The hardships faced deepened their understanding of God’s transcendence, highlighting that worship isn't limited to specific locations or rituals. The transition to small group worship in homes demonstrated the value of close-knit community experiences. Although initially resistant, congregants ultimately discovered more meaningful engagement with their faith. This shows that communal worship isn't solely about numbers or grandeur; it’s rooted in genuine relationships and shared spiritual experiences. The shift from large gatherings to small groups symbolizes a return to the true essence of worship as a collective yet personal act.[57]

It was through these small group meetings that the believers truly grasped the essence of John 4:24—that worshipping God transcends specific locations, allowing believers to connect with Him anywhere, at any time. They learned that worship could be expressed through heartfelt singing, even without musical instruments, and that prayers could be offered quietly, without the need for loud voices. This journey taught them that worship is not defined by outward displays—such as clapping hands, using

[55] Pastor Desalegn B., one of those who gave their houses for underground meetings, interview by the author, April 21, 2025.

[56] Bekere, *The Journey of the Faithful*.

[57] Bekere, *The Journey of the Faithful*.

instruments, or gathering in ornate buildings—but is instead rooted in the condition of the heart and a spiritual connection with God.

Evangelistic Zeal

Persecution ignited a profound evangelistic zeal among believers, instilling a sense of urgency to share the gospel. In their struggles to maintain faith, many felt a compelling need to proclaim their beliefs, often at great personal risk.[58] This active expression of faith deepened their understanding of God's mission and purpose in their lives. Church members remained committed to evangelism, leveraging personal relationships and clandestine meetings to spread the gospel. They exchanged prayer requests and engaged in personal witnessing, often at high-risk social events like funerals and weddings, where Derg cadres could easily observe them, all to lead others to Christ.

Despite facing insults, beatings, and arrests during the Derg regime, believers remained undeterred in their mission to share the gospel, although not every individual had the same experience. State repression failed to silence their commitment to proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ.[59] This boldness in evangelism was passed down to subsequent generations, who embraced the same fervor for sharing the gospel as those who lived through the persecution. Their refusal to be silenced speaks to a strong internal conviction that transcends fear. This tenacity enriches the narrative of faith and the intrinsic motivation of believers as they risk personal safety for their beliefs.

Two primary motivations drove these believers into their evangelistic efforts. First, they held a deep conviction that, as Jesus taught, those who witnessed for Him before others would be acknowledged by Him before the Father, while those who denied Him would face denial in return (Matthew 10:32). This belief shaped their understanding of how witnessing—or failing to witness—would impact their eternal destiny. This conviction places a profound sense of urgency and accountability on believers, shaping their approach to evangelism as not merely a task but a vital act tied to their ultimate destiny.

Second, their commitment to evangelism was fueled by love for people; they sought to save others from the consequences of sin and the prospect of hell (Jude 23). The second motivation is rooted in a compassionate desire to save others from sin and its consequences, which underlines a proactive and altruistic aspect of evangelism. This reinforces the idea that evangelism is not just about doctrine or conversion but is fundamentally about caring for the spiritual well-being of others. In Adama MKC, there was a devoted believer who exemplified the spirit of evangelism by actively sharing the gospel with prominent Derg officials. He would visit their offices, driven by a deep conviction that everyone, regardless of their actions, should have the opportunity to experience the love of Christ before it was too late.[60]

These two drivers persist among believers today, with many taking seriously the call to share the gospel as an expression of obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.[61] Through this enduring commitment, the legacy of faith and evangelism continues to thrive, inspiring new generations to carry forth the message of hope and salvation. This notion of a legacy of faith emphasizes the long-term impact of shared beliefs and experiences within a community. It suggests that evangelism becomes not only a personal calling but a communal tradition that is upheld over time. This experience of MKC suggests that adversity can create an environment in which faith becomes more active and outwardly expressed. The implication is that persecution not only challenges believers but also solidifies their commitment to witness, as they find deeper meaning and purpose in their struggles.

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[58] Eshete, "Evangelical Christians and Indirect Resistance," 18.

[59] Woineshet T., interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, April 24, 2025.

[60] Bekere, *The Journey of the Faithful*.

[61] Kebede Bekere and Desalegn Abebe Ejo, "God's Reconciling Work in Development: The Development Theology and Practice of Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia," *Anabaptist Witness*, November 21, 2024, https://www.anabaptistwitness.org/2024/11/gods-reconciling-work-in-development-the-development-theology-and-practice-of-meserete-kristos-church-mkc-in-ethiopia/.

The state persecution of the MKC did not extinguish the church; rather, it fueled its growth.[62] Bediru Hussein, the former General Secretary of MKC, described the adversity the church faced as “a blessing in disguise.” During this period of persecution, the MKC's membership surged, increasing from 5,000 at the time of the church's closure to an impressive 34,000 upon its reopening in 1991. Additionally, the number of local congregations expanded from 14 to 53, church planting centers grew from 3 to 27, and the number of full-time ministers rose dramatically from 12 to 98.[63]

Such significant numbers may suggest that persecution galvanized existing members and attracted new converts, possibly as individuals sought community and support in times of crisis. The rise in the number of local congregations and church planting centers indicates not only survival but also the implementation of proactive growth strategies. Furthermore, the increase in full-time ministers indicates an improved capacity to nurture and lead a rapidly expanding community. John Roth and M. James contended that MKC did not perish because of state persecution. They argued that the political events reshaped the trajectory of this indigenous church, founded on a charismatic revival movement in the 1950s. These events compelled the church to operate underground, ultimately facilitating its growth and proliferation—a phenomenon Roth likened to the experiences of the Anabaptists in the 16th century.[64]

The Derg regime sought to intimidate Christians through persecution, aiming to instill fear and ensure compliance with its policies. However, the evangelical Christians responded with remarkable resilience, rising above their fears to boldly proclaim their faith. Tibebe Eshete called the resilience of the evangelical churches “one of human perseverance in the face of political cruelty.” [65]The trials and sacrifices they endured only strengthened their resolve, deepening their reliance on God’s faithfulness and provision during difficult times. As their fears of persecution waned, they found the courage to witness for Christ in diverse contexts, even in the face of potential repercussions. In this way, their unwavering commitment to their beliefs became a powerful testament to their faith.

Faith Community Cohesion

Persecution created a sense of solidarity and community among believers. Persecution often led to the formation of tight-knit communities among believers. As they met secretly in homes for worship and Bible study, they relied on each other for support.[66] This sense of community reinforced their understanding of God as not only a personal savior but also as a unifying presence among His people. Persecution has redefined the believers’ relationship with God, shifting their faith from a personal conviction to a dynamic, communal, and resilient expression of hope.[67] It has fostered a deep reliance on each other and an unwavering commitment to live out their beliefs, even in the face of challenges. This holistic evolution of faith profoundly influences how individuals and congregations understand and engage with God throughout their lives, guiding their actions and deepening their communal bonds. As a result, the MKC stands as a testament to the power of faith to inspire resilience and foster community in the most trying of times.

Psychological and Social Effects

The persecution faced by believers during the Derg regime in Ethiopia clearly had a deep impact on their mental health. The mix of psychological suffering caused by fear, isolation, and trauma during a time marked by state violence and repression imposed a heavy burden on many in the church community. The

[62] Eshete, “Evangelical Christians and Indirect Resistance,” 18.

[63] Bedru Hussein Muktar, “Non-Formal Theological Education: The Meserete Kristos Church Experience,” *Mission Focus Annual Review* 5 (1997): 23.

[64] John D. Roth and M. James, “‘Blest Be the Ties That Bind’: In Search of the Global Anabaptist Church. Lecture One: The Challenge of Church Unity in the Anabaptist Tradition,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 31 (2013):5–23.

[65] Eshete, “Evangelical Christians and Indirect Resistance,” 20.

[66] Goshu K., interview with the author, Nekemte,Ethiopia, March 24, 2025.

[67] Asayech T., interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, April 24, 2025.

constant threat of arrest, imprisonment, or violence increased fear among church members, creating a continuous atmosphere of anxiety as believers dealt with the dangers linked to their faith.[68] This widespread fear was made worse by the risk of losing family, friends, and social connections. Many believers experienced the harsh reality of fellow church members being imprisoned because of persecution, which deepened a collective feeling of grief.[69] Individuals struggled to handle the uncertainty about their safety, while also coping with emotional pain from loss. Some families experienced prolonged grief over the loss of loved ones, a result of health complications stemming from their severe imprisonment.[70]

The persecution in the form of prejudice and discrimination in the community and workplace caused mental distress for believers, and some even experienced severe mental health problems due to harsh mistreatment in the workplace.

> *In the mid-1980s, she was a dedicated believer in Adama and was in her thirties. Employed in the public sector, she was recognized as the star worker of the year, earning both an award and monetary incentives for her hard work and exemplary service. When her office received an invitation to send a deserving employee abroad for a scholarship in Eastern Europe, she was informed that she would be the chosen one.*
>
> *As she prepared for her journey, her boss summoned her to his office to discuss her faith. When she told him she was an evangelical believer who loved her country and dedicated herself to her work, he erupted in anger. He declared that she could not attend the scholarship program unless she renounced her faith, stating that as a socialist leader, he would not permit a "religious fanatic" to study abroad. She stood firm in her beliefs and refused to renounce her faith.*
>
> *In response, her boss selected someone else for the opportunity, leaving her devastated. Overwhelmed by the decision, she fell into a deep depression and eventually had to terminate her job due to mental health issues. Despite the prayers and support from her brothers and sisters at church, her mental health condition did not improve.*[71]

The 1980s, marked by a socialist regime that often suppressed religious beliefs in favor of state ideology, deepened the story of religious persecution. This societal context creates environments where people may feel unsafe or unwelcome in practicing their faith, leading to widespread fear and self-censorship among believers. The woman's experience sharply highlights a violation of her right to practice her religion. Her boss's demand that she renounce her faith as a condition for career advancement illustrates the pressure individuals face to conform to secular ideologies, often at the cost of their core beliefs. This incident clearly shows discriminatory workplace practices based on religious identity. An employee's faith should not determine their chances for professional growth; yet, her boss, driven by socialist beliefs, made a discriminatory decision that directly targeted her religion.

The psychological effect of such persecution can be severe. After she was denied her scholarship and faced an ultimatum from her boss, the woman became depressed. This highlights how stress and isolation caused by religious-based discrimination can greatly harm mental health. During this difficult time, many believers questioned their faith, facing an existential crisis about what faith means under persecution. This struggle could lead to spiritual disillusionment and doubt. Additionally, persecuted believers often faced social stigma and isolation, as non-Christian friends and family members shunned them. This disconnection fostered feelings of loneliness and despair, making it harder for individuals to maintain their spiritual lives and negatively impacting their overall mental health.

State repression of evangelical Christians fostered a climate of mistrust among believers.[72] Initially, some Christians viewed the socialist regime with hope, believing it could usher in positive change for both them and their country. A few even renounced their faith, embracing socialist ideology

[68] Bekele G., interview with the author, Nekemte, Ethiopia, March 24, 2025.
[69] Desalegn B., interview with the Author, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, April 21, 2025.
[70] Eshete, “Evangelical Christians and Indirect Resistance," 17.
[71] Dhugassa, interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, May 14, 2025.
[72] Hege, *Beyond Our Prayers*, 196.

and promoting atheism in stark contrast to their previous beliefs. Meanwhile, other believers covertly allied themselves with the state, acting as informants and reporting on fellow believers, including the locations of their prayer gatherings.[73] Unbeknownst to many, these individuals maintained secret ties to the government while still engaging with the church community. A notable incident occurred in Adama, where a church was closed following a letter signed by a former believer who had become a Derg cadre after the revolution. This betrayal sowed seeds of distrust, causing believers to be wary of one another for a prolonged period.[74] As a result, knowledge of the underground church networks was restricted to a small group of mature believers.

Mistrust of the State

The tension between the Derg regime and marginalized evangelical Christians often manifested through the imposition of ideologies that categorize dissenters, evangelicals, as outsiders or adversaries. In such environments, derogatory labels and social stigmatization serve to delegitimize and isolate these communities, fostering a pervasive sense of vulnerability and alienation. The resulting fear and mistrust cultivate an atmosphere in which the affected groups perceive state authority as fundamentally hostile, leading to a deliberate withdrawal from engagement with governmental structures. This dynamic reinforces existing barriers between the oppressed and the state, perpetuating cycles of suspicion and avoidance within the community, which can have lasting effects on their collective identity and interactions with broader societal forces.[75]

Initially, many evangelical Christians viewed the Derg as a liberating force and a divine agent poised to bring equality to the oppressed. They rallied behind the Derg in the belief that it would champion their cause. However, as the regime turned against them and began to persecute their community, these Christians came to associate politics with betrayal. They saw it as a realm where faith could be compromised, loyalty feigned, and promises ultimately broken.[76] Consequently, the scars of historical persecution deepen the chasm between faith identities and state power, engendering a legacy of resilience grounded in wariness of institutional authority. This positioned MKC as one of the country's evangelical churches that sought to maintain a clear distinction between politics and religion.[77]

Although the MKC has sought to distance itself from the government, the church's recent faith statement demonstrates a commitment to fulfill its biblical obligations toward the state. This includes praying for civil authorities, respecting them, and paying taxes, as outlined in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Timothy 2:1-4. These responsibilities highlight the ethical behaviors that church members are encouraged to exhibit in their interactions with government.[78]

Despite facing significant challenges during the Derg regime that hindered its ability to deliver humanitarian aid and development programs, Meserete Kristos Church resumed its holistic ministry after the regime's fall, as this remained a central aspect of its mission. The Meserete Kristos Church Relief and Development Association (MKC-RDA) was subsequently established as a registered local non-governmental organization, serving as the church's development arm per government policy. While the church has maintained a commitment to political neutrality, it has continued to collaborate with the state when necessary to enhance its outreach to the community.[79] As one of the first and most capable local

[73] Bekere, *The Journey of the Faithful*.

[74] Nigussie T., interview with the author, Adama, Ethiopia, April 21, 2025.

[75] Kenna D., interview with the author, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, August 9, 2025.

[76] Mohammed Girma, *Understanding Religion and Social Change in Ethiopia: Toward a Hermeneutic of Covenant* (New York: Springer, 2012), 54.

[77] Emanuele Fantini, "Pentecostals and Developmental Citizenship in Ethiopia," in *Christian Citizens and the Moral Regeneration of the African State* (London: Routledge, 2017), 115-130.

[78] MKC, *Faith Statement* (2024), 9.

[79] Bekere and Ejo, "God's Reconciling Work."

faith-based development organizations in the country, MKC-RDA actively engages in humanitarian and development initiatives to address the population's needs.[80]

The account of the impact of state repression on evangelical Christians in a socialist regime reveals not only the dynamics of faith but also the interplay of personal beliefs, political allegiance, and communal trust. The initial assertion that state repression created an atmosphere of mistrust underscores a significant psychological and social consequence of political oppression. When individuals are forced to navigate their faith in a repressive environment, the natural cohesion of the community is compromised. The fear of betrayal can erode trust among believers, a breakdown that is critical in religious settings where communal support is vital.

In summary, persecution has multifaceted negative impacts on believers and the church, often leading to physical, psychological, and social challenges. These repercussions can diminish the church's effectiveness, hinder its growth, and create a culture of fear and isolation within the community of faith. The resilience demonstrated by believers in the face of these hardships, however, exemplifies their commitment to their faith and the transformative power of community support.

CONCLUSIONS

The persecution faced by the Meserete Kristos Church during the Derg regime catalyzed profound transformations within the community, enhancing both individual and collective faith. Despite the immense suffering, MKC members exhibited remarkable resilience, redefining their understanding of worship, community, and divine intervention. Their experiences prompted a strong sense of solidarity, deepened theological insights, and sparked a sense of urgency for evangelism, ultimately resulting in significant growth following the regime's fall. Although the psychological impact of persecution included trauma and social stigmatization, the church's adaptation to underground worship and reliance on one another played a crucial role in sustaining their faith amid adversity. The MKC narrative serves as a poignant reminder of how persecution can galvanize spiritual commitment and reshape community dynamics, paving the way for future engagement within marginalized religious groups.

Future research could conduct comparative studies that explore the resilience strategies of the Meserete Kristos Church in relation to other marginalized religious groups facing persecution in various political contexts. Such investigations would yield valuable insights into the dynamics of faith, community cohesion, and adaptive worship practices in the face of oppression.

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