

## The Greatest Missionaries to the Somalis: The Heroes of 1881-1981

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### Prologue

The purpose of this paper is to acknowledge the sacrifices, challenges, and successes of the greatest missionaries to the Somalis. The one hundred years from 1881 to 1981 encompass the golden years of the Somali Church in terms of the quality and quantity of the converts who came to the Lord under the ministries of the Magnificent Four: The Roman Catholic Church (RCC), the Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC),<sup>1</sup> the Mennonite Mission (MM), and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM).<sup>2</sup> Any Somali Christian, whose name became well-known, even outside Christian circles, was saved under the ministries of these four organizations within the one hundred years stated above.

The French Catholic Mission (FCM), under the auspices of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), opened a famous orphanage in Daymoole village, British Somaliland, in 1881.<sup>3</sup> This orphanage, which was located near Berbera, is best remembered for contributing to the anger of the Somali Muslim scholar and freedom fighter, Sayid Muhammed Abdulle Hassan (7 April 1856 - 21 December 1920), who waged a relentless jihad against the British colonizers and their sympathizers. Hussein A. Bulhan writes that the Sayid's "wrath intensified when he met Somali boys converted to Christianity by missionaries who came and collaborated with the colonial administration."<sup>4</sup>

The British finally expelled the FCM in 1910 to appease the Sayid and his followers.<sup>5</sup> By then, the FCM had won numerous Somalis to the Lord before moving to the Somali town of Jigjiga, Eastern Ethiopia, 367 kilometers from Daymoole.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish name of this mission organization is Evangelisk Fosterlands-Stiftelsen (EF-S); the closest English translation is "Evangelical Homeland Foundation," better known today as "Swedish Evangelical Mission." See also: David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The work of the SIM was never intended to be limited to the modern country of Sudan. Sudan is a regional geographical area that stretches from the Senegal border to southern Mali (once known as French Sudan), Burkina Faso, southern Niger, northern Nigeria, northern Ghana, southern Chad, western Darfur (in modern-day Sudan), and present-day South Sudan.

<sup>3</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islam Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 121.

<sup>4</sup> Hussein A. Bulhan, *In-Between Three Civilizations: Archeology of Social Amnesia and Triple Heritage of Somalis*. Volume 1. (Bethesda, Maryland: Tayosan International Publishing), 263.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006), 76.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, *The Hardest Place*, 77.

The RCC was known not only for its top-quality orphanages but also the high standards of its schools. By 1939, the Italian Colonial Authority had given the Church a subsidy to oversee 12 elementary schools with 1,776 students.<sup>7</sup>

The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) established its first mission in the coastal town of Kismayo in 1896, quickly expanding to Jilib, Jamaame and Mogaambo, all located in the Jubaland regions of southern Somalia.<sup>8</sup> SOLC opened schools, clinics and churches just like the RCC.<sup>9</sup> SOLC planted a number of Somali-led house-churches in southern Somalia before the Italian Colonial Authority expelled it in 1935.<sup>10</sup> SOLC is arguably the most effective Protestant mission organization in the Magnificent Four.

The Mennonite Mission (MM) entered Somalia in 1953, setting up a mission base in Mogadishu.<sup>11</sup> In addition to evangelistic ministry, the MM opened much-needed schools and clinics. The MM eventually expanded its work to Mahaddaay, Jowhar Jamaame and opened two other mission stations. The Mennonites were very successful in their ministry. The Somali government expelled the MM in 1976.

The SIM entered Somalia in 1954 under the leadership of the legendary missionary couple, Warren and Dorothy Modricker.<sup>12</sup> Like the MM, the SIM operated schools and clinics in addition to their traditional ministry.<sup>13</sup> The Somali government expelled the SIM in 1976. Like the MM, the SIM was very successful in Somalia.

John Ethelstan Cheese (1877-1959), a Church of England member and an independent mystic missionary, invited the Modrickers to Somalia.<sup>14</sup> Cheese, who was known as the poor man of God, and the holiest man in Somalia, paved the way for the SIM work in Somalia.<sup>15</sup> He served thirty-three years among the Somalis.

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<sup>7</sup> Saadia Touval, *Somali Nationalism: International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1st edition, 1963), 77.

<sup>8</sup> These regions were known at the time as *Oltre Giuba*, Greater Juba, and Trans-Juba of British Kenya.

<sup>9</sup> Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*, (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. 2015), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Abdurahman Moallim Abdullahi, "The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Historical Evolution with a Case Study of the Islah Movement (1950-2000)." (PhD. Thesis, McGill University, Institute of Islamic Studies, 2011), 116.

<sup>11</sup> The Mennonite Mission registered in Somalia as Somalia Mennonite Mission (SMM). See David W. Shenk, "A Study of the Mennonite Presence and Church Development in Somalia from 1950 Through 1970." (Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, School of Education, 1972), 3.

<sup>12</sup> To learn more about the Modrickers, please see: Helen Miller, *The Hardest Place: The Biography of Warren and Dorothy Modricker*, (Guardian Books, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Abdullahi, Abdurahman M., *The Islamic Movement in Somalia: A Study of the Islah Movement, 1950-2000*. (Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2015), 21.

<sup>14</sup> To learn more about this saint, please read: Philip Cousins. *Ethelstan Cheese: A Saint of no Fixed Abode*. (Churchman Publishing, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> David A. Kerr, "Cheese, John Ethelstan." *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. <https://dacb.org/stories/somalia/cheese-johne/> (accessed 01 January 2021).

## The Greatest Missionaries

The missionaries who served among Somalis from 1881 – 1981 are indeed the greatest missionaries because of the holistic ministries they pioneered among Somali Muslims and the determination they demonstrated in the face of intense persecution. These heroes thrived in the inhospitable terrains of the Somali peninsula.

Some of these heroes were martyred in the Horn of Africa and others lost their minor children because of illnesses that could have been treated in their home countries. In fact, some wondered in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century if there were more missionary graves in the Somali peninsula than Somali Christians.

The greatest Roman Catholic missionary is arguably Monsignor Venanzio Francesco Filippini, O.F.M, the RCC Bishop to Somalia (23 May 1933 - 19 October 1970). Filippini reported 40,000 Somali Catholics in 1940, mainly among the Somali Bantus of Juba and Shebelle.<sup>16</sup> According to the Italian Colonial Authority, the population of Somalia in 1940 was around 1,150,000, and was updated to 1,200,000 in 1950 according to *Catholic Hierarchy*.<sup>17</sup> This RCC report puts the Somali Christian population in the 1940s at about 3.5%. If this report of Somali Catholics is accurate, then the often-repeated Somali Muslim mantra, “To be a Somali is to be a Muslim”, becomes a hollow claim. Ali Abdirahman Hersi, a Somali scholar, paraphrased this maxim in 1977 by asserting, “It is difficult to conceive of any meaning in the term Somali itself without at the same time implying Islamic identity.”<sup>18</sup> Monsignor Giorgio Bertin, the RCC Bishop of Djibouti and the Apostolic Administrator of Somalia, considers the 3.5% figure too high.<sup>19</sup>

The greatest Protestant missionary couple is Warren and Dorothy Modricker. The Modrickers pioneered the Somali Protestant ministry in Somalia.<sup>20</sup> They arrived in British Somaliland in 1933 and temporarily relocated to Yemen after the British Colonial Authority had denied them entry to Somaliland. The Modrickers lived in a number of countries so they could better minister to the Somalis. These countries include Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. Even after retiring to the United States, the Modrickers continued ministering to the Somalis in the US. Almost every Protestant Somali Christian in the Somali peninsula directly or indirectly traces

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<sup>16</sup> Paolo Tripodi, *The Colonial Legacy in Somalia, Rome and Mogadishu: From Colonial Administration to Operation Restore Hope*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 66. Tripodi refers to the Bishop as Franco Filippini. The Bishop’s legal name is Venanzio Filippini.

<sup>17</sup> “Diocese of Mogadiscio,” *Catholic Hierarchy*, (nd).

<http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dmgds.html> (accessed 21 December 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Hersi, Ali Abdirahman. *The Arab Factor in Somali History: The Origins and the Development of Arab Enterprise and Cultural Influence in the Somali Peninsula*. University of California, Los Angeles: Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977, 109

<sup>19</sup> Bishop Giorgio Bertin, “Re: The Draft Thesis Proposal.” Message to Aweis A. Ali. 17 April 2019. Email.

<sup>20</sup> The Swedish Overseas Lutheran Church (SOLC) pioneered the Somali ministry in the Jubaland regions which were known at the time as *Oltre Giuba*, Greater Juba, and Trans-Juba of British Kenya. This region was technically part of British Kenya at the time.

their salvation to the ministry of the Modrickers. The Modrickers likewise helped Aadan Jim'aale Faarah and his Somali team translate the Bible into Somali. The Modrickers also started the most well-known and the most effective Somali radio ministry in 1972. Many Somalis first heard the Gospel because of this ministry, *Codka Nolosha Cusub* (Voice of New Life).<sup>21</sup>

## The Fruits of the Greatest Missionaries

### Somaliland

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) wins when it comes to the quality of Somali Christian converts. This Church produced first, second and even third-generation Somali Christians of very high caliber. The Protestant Somali Christians often struggle to gain acceptance in Somalia but not the Somali Roman Catholic ones. No Somali Protestant Christian ever won a national election in Somalia. However, a number of Somali Roman Catholics beat Muslim challengers in Somali elections. The high-profile Somali Christians from Somaliland include:

1. Michael Mariano Ali (1914 –1987), a Roman Catholic, was a freedom fighter, statesman, diplomat and politician. Michael Mariano, as he is better known, was a diligent lawyer and a businessman; Michael was the most prominent voice in the Somali Youth League (SYL).<sup>22</sup> He established the powerful Somali political party, National United Front (NUF), in 1958 and became its chairman. Michael was elected as a Member of the Somaliland Parliament (MP) in 1954. He was elected again in 1960 as an MP for the Somali Parliament after Somaliland and Somalia united to form the Somali Republic. Michael also served in the Somali cabinet as Minister of Economic Planning under the Premiership of Muhammed Haji Ibrahim Egal. Michael also served his country as an ambassador to Zambia and southern Africa from 1974-1986. He received a state funeral when he died in Mogadishu in 1987.

During one of these Parliamentary elections, Michael's political challenger circulated an infamous anti-Michael poem in which the refrain was "*Michael iska eeg iyo maska daba yaal.*" "Be careful of Michael and the snake behind him." The snake was Michael's Christian faith. The fear-mongering failed, and Michael was elected in a landslide.

Michael, a man of great courage and wisdom, once said to President Muhammed Siyaad Barre that Somalia would never enjoy peace until it returned to its Christian roots. Michael made this prophetic pronouncement

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<sup>21</sup> The author of this paper came to the Lord through this radio ministry in 1986.

<sup>22</sup> The Somali Youth League (SYL) (Somali: Ururka Dhalinyarada Soomaaliyeed, Italian: Lega dei Giovani Somali or Lega Somala della Gioventù), was initially established as the Somali Youth Club (SYC) to disguise its political ambitions from the Italian Colonial Authority. The SYL was the first political party in Somalia. It fought for Somalia's independence in the Somali Peninsula and in international arenas in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The SYL demanded the unification of the five Somali territories in the Somali Peninsula to form the Somali Republic.

during a cabinet meeting in 1974.<sup>23</sup> Sixteen years later, in 1991, the central government collapsed and ushered in a bloodbath and destruction the likes of which the nation had never seen before.

2. Lewis Clement Salool, a Roman Catholic, had a Somali father and an Indian mother. Lewis was “a native of British Somaliland and of a missionary Catholic family. Educated in Bombay where he graduated [with] M.A., LL.B., practiced as a lawyer in Addis Ababa under [the] Italian regime, later in British Somaliland. He came to Mogadishu in 1945 as Legal Advisor to SYL.”<sup>24</sup> Lewis also designed the SYL flag in 1942.

Lewis Clement Salool and Michael Mariano Ali, both SYL stalwarts, crafted the Somali Youth League’s core message in its pursuit of Somalia’s independence and unification. Lewis and Michael also “wrote all the party petitions.”<sup>25</sup>

3. Alex Qolqoole, a Roman Catholic, was “unequaled in the history of modern Somali nationalism.”<sup>26</sup> Alex was a businessman and a patriot who worked closely with Michael and Lewis. Alex supported the SYL financially and advised other key leaders of the movement. He was a brilliant statesman.
4. Awil Haji Abdillahi, a Roman Catholic, is better known as Anthony James. He was a member of the 1964 cabinet and served as the Minister of Finance under the Premiership of Abdirisak Haji Hussein. Anthony significantly contributed to the independence of Somalia and Somaliland and their unification in 1960.
5. Ahmed Ali Kootali, a Roman Catholic, is a second-generation Christian, a businessman and a senior leader of the Somali National Movement (SNM). The most well-known of Ahmed’s children is probably Layla Kootali, a singer and entertainer.
6. Dr. Omar Elmi Dihod (1947 – 2016), a Protestant, is one of only two Protestant Christians in this Somaliland list. Omar was a medical doctor and a colonel in the Somali Defense Forces. Omar later defected to the Somali National Movement (SNM) and became one of its vital early leaders. The

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<sup>23</sup> Ben I. Aram, “Somalia’s Judeo-Christian Heritage: A Preliminary Survey.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*. 2003, 7.

<sup>24</sup> “Personalities in Somalia,” 7 December 1948, FO 1015/51, UK National Archives. Cited in Abdi Ismail Samatar. *Africa’s First Democrats: Somalia’s Aden A. Osman and Abdirizak H. Hussen*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 235.

<sup>25</sup> Abdi Ismail Samatar, *Africa’s First Democrats: Somalia’s Aden A. Osman and Abdirizak H. Hussen*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Mohamed Haji Abdulahi Ingiriis, “Reframing Narratives of Statebuilding and Peacebuilding in Africa. Integrated Field Research Report.” A paper presented in the African Leadership Centre Research Project, 18-19 April 2016, in Nairobi, Kenya, 10.

SNM fought against the government of President Muhammed Siyad Barre until its collapse in 1991. Omar returned to Hargeisa victoriously and became the Minister of Health and later the Somaliland Envoy for International Recognition. Omar was later appointed as a presidential advisor by three consecutive Somaliland Presidents.

7. Prof. Haji Muhammed Hussein Ahmed (1951 – 1996), a Protestant, was educated in Somalia (Lafoole University) and Canada (University of Saskatchewan). He returned to Somalia and taught at the Somali National University. He stayed in Mogadishu during the early years of the Somali civil war to rebuild the education system in the country. Ahmed was kidnapped in Mogadishu and martyred because of his Christian faith on 3 April 1996.

## Somalia

Despite southern Somalia's (Italian Somaliland) long history of Italian occupation and colonization, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) did not attract or produce any prominent local Christians except for one. It is a topic for another paper why the RCC could not replicate its success in Somaliland, Djibouti, and the Somali region of Ethiopia. Following are five prominent Somali Christians from Somalia. The first two are Roman Catholic and the remaining three are Protestant.

1. Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudeen (d. June 1951), a Roman Catholic, was the founder and the first President of the SYL. Sakhawudeen, as he is known, recruited the first twelve key leaders of the SYL;<sup>27</sup> he contracted tuberculosis as a younger man and was treated in Forlanini (also known as Laansareeti) Hospital in Mogadishu. Sakhawudeen became a Christian during his hospitalization.<sup>28</sup>
2. Elman Ali Ahmed (d. 09 March 1996), a Roman Catholic, is a national hero. He was an Italian and German-educated electrical engineer, entrepreneur, peace activist and human rights advocate. Elman was murdered in Mogadishu by unknown gunmen suspected to be bankrolled by the late Somali warlord, General Muhammed Faarah Aideed. Elman was known for his motto, "*qoriga dhig, qalinka qaado.*" "*Put down the gun, pick up the pen.*"

Elman managed his football club, Elman FC, spearheaded a literacy campaign, created income-generating projects for thousands of poor and disadvantaged children. Elman rescued homeless children and found safe havens for them. He also founded Elman Peace in 1990 which "is dedicated

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<sup>27</sup> The thirteen SYL leaders are: Abdulkhadir Sheikh Sakhawudeen (who was the actual founder), Yasin Haji Osman Sharmarke, Mohamed Hirsi Nur (Seyedin), Haji Mahamed Hussein Mahad, Osman Geedi Raage, Dherye Haji Dherye, Dahir Haji Osman (Dhegaweyne), Ali Hasan Maslah, Mohamed Ali Nur, Mohamed Farah Hilowle, H. Mohamed Abdullahi Hayesi, Hudow Malin Abdullahi Salah, and Mohamed Osman Barbe Bardhere.

<sup>28</sup> Mohamed A. Gurhan, "The Persecuted Disciples of Jesus Christ: A Research Article on Somali Ecclesiology." (Somali Christian Mission, December 2012), 15.

to promoting peace, cultivating leadership and empowering the marginalized brackets of society to be decision-makers in the processes that ensure their wellbeing.”<sup>29</sup> Elman Peace is an award-winning human rights organization.

3. Professor Ahmed Ali Haile (1953 – 2011), a Protestant, is the highest-profile Somali Christian from Somalia (Italian Somaliland). Ahmed was an American-educated peace-maker and educator. President Ali Mahdi Muhammed appointed Ahmed in 1991 to become the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Ahmed declined to accept the official appointment.
4. Professor Da’ud Hassan Ali (1944 - 2008), a Protestant, was educated in Somalia, Lebanon and the United Kingdom. Da’ud moved to Britain in 1967 after completing his course of study in Beirut, Lebanon. He worked for the Birmingham City Council as an educational psychologist. He returned to Somalia in 2004 after early retirement to rebuild the educational system of the country. He was martyred for his Christian faith in Beledweyn alongside Rehana Ahmed (1975-2008) and two Kenyan colleagues.
5. Aadan Jim’aale Faarah, a Protestant, was an influential Lieutenant Colonel in the National Security Service (NSS Somali: *Hay’ada Nabadsugidda Qaranka*, HNQ), Somalia’s powerful secret service. He used his position to defend the rights of Christian organizations who were often targeted by unscrupulous elements in the NSS. Aadan was also a Bible translator, hymnologist and a prominent church leader. Aadan composed some of the most famous Somali Christian hymns of the *degrie* genre and translated the Somali Bible with the help of the celebrated SIM missionaries, Warren and Dorothy Modricker.

### Djibouti

Despite its small population, Djibouti produced the biggest number of high-profile ethnic Somali Roman Catholics. Many of these eminent Christians have ancestral roots in Somaliland. These renowned ethnic Somali Christians include:

1. Jean Paul Noel Abdi, (c. 1946 - 13 April 2012), a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament, president of the League of Human Rights and a fierce critic of President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh. Jean Paul was a fearless defender of the rights of his fellow Djiboutians.
2. Maitre Luc Abdi Aden, a Roman Catholic, was a highly acclaimed lawyer and former Governor of the Central Bank.
3. Antoine Michel Barthelemy, a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament
4. Vincent Omar Ahmed Youssouf, a Roman Catholic, was a Member of Parliament and an active member of the *Front de Libération de Côte des*

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<sup>29</sup> Elman Peace: “Our Story,” <http://elmanpeace.org/about/> (accessed 28 December 2020).

*Somalis* (English: Front for the Liberation of the Somali Coast), a liberation-focused guerrilla organization in French Somaliland (known today as Djibouti). Vincent was often self-exiled in Hargeisa and Mogadishu to better fight for the liberation of Djibouti.

5. Alain David, a Roman Catholic, is a prominent medical doctor who never turned away any patient because they could not afford his services.
6. Chantal Lelong, a Roman Catholic, was an Inspector General of the Ministry of Education, University of Djibouti adjunct professor and senior advisor for USAID.
7. Robert Carton, a Roman Catholic, was a Caritas Director and humanitarian worker.
8. Wahib Issa Ali, a Roman Catholic, better known as Jean Pierre Issa, was a Member of Parliament.
9. Edouard Shamis, a Roman Catholic, was a Secretary at the Presidential Palace known for her humility and professionalism.
10. Thomas Ahmed Aden Youssouf, a Roman Catholic, was a Minister of Finance who strengthened the economy of his country.
11. Michel Dirieh, a Roman Catholic, was a Director General of the Ministry of Labor who was an advocate for the interests of the Djiboutian workers.
12. William J. F. Syad (1930 - 1993), a Roman Catholic, is the most celebrated Djiboutian author and novelist. William was the pioneer of the French language literature in his country. He wrote both in French and in English.

### **Somali Region of Ethiopia**

The most prominent ethnic Somali Christians include:

1. Dr. Peter Gabriel Robleh, a Roman Catholic, is a former Brussels-based Ethiopian ambassador to the Benelux.<sup>30</sup> Peter also represented his country in the European Union. During this assignment, Peter was often interviewed by the international media on issues pertaining to the Horn of Africa.
2. Arteh Mo'alim Muhumed Ali Omar (d. 2002), a Protestant, led a Somali militia that fought against the British Military Administration in the Somali region of Ethiopia, known then as British Ogaden (1941-1955). The British derogatively called him *Arteh Shuftay* (Arteh the highway robber). He later reconciled with the British colonial authority and ended his rebellion. Arteh later converted to

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<sup>30</sup> The Benelux Union, or simply Benelux, is a politico-economic union of three neighboring countries of western Europe: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.

Christianity and the local Muslims in the region nicknamed him *Arteh Gaal* (Arteh the Christian).<sup>31</sup> Arteh's Muslim sub-clan subsequently anointed him as their Chief Elder in the region. The sub-clan christened him as *Arteh Mo'alim* to emphasize that his dad was a Muslim preacher and madrassa teacher.

Arteh was the founder and the CEO of Ecumenical Development Group for Somalia (EDGS). Arguably the biggest and most effective non-governmental organization (NGO) in Somalia for decades. EDGS implemented hundreds of projects all over Somalia. They dug hundreds of ponds, shallow and deep-water wells, supported livestock and agricultural projects, equipped technical schools, installed windmills in Lower Shabelle, etc. In 1991 when Somalia's central government collapsed, EDGS had several thousand employees in Somalia.

3. Ali Ibrahim Ahmed (d. 29 June 2005), a Protestant, was an Egyptian-trained Somali military officer who studied the Bible in India. Ali was a renowned hymnologist and a humanitarian worker. He served as the Minister of Agriculture in the Ethiopian Somali Regional State before he died in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.

### Somali Region of Kenya

1. Shaafi'i Ibrahim Faarah (b.1932), a Protestant, is a retired longtime minister of the Gospel. Shaafi'i is known as a fearless witness, expert on the Somali culture, language and poetry. Shaafi'i came to the Lord in 1969 and ministered both in Somalia and Kenya for decades. Shaafi'i was once asked why his Muslim clan protected him from harm. He answered, "In popular Islam, the clan is more important than Islam! If a man from a different clan kills me, my clan would see that as humiliation because they could not protect one of their own from a rival clan. My clan is not protecting me as an individual; they are also protecting their honour."<sup>32</sup>

### Exclusive List

The fruits of the greatest missionaries chronicled above are those whose names are well-known, not only among Somali Christians but also among the Somali Muslims. The list is, therefore, very exclusive. For example, Dominic Colhaye (d. 1991) was born in Gabiley, British Somaliland, and moved to Djibouti (then French Somaliland) in the 1940s with his Muslim mother when he was a baby. The Catholic Church in Djibouti raised Dominic as a Roman Catholic Christian. He later became a Djiboutian citizen, Bible study leader and humanitarian worker before he died in a motorcycle accident. While Dominic was well-known among the ethnic Somali Christians in

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<sup>31</sup> *Gaal* is a derogatory Somali term which Muslims use for all non-Muslims

<sup>32</sup> "Courage in Our Conviction: A Conversation with Pastor Shafi'i Ibrahim Faarah." Somali Bible Society Journal, Volume 1, Issue 1, Version 2, December 2020, 60. [https://www.academia.edu/44571287/Courage\\_in\\_Our\\_Conviction\\_A\\_Conversation\\_with\\_Pastor\\_Shafi\\_i\\_Ibrahim\\_Farah](https://www.academia.edu/44571287/Courage_in_Our_Conviction_A_Conversation_with_Pastor_Shafi_i_Ibrahim_Farah) (accessed 28 December 2020)

Djibouti, he lacked name recognition among ethnic Somali Muslims in his country. Dominic will, therefore, not be featured in the Djiboutian list of the prominent Somali Christians who came to the Lord under the ministry of the greatest missionaries to the Somalis.

Another Roman Catholic Somali Christian of a similar caliber was Gregory Fidel who died in Hargeisa, Somaliland, in 2008). Unlike Dominic, Fidel Gidhi Gidhi, as he was locally known, was a second-generation Christian. His father, who was from Bur'oo, British Somaliland, became a disciple of Christ in the early 1900s. Also, not included in the list are the Christian children and grandchildren of these famed Somali Christians. Many of the children and grandchildren are lawyers, medical doctors, academicians and entrepreneurs but they lack the name recognition their parents enjoyed in the Somali peninsula.

### The SYL Flag



The SYL logo/flag with its founders  
Photo credit: symbolhunt.com

Lewis Clement Salool designed the Somali Youth League (SYL) flag in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1942. He later presented the flag in Jigjiga, eastern Ethiopia, during a meeting organized by some of the early supporters of the SYL. Lewis included in the flag a prominent cross, a crescent and five stars representing the five Somali territories the SYL wanted to be united under one republic: British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, French Somaliland, the Ogaden-Haud region of Ethiopia and the Northern Frontier District (NFD), Kenya.

The thirteen SYL founders, twelve of whom were Muslim, recognized that their struggle for independence could fail without the support of the educated Somali Christians from British Somaliland. This may explain why Lewis' SYL flag with a Christian symbol was accepted without much ado. The SYL flag colors are red, white and blue. Given the inclusion of a cross in the flag design, the first two colors were probably chosen because of their Christian symbolism. Lewis, Michael and Alex are indeed the unsung heroes of the SYL struggle.

### Successes and Challenges

The Roman Catholic Church dominated Somali ministry during the colonial era in the Somali peninsula until 1981. While the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and the Mennonite Mission (MM) witnessed the establishment of several Somali house-churches, fellowships and Bible study groups, the caliber of these Protestant converts was much lower than their Roman Catholic Church (RCC) counterparts. The faith of the RCC converts was also more deeply rooted than their Protestant counterparts. Exactly how the RCC accomplished this feat among Somalis remains elusive. The successes of the years from 1881 to 1981 soon faced challenges in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. The challenges started in the early years of the 1970s when radical Islam began to slowly infiltrate the otherwise popular Islam of the Somalis with its emphasis on piety and pragmatism.

Fundamentalist Islam, fueled by Gulf petrodollars, considered Sufi Islam as diluted and radicalized the Somali youth of both genders. This intolerant Islam spread among Somalis like a bushfire despite the Somali government's crackdown. The most significant force that propelled radical Islam was the Muslim Brotherhood (الإخوان المسلمون al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn), a transnational Sunni fundamentalist group founded by the Egyptian Muslim cleric, Hassan Ahmed Abdel Rahman Muhammed al-Banna (14 October 1906 – 12 February 1949) in 1928. All Jihadi groups have their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood.

### Epilogue

The greatest missionaries ministered to the Somalis from 1881 to 1981. These missionaries broke down barriers and built bridges to win the trust of the Somali Muslims to whom they were ministering. The missionaries did not have smooth sailing. Some were martyred, including Merlin R. Grove (9 February 1929 – 16 July 1962), William Donald McClure (28 April 1906 – 27 March 1977) and Bishop Pietro Salvatore Colombo, OFM (28 October 1922 - 9 July 1989). Some missionaries lost their children to diseases that could have been easily treated in their home countries. A number of female missionaries also experienced sexual violence.

Despite all these seemingly insurmountable challenges, the greatest missionaries from 1881 to 1981 overcame the challenges and led many Somalis to the Lord. Many of these converts, as detailed in this paper, contributed to the independence and developments of their countries, including Somaliland, Somalia and Djibouti. Other Somali Christians in the Somali regions of Ethiopia and Kenya positively contributed to the progress of their communities. These greatest missionaries left behind shoes too big to fill, but modern missionaries (from 1981 to the present) should not despair. The same Lord who used the greatest missionaries is the same One using the modern missionaries.

Several missionaries and local church leaders fact-checked this paper. Special thanks to Monsignor Giorgio Bertin, the Bishop of Djibouti and the apostolic administrator of Somalia, who fact-checked the Roman Catholic section of this paper.<sup>33</sup> I am also grateful to Rev. Mohamed Gurhan who fact-checked the Protestant section of this paper.<sup>34</sup> Despite their arduous effort to assure the accuracy and the integrity of the claims made in this paper, any shortcomings in this paper are entirely mine alone.

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<sup>33</sup> Bishop Giorgio Bertin, "Re: I Need Your Help." Message to Aweis A. Ali. 16 January 2021. Email.

<sup>34</sup> Mohamed Gurhan, "Re: Request." Message to Aweis A. Ali. 08 March 2021. Email.

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### About the author

Aweis A. Ali, PhD, is a missiologist and an authority on the persecuted church in the Muslim world with special expertise on the Somali Church. Aweis was a co-pastor of a house church in Mogadishu, Somalia, in mid 1990s when 12 of its 14 members were martyred for their faith. Aweis, an ordained elder, has been ministering in the Muslim world since 1993; he has lived and served in world areas that include the Horn of Africa, East Africa, West Africa and the United States. Aweis earned a B.Th. degree from the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa; an M.Div. degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri; and a PhD from Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi. Aweis' PhD thesis is titled, "Persecution of Christians and its Effect on Church Growth in Somalia." Aweis is the author, editor or translator of 8 books and a dozen articles. He is the founder and the Series Editor of the annual *Maansada Masiixa* (Anthology of Somali Christian Poetry.) Dr. Aweis can be reached at [amazingwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:amazingwisdom@gmail.com).