Said Abouadaou 1890-1964

Evangelist among his own people in Kabylia, Algeria



A Café in Algiers

He was born in 1890 in Djemaa Saharidj one of the largest and best-known villages in Kabylia. He came from a family of three boys and two girls. Their parents were Muslims. It was rare to find a French government school in Kabylia but there was such a school in Djemaa and Said attended there from the age of six. On his way back and forth to school he passed a Protestant Mission Station that had been in his village since 1881. A worker by the name of Emile Rolland took a special interest in Said.

From 1908 there had been two English women workers – Jane Cox and Kate Smith – in Tizi Ouzou. The Algerian government handed responsibility for their work over to Emile Rolland since he was a Frenchman. They were worried about spying activities if it remained in English hands. Rolland was an employee of the Renault Auto Company. He later founded Mission Rolland.

He learned the local Berber language and was soon able to preach in it. He also built a permanent place of worship in the town. Despite many efforts, the French Protestant endeavour didn't yield great results. At the time of the insurrection in 1954 there were no more than 800 who had turned from Islam to faith in Christ.

Rolland asked Said to accompany his son Daniel back and forth to school. On the way back they often stopped to play at the mission house. One day Said fell from a swing and was knocked unconscious. From this time his father forbade him to go to the mission. He told him that it brought dishonour on the family for him to go to the house of Christians. Still Said couldn't help himself!

The affection and love of the two ladies who taught the Bible classes was captivating. About 20 boys attended the Bible classes in secret. Said wrote of this time, **"We didn't always catch the meaning of the missionary's teaching, but we sensed their love for us. ... This so captivated us that we found it impossible to give up attending the Bible classes"**.

As Said moved into adolescence, he lost all interest in both Islam and Christianity. His behaviour at school deteriorated and aged 12 he had an accident at school in which he broke his leg and had to stay in bed for six months. The principal of the French school despaired of his behaviour. Writing about this incident later in life he said, **"I visited the same principal 20 years later. After greetings were exchanged, he recognised me and said, 'Now I believe in the power of the Gospel! Knowing you in your younger years as I did, I would never have believed you would become an evangelist'."**

On his return to school, he once again got involved in smoking, drinking and gambling. When he was 14 years old his eyes began to give him trouble. He could no longer see the blackboard and so dropped out of school. He had no trade and was generally lazy hanging out with his friends around the village in the cafés gambling – sometimes all night long. His mother was in despair. She wanted him to be a good Muslim but would even have preferred him to be a Christian than to live the life he was living. She told him, **"I won't oppose you if you become like Saeed Rahal"**.

Said Rahal was a friendly evangelist and a worker in the mission. He was always clean and neatly dressed. He spoke four languages and had a real gift of public speaking. He was also gifted in teaching. He was well respected and recognised for his sincerity.

Still Said continued in his destructive lifestyle. Eventually his father declared before the Village Council that he was disinheriting Said because of his way of living. This meant he could remain a son in the house, but his father would not be responsible for any debts or acts of his. In the event of his father's death he could not inherit as long as this declaration was in effect.



An Algerian Christian family

His eyes got worse and he became effectively blind, needing to be led around by a relative. A Roman Catholic sister from the 'White Sisters' took pity on him. She took him to her dispensary and diagnosed trachoma. One eye was almost lost. Due to her careful daily treatment of the other eye, it slowly recovered.

Said still continued his destructive lifestyle but he kept in contact with the mission. Mainly he took delight in annoying the workers! Still Jane Cox continued her efforts to win him. Occasionally she gave him jobs and he was able to earn a little money. One day she asked him to collect thorny locust tree branches to fence off her vegetable garden. He attempted this task even though he felt it was beneath him. He came back scratched and bleeding and told her he wouldn't do any more work like that. By this time he was 16. He left her angrily and she said something to him that he never forgot for the rest of his life, "**Said, life is like a ladder. You must begin with the lowest rung!**".

Said remained angry. At night he used to slip out before the classes were finished and cut cactus leaves from the prickly pear plant with its sharp spikes. He scattered these along the path where the barefooted boys would hurt their feet on them when they left the mission. As he hid to watch what happened, he saw a kind Scottish worker, Daniel Gibson Ross, go out and sweep the thorns away by the light of his lantern.

The time came when Said had to decide whether he was going to show he was a good Muslim by keeping the fast during the month of Ramadan. He decided to do this aged 17 and did indeed manage to fast for the whole month. He was proud that he managed to do this although he had no understanding of the spiritual meaning of the fast. By 18 years old he had abandoned the practice of fasting being sure it would never be the means of salvation from sin.

This is how he describes coming to faith in Jesus, "**When I was 19 God revealed Himself to my soul. I discovered that Christ saves sinners and that I was a great sinner. He did what nobody else could do. He broke the power of sin in me. I surrendered my life to Him to be used for His glory**". He was baptised by Daniel Ross and this meant not only a break with Islam but unfortunately a break with his family. He had to move out of his father's house since the shame of his becoming a Christian was too much for his father. Before his mother's death in 1910 she sent for him and on her deathbed she asked him to promise to look after his younger sister and younger brother. He promised her and in later years God helped him to fulfil this promise.

In 1910 Said joined the Methodist Episcopal Church that had begun work in Algeria in 1908. He was a member of this church for the rest of his life. Said was one of five young man who had been led to Christ by Daniel Ross. They volunteered to work with the mission in outreach to the Kabyle people.

Dr Friedrich Roesch was a German Methodist worker who had a profound influence on Said. They went together on several tours among Kabyle tribes. Towards the end of his life Said was shown a photo of Dr Roesch. He said, "**Nobody in the world has meant so much to me as he did. Even though he was such a learned man and I came up from ignorance, he never treated me condescendingly.**"

To train these five young men Dr. Roesch established a Training School/Bible Institute in Algiers. It was led by an Algerian believer, Said Flici, who was an established Christian preacher. The five young men travelled to Algiers on September 28, 1910. Initially Dr Roesch financed the whole venture himself as the Methodist superintendent was opposed to this method of recruiting evangelists fearing that the Methodist Church would not have the means to sustain employment for them after the training. But Dr Roesch passionately believed that this was the way to go. He wrote, "**I could not find any work in the city of Algiers which could be dearer to my heart than this educational work**". In the end the superintendent conceded and the leadership of the mission took over this training.

As well as the Bible Institute Dr Roesch also set up the first hostel for boys of the Methodist Church in North Africa. Lodgings were rented and were made available to many students including some who were not studying in the Bible Institute. Some of these later became government medical assistants, school teachers etc. Some never became Christians but always remained on very friendly terms with Christians.



Kabyle Village of Taourirt

In 1911 a young man named Josiah Blackmore joined the Methodist Episcopal Church and was appointed to begin a new work in Fort National among the Irathen tribe. He had come from the English Plymouth Brethren at Tazmalt. Said was appointed by Dr Roach to be Blackmore's assistant. He was the first one of the five students to be sent out from the Bible Institute in Algiers to work in the Kabyle Mountains. Dr Roach wrote in a report to the Methodist Mission, "**Said Abouadaou's earnest and devoted character might be presented as an example to his comrades**".

They left Algiers by train February 28, 1911 and arrived in Tizi Ouzou that evening. From Tizi Ouzou they took a stagecoach drawn by horses. The winding road from the plane of Sebaou to Fort National climbs from near sea level to an elevation of about 3200 feet. About 8 miles before Fort National they left the stagecoach and took a shortcut on foot. When they arrived at the Lookout Monument they knelt in prayer – their first prayer together in Kabylia. This monument had been built by the French to commemorate their conquest of Kabylia in 1857. In 1962, with Algerian Independence, it was torn down by young nationalists. They waited at the monument for the next stagecoach and arrived at Fort National at 4 am on the morning of March 1.

The very first day in Fort National news reached them of the death of their beloved friend Daniel Gibson Ross. He been caring for others in the typhus epidemic and himself fell victim to this dreadful disease. They hurried to Djemaa Saharidj to see how they could help the bereaved family with the funeral arrangements.

Grateful Muslims raised a memorial stone on his grave thus honouring a Christian who died serving them. When nationalist youths wrecked the nearby French or Christian cemetery after Algerian Independence they respected only two graves – the grave of Daniel Ross and that of a missionary's child.

Back in Fort National, two months later Mr Blackmore married the daughter of a Swiss pioneer mission worker Eugene Cuendet. He was the man who translated the New Testament into Kabyle with help from Saeed Rahal.

In March 1912 – about a year after his move into the Irathen tribe – Said married Sadiya Khichan. She was a Christian who had been brought up by two workers – Dora Welch and Emily Smith – in the hostel for Kabyle girls in Algiers. Said wrote, "**Ours was the first of several Christian families made possible by this mission hostel. Two of my wife's younger sisters also lived at the hostel**". Of his marriage Said wrote, "**God himself found for me this Christian helpmate of like feelings as myself. Praise God I am happy! I give my wife liberty and seek to do so more and more. I will banish such Muslim customs which are contrary to the Gospel**".

Some years later reminiscing about this young couple, Emily Smith wrote, "**When Sadiya married, her husband gave her freedom of thought and action at a time when other Algerian men would not dare to emancipate the women, so great was the opposition**".

Remembering his promise to his mother on her deathbed, Said was able to intervene and rescue his younger sister from a marriage his father was arranging to an old Muslim man. Said managed to repay the dowry and his sister went to live in the Girls' Hostel in Algiers where she stayed until her marriage to a Christian teacher. Said's younger brother, Ferhat, lived with Said and Sadiya so he could experience the atmosphere of a Christian home.



Kabyle man from Tizi Ouzou

In 1913 Said and Sadiya were blessed with a baby daughter who they named Mariama. Said commented. "**I am proud of this little girl and will do my best to bring her up loving the Lord**".

As the work continued Said experienced a good deal of opposition. He had struggles both in the mission and in the villages. He wrote, "**The adversary tried by several means to cause me spiritual harm and deter me from the work so dear to my heart. I discovered that the Christian life was not as easy as I had imagined at first, but I can testify to the help of God and His blessings**".

Dr. Roesch anticipated World War I which broke out in 1914. He didn't want to be arrested by the French, so he left Algeria in 1913. This meant the Bible Institute and hostel had to close. Sadly, Dr Roesch was killed in 1914 on the German side.

Said set up a new hostel for Kabyle boys in Fort National. This was later re-located to El Biar, Algiers. By 1914, 20 boys from different tribes were living there. Said's brother, Ferhat, went to live in the hostel at this time.

Said and Josiah Blackmore devoted themselves to village evangelism. Said wrote, "**What a pleasure it was to consider that we were following the example of Our Master who went from place to place doing good. We frequently visited all the villages from Adeni in the west to Agemoun Izem in the east. This densely populated mountain range included 46 villages all within two hours' walk from the Mission Centre along mountain paths**".

They usually delivered their message in the village square or in front of the village mosque. They used the Ten Commandments to try to awaken consciences to a conviction of sin and the need of a Saviour. They then announced Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the World. Some ridiculed and mocked and did their best to upset the meetings, but others asked many questions and listened well to the answers.

Said and Mr Blackmore usually went together to the villages as Said was not always well received when he went alone. Sometimes he became discouraged and wondered whether he should continue in this work. His wife was his constant encourager saying, "**We are in the Lord's hands. Let us press forward with our eyes fixed on Jesus**".

As well as the evangelistic work, they also ran a dispensary just outside the French ramparts of Fort National. Said was often able to share the Gospel with fifty or more people who were waiting to see Mr Blackmore who had become an expert ophthalmologist. He was well known throughout the area as many people had been cured through his eye surgery. Even government physicians in Kabylia sent patients to him. By tribal law, Kabyle women were not allowed to go inside the fortified walls of Fort National. But the Mission House was just outside the walls, so Mr Blackmore was able to help many women. In 1913 he wrote, "**About 1200 women and girls from 50 surrounding villages have received treatment and medicines and have heard the Gospel. Said Abouadaou, our national preacher has made real spiritual progress. The enemy has beset him sorely but, by God's grace, he has come through rid of more dross. He is studying and does well. He helps me with the lads in the hostel, in dispensing medicine and in village preaching in which we continue to push forward.**"

Said wrote at the same time, "**What a joy for me to be able to count myself among the members of God's family and to have the same Jesus as Saviour! I am happy and my heart overflows with joy in the possession of the title of Child of God and even more that of Servant of God. Divine goodness has been revealed to me by real proofs ever since I began serving God".**

The time came for Said to take more responsibility for the village evangelism. Another Kabyle brother, Amokran Hamadouche, joined him. Said wrote, "**The fight is long and difficult. We don't**



Crushing Olives

always have Mr Blackmore with us to reply to all the questions. When we have to face the enemy alone, the presence of God ever protects and consoles us. It will always be so if we are faithful. Twice Satan hindered us from preaching. This happened when people threatened us with clubs and ordered us to leave, but praise be to the Lord Jesus we got home safe and sound."

As well as the villages, the work extended to the tribal markets, the shops and the administrative centre of Fort National as well as the little dispensary. His comment was, **"Around us the soil is now less hard for the Gospel than at the beginning. Those who refused us a hearing at first, now invite us to eat with them according to local custom. I am glad the Lord is beginning to work in these dark hearts."**

Said and Sadiya had the joy of welcoming a second daughter, Rifqua, into the family in 1915. She later became the wife of Said Saidj who became a preacher in the Rolland Mission in Tizi Ouzou. In 1916 their third daughter, Ourdhia, was born.

In Said's report to the mission in 1918 he wrote, **"We note that Jesus Christ has begun to found His Kingdom in 'the heart of Kabylia' (that is the region of Fort National). Though we haven't yet obtained our object in the conversion of our race, we are ever more encouraged. With those who have come to faith from other missions we have lately founded a Kabyle Christian Association with the object of helping the evangelisation of our country."**

It is not easy to evangelise among the Muslims. Islam's hold on the Kabyles is from the cradle to the grave. All must be renewed. The Irathen tribe around Fort National, foremost in civilisation, is also foremost in fanaticism. They are aggressive for Muhammad even to offering me money to return to Islam. Islam seems to flourish more than ever. Near us a new mosque has just been built for 40,000 francs – the gift of one man. That makes three Muslim praying places around us now and numbers attend every Friday. I am asking God to transform these mosques into churches of Christ.

A Kabyle proverb says, 'He who seeks a serpent in his hole is sure of being bitten'. Our village preaching is doing exactly that and is going after Islam in its lair. We therefore find that the hardest of all. However we now concentrate on the boys. Four times a week we hold classes outside different government schools. On average about 40 boys listen and learn well. We are much encouraged by this branch of the work as the young have not yet the full malice of their elders. Tours to distant tribes have shown me that the harvest is great and the labourers few. May God raise up those who will bring the light and make Muhammad give place to Jesus Christ."

As the work of Fort National grew, they began to pray for sufficient funds to build a Mission Station. In 1918 Mr Blackmore went to the USA on furlough. He took with him a quantity of tiny bits of mosaic from the ruins of ancient Christian churches in North Africa. He offered these for a donation of one dollar each. The money raised funded the Fort National Mission Station which included a chapel, a dispensary and several classrooms as well as living quarters.

In 1918 a fourth daughter, Lhore Dahabiya, was born to Said and Sadiya and sadly in the same year their first-born daughter, Mariama, died. The work continued to flourish despite difficulties and opposition. They were encouraged as they saw God's provision for every need even in the most impossible circumstances.

In 1923 Said was ordained a local deacon and was sent to Il Maten of the Fenaya tribe where the mission work was being re-organised. Again he was involved in evangelism to the outlying villages,

preaching in the dispensary waiting room and conducting Sunday worship in the little mission chapel. He also held classes for schoolboys during the week. This mission station at Il Maten had been set up by the French Wesleyan Methodists in 1888. They had entered Algeria in 1886. The station was taken over in 1919 by the American Methodists.



Weaving

Said spent seven happy years in Il Maten. He reported in 1928, **"People are hungry for God's Word and God is at work in their hearts."**

In 1930 Said and Sadiya returned to Greater Kabylia and were appointed to work in the new Mission Station at the marketplace of the Ouadhias tribe where there was already a dispensary run by a nurse. Most weekdays this dispensary was visited by 150-200 people. Patient visits increased to around 50,000 annually. All these people heard the Gospel as several Gospel meetings were held every day in the waiting room.

In 1931 Said finished his theological studies and was ordained an elder. The joy of his achievements turned to sadness a few days later with the death of his wife Sadiya. He wrote, **"Suddenly I found myself alone with 8 children – 7 of them girls – the oldest 15 years old and the baby one-year-old."**

Emily Smith wrote in her obituary about Sadiya, **"She was entrusted to Dora Welch and myself by her father who said, 'Take her and make her a woman like yourselves'. This was in 1906 two years before the Methodist Church began its work in North Africa. She was the first of our girls to discard the veil and claim for herself the right to wear European style clothes in the city of Algiers. While very young, she confessed faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and was baptised in this faith. When she became the oldest girl in our hostel, she made a solemn promise to remain faithful in the Christian life and to help open a way for the new life for the women of her race. She lived a quiet Christian life. Never a breath of scandal touched this Kabyle woman's life. On account of her husband's appointments to distant mountain villages without schools for girls, her daughters had to be sent at an early age to the mission hostel for their education. We know that she accepted this sacrifice of separation only after long resistance. She kept her faith. She fulfilled her promise to open the way for her Kabyle sisters. Now she contemplates the face of the Lord she loved."**

A year later the Lord answered Said's prayers and gave him another wife who was a real companion to him. She was Swiss. Her name was Leone Hermann. She had come to a knowledge of Christ through the Salvation Army and had been a helper at the Methodist Mission Station at Sidi Aich. She helped Said raise his large family and also gave him a son – Samuel.

Said remained in Ouadhias for 30 years. In 1945 he moved to Agouni Bourar. He served a Mission Station there as well as the one at Fort National while the workers were on leave after World War II.

His health had not been good for some time and in 1949 he had a heart attack followed by severe complications. He was not expected to recover but after much prayer he was able to return to his own house in Agouni Bourar and 11 months later he was able to walk about again. He never regained the strength of earlier days. Of this time he wrote, **"The Lord renews my strength from day to day. I do what I can for Him who has undertaken abundantly for me. It is no longer possible for me to make the evangelistic tours I loved so dearly. I am now a retired preacher. But there remains a task which the Lord has laid on my heart. That is to pray for the mountain country that I know so well; to pray for those men today who, as children, heard the living message of Salvation through the Cross through my efforts and to pray for all the Lord's workmen wherever they may be. May the Lord bless His work that everyone may hear the precious name of Jesus and every heart be touched by the Holy Spirit and every knee bow before our Lord in praise."**

Said continued to suffer poor health. A number of times he came close to death. On one of these occasions his friend Willy Heggoy wrote, **"At the gate of death one may, even if only partially so, measure the depth of another person's faith. This is my witness concerning pastor Abouadaou: I saw a man of faith. I saw a man who trusted in Jesus Christ for life and eternity. He seemed to smile to the Lord with thankfulness and confidence. His faith gave strength to my own"**.

On one of these occasions the French colonial doctor was visiting Said. Coming out of his room he quickly wiped away a tear and said, **"Pastor Abouadaou is dying. He has more than enough concern with his own sickness and his own soul. But don't you know, he asked me how it was with my soul. I love that man. I never met anybody, except possibly my grandfather, who spoke so naturally about God."**

However, Said continued to recover and continued his quiet ministry as he was able. In 1964 he was hoping to go with another Kabyle believer to distribute food and blankets in several war-ravaged villages. It was only the second winter after Algeria's independence and the need was great in the mountain area. The day he was supposed to go, he was killed on the sidewalk outside the mission house. A car with defective brakes went out of control and ran him over. A few minutes earlier in his morning devotions he had recited Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want …

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me ….

I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

A couple of days later his body was laid to rest in the municipal Christian Cemetery in El Biar, Algiers where a number of Christian Kabyle are also buried. A stone was put on his grave that preaches to all passers-by. Said had chosen the words himself:

"I lift my eyes to the hills.
From whence does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth."
Psalm 121:1-2

"For me to live is Christ to die is gain." Phil. 1:21

For many years after his death Kabyles in France and in Algeria could still put on one of his Gospel records and hear the old preacher tell about the Prodigal Son and God's infinite love or about Christian hope linked to the Risen Lord. Many would boldly state that he was the best evangelist the Methodist Church ever had in Kabylia. There were others who surpassed him in eloquence and teaching gifts but nobody surpassed him in the combination of ability and joy and spiritual maturity.

Willy Heggoy wrote of Said, **"I have observed how people like to listen to him. If a difficulty arose, as was inevitably the case when someone raised a controversial issue between Islam and the Gospel, this fine old man always had an appropriate proverb, a brief little anecdote or a parable at the tip of his tongue. It was as if he gave them something sweet to chew on. They would smile approvingly and the happy phrase would stay with them thereafter. The Kabyles love men who can speak words of wisdom in well-turned phrases. Said Abouadaou had become a master of that art."**

Further Resources

- **I was an Algerian Preacher** : autobiography and parables by Said Abouadaou, translated By W. N. Heggoy
- **Fifty Years of Evangelical Missionary Movement in North Africa : 1881-1931,** by Willy Normann Heggoy