

Former Prime Minister Now Professes Christ



A former prime minister of Ethiopia who spent years as a freedom fighter says he's on a new mission: to help his nation find freedom through Christ.

"I believe that the gospel is the only solution for my country," said Tamrat Layne, 54, who served as prime minister of Ethiopia's transitional government from 1991-1995. "For development, democracy, for politics, for economic development—the only way out, the only key is the gospel."

A former atheist who embraced communism at age 18, Layne was part of a coalition that ousted Ethiopia's military regime in 1991 and was a top leader in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front coalition. In addition to serving as prime minister, Layne was deputy prime minister and defense minister.

But in 1996 he was arrested on corruption and abuse of power charges amid accusations that he was involved in an illegal \$16 million deal to export Ethiopian textiles and that he used his position to export 1,000 tons of state-owned coffee through a bogus firm, among other claims, Agence France Presse reported.

Although he has consistently denied the charges, Layne was found guilty in 2000 and sentenced to 18 years in prison. He served 12 years before his release in December.

It was during his incarceration that Layne said he encountered Christ for the first time. In 2002, while in a prison hospital ward, Layne said a nurse gave him a gospel tract though she was not allowed to talk to the inmates.

"That tract had only about four or five lines ... but I started asking, 'If You are Jesus Christ,' as the tract explains, 'then come to me and give me a new life,' " he said. "I had never known prayer or a thing called prayer, [but] ... I was praying for about three or four days. Then after the third or fourth day, Jesus came in. It was a real experience, right there in the prison."

After receiving a Bible from the same nurse, Layne began reading from

the book of Psalms, then the book of John. "I was reading [the Bible] day and night, continually, sometimes nonstop," Layne said, who had been put in solitary confinement. "I loved it, and whenever I read the Bible it would bring tears."

Although he had followed communism for 25 years, Layne said studying the Bible forced him to re-examine his political ideology. "I started to compare those [Marxist-Leninist] values with the new values in the Bible," he said. "And side by side, while comparing these values, I was also measuring my past life ... in terms of the new values I had found in the Bible. Mostly, I found [the communist ideologies] just nonsense."

Before his release, Layne said a Christian man visited him and prophesied that he would soon be released. Layne said the man told him he would be a controversial figure but would "carry the name of Jesus Christ." Layne was released 15 days later, and in media interviews he told of his newfound faith in Christ.

Many Ethiopians remain skeptical of Layne's conversion, questioning whether his repentance is genuine or a political ploy. But others have embraced him. At a December worship service at Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers Church in Addis Ababa, Layne was welcomed with rousing applause as he shared his testimony.

"The controversy is still there, but God is working miraculously wherever I go and share my testimony," said Layne, who immigrated to the U.S. in December and attends Ethiopian Evangelical Church in Denver. "Many people are being saved."

Ethiopian evangelist Daniel Tassew Haile, who leads International Revival Ministry in Hallandale Beach, Fla., has been traveling with Layne to churches in the U.S. as he shares his testimony. Haile believes Layne may be able to influence other African leaders, who met in Ethiopia for meetings of the African Union.

"He may become an effective servant of God in Ethiopia and the other nations," Haile said. "He can be of a great help for the continent of Africa. I just want to be a help in whatever way I can, to help him accomplish his vision."

Layne says God has given him a message to encourage Christians to love one another and walk in unity, and to tell his nation that their only hope is Christ. "I have decided to be a servant of God, and I have decided to serve Jesus in any way for the rest of my life," Layne said. "For many years, I have been with a gun in my hand. And for the rest of my life, I will be with the gospel in my hand. This is what I live for."

