

Kilonzo, Paulo Saburi (c. 1890–1979)

GADI KILONZO

Gadi Kilonzo

A pioneer evangelist, pastor, and missionary in East Africa, Paulo Saburi Kilonzo hailed from the Pare (Vu-Asu) people of the Pare Mountains of the northeastern coastal mountain ranges of Tanzania.

Early Life

Paulo Saburi Kilonzo was the third child born circa 1890 to Kilonzo Senkunde (c.1824-1934) and Kahindi Mrekwa (c.1850-1966) at Gonjanza Suji Tanganyika (now Tanzania). The exact date unknown, his year of birth has been estimated from an account by Hans Mayer who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 1892. His eight surviving siblings were Ihano Mose Kilonzo (born c. 1886), Yohana Bwelela Kilonzo (c. 1888), Filipo Mhina Kilonzo (c. 1892), Nashumbwe Kilonzo (c. 1894 and the only sister), Enoki Kadufwa Kilonzo (c. 1902-1935), Kadari (c. 1906-2007, and Eliamani Sangiwa Kilonzo (born 1909). Yohana Bwelela, Enoki Kaadufwa, and Eliamani Sangiwa also entered the Adventist ministry as teachers and later evangelists.

In 1897 Chambega, a chief from Sambaaland, led a white man to the Kilonzo family home. The frightened children, including Saburi, ran away to Nkogo, a hamlet a kilometer away, where Saburi's maternal grandparents lived. The other children later returned home at Gonjanza, but the family decided that Saburi should remain at Nkogo under the care of the maternal grandparents, Navushiku and Mrekwa Mtundu. In those days it was customary for one of the children to spend part of their childhood with maternal grandparents. Saburi remained at Nkogo Suji¹ until 1903 when Seventh-day Adventist missionaries from Germany first came to the Pare Mountains.

Conversion Earns the Ire of Paulo Saburi's Father

Saburi's father, Kilonzo Senkunde, was a priest of the Asu (Pare)² religion. He was a healer and diviner as well as chief warrior who defended the '*Mrungu wa Gu*' (the god of war) during conflict or civil disturbance. The traditional religion that he led was similar in many ways to the prevailing traditional African religions³ in Tanganyika and other African countries. It focused on the sanctity of life and the veneration of elders and dead ancestors. The later provide communication between the living and the dead, and through the latter with the various gods and the supreme deity (Murungu, Kiumbi, Mkembeti, Kilunge, and Kavarisha). Because it is so interwoven with kinship and culture, it is not an easy thing to renounce in favor of a new religion from a distant

land.

In 1912 a church elder arrived from Germany and preached to the multitude who came to hear him. From that moment many young people believed in Christ, but when the missionary called for those who wanted to declare their faith to stand up, Saburi did not, because he feared his father, Kilonzo Senkunde. His father had evaluated the teachings of the missionaries and concluded that learning to read and write, as well as other aspects of education, were valuable, and he encouraged people to send their children to school. But at the same time he strongly advised everyone to shun the religion brought by the missionaries. When Kilonzo Senkunde learned that his children liked the missionaries' religion, he warned them against listening to the teachings of the new religion or talking about it. He also told them not to read books about the new religion in his house. However, Saburi continued to read about it outside in secrecy. When Kilonzo learned that Saburi had not stopped reading, he rebuked his son and threatened to curse him if he converted to the new religion.

Saburi relates that one day on his way home from school, he tripped and fell, sustaining a serious wound on his knee. He returned to the mission for bandaging and then went home with difficulty, because the knee was very painful. Then he continued treating the injury with traditional herbal medicines. While ailing he had ample time to read the Gospel according to Mathew. In that book he met Jesus, believed in Him, and decided to follow Jesus no matter what might happen.

In September 1913, with sadness in his heart, Saburi ran away from his home in Gonjanza village and went to the mission at KwaNkanja⁴. Enraged, his father called on his ancestors to curse Saburi. He took out his arrows from the quiver and sharpened them in front of Saburi's siblings, vowing to kill his son, though he considered that he was already dead.⁵ In one account, which may be apocryphal because Saburi does not mention it, his father actually seized a spear and attempted to strike Saburi, but his brothers tackled their father and he lost aim, allowing Saburi to escape⁶. His father then cursed Saburi.

Such a curse, *lute luvivi*⁷ in the Chasu language, has consequences worse than those associated with the English word. It involves the cursed person and all his progeny from generation to generation. An appeal to the gods or ancestors cannot remove it. Only appropriate repentance and rituals asking for forgiveness from the wronged elder while he or she is still alive can accomplish that.⁸ Thus, it must have taken great courage on Saburi's part to face *lute luvivi* from his father as well as equally great faith in the Christian God to trust for deliverance from that curse. No known person among the Asu had ever escaped such a curse. Saburi relates that he sought comfort in biblical promises such as 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, and Joshua 1:5.

He believed that since he had not done anything wrong, his father's curse would actually turn into a blessing. After undergoing baptismal classes for nine months, he was baptized on June 27, 1914, and took the name Paulo Saburi.⁹ He prayed to God to sustain him and vowed to work the rest of his life in whatever field and role God lead him to.

World War I had reached Tanganyika around this time. An incident on August 11, 1914, strengthened Saburi's faith when he experienced God's intervention in response to a prayer. German military officers had ordered him to guard a road bridge at Makanya¹⁰ against enemy sabotage. At night he became sleepy and started dozing. He prayed to God to protect him so that if the military officers came by while he might be asleep, God would blind them to that fact. At midnight he was fast asleep, the officers arrived, but they did not see him. His companions in the watch who were discovered asleep received 15 lashes of the whip. To him, the episode was direct evidence of the power of prayer.

He became emboldened to bring others to the same faith. Two of his brothers who converted early on were Kadufwa Enoki Kilonzo and Bwelela Yohana Kilonzo. His other siblings were still terrified of their father's wrath. Sangiwa Eliamani Kilonzo was still a 5 to 6 year-old lad at the time.

Education and Marriage

Suji Mission was built in 1905-1906, and one child from each nearby home started attending school outside under trees. In 1908 more missionaries arrived and invited Saburi together with his siblings to join the classes. He completed his basic education and teachers' training at the German Adventist Academy at Suji in February 1916. Later, in 1927 he attended a course at Suji Teachers Training College to upgrade his education to a Grade 2 Teaching Certificate. He was among the first Tanganyika teachers to qualify to that level.

In spite of his father's curse, Paulo Saburi married Kirindi Nakizhwa, daughter of Kajiru Mrekwa from a neighbouring hamlet, Nkogo, on April 20, 1920. Because he was still under the curse, he could not ask his father to provide the traditional dowry. He later stated that he did not have to borrow dowry from anybody, that God Himself provided cattle for him to pay it. During all this time he was the only teacher at Suji teaching children of Christians. The following year, July 10, 1921, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. The arrival of the granddaughter, Navoneiwa, led to a reconciliation with Saburi's father. When Kilonzo Senkunde heard that his son had a child, he asked that the granddaughter be brought to him along with her parents. Delighted with the child, he removed the curse, stating that Saburi's God was a strong one. Father and son became reconciled even though Kilonzo Sekunde maintained that the traditional deity, Murungu, was the genuine one and traditional religious practices should be observed.

Life as Family Man, Father, and Community Leader

In the late afternoon when he was not on his desk busy writing reports or preparing sermons, Saburi was approachable and jovial. He liked to spend time with his family, discussing events in the neighborhood and the progress in school of his children, and having informal talks with his children. He emphasized diligence in studies and personal appearance and the importance of household chores. On Sundays he would join the family in gardening, using the opportunity to socialize with them. In addition, he took pleasure in taking care of the

needs of the community, including his extended family; and kept reminding the family that God provides whatever a generous person might lack. Neighbors and visitors were frequently at his home, and he often had refreshments and food ready for them. Sometimes Saburi would take an opportunity to introduce the Word of God when the situation presented itself. For example, he would casually ask visiting adolescents if they wished to be goats or sheep. They would laugh and say that they didn't want to be either. Laughing with them, he would comment that a time was coming when all human beings would be divided between sheep and goats, and they would have to be in one of those two groups. Then he would describe the attributes of the sheep and goats; and that the Lamb of God would come to take the former to heaven. Finally, he would invite them to come to church on Sabbath to hear more about salvation.

Acutely aware of the vital role his wife, Kirindi, played in supporting his work, he thanked God for providing him with a partner-helper who made it possible for him to devote most of his time to seeking lost sheep. Not only did she work hard to put food on the table, she was the instructor, model, and nurse of the children.

Saburi and Kirindi raised 10 children who grew up to make their own contribution in the fields of education, nursing, medicine, publishing, public administration, and business, five of them in Adventist service.

Kirindi Nakizhwa accepted leadership positions in the Dorcas organization and children's Sabbath classes. Often she served as a hostess for church employees when they came home to present their monthly reports of field and church work. In addition, she was the presence at home when Saburi went out on his frequent pastoral and evangelist journeys. She worked very hard doing farm work, gardening, household chores, and giving Bible instruction and spiritual guidance for their children. Keeping in contact with teachers and other parents, she sought to make sure that children obtained appropriate education both in academics and in personal conduct. Not only did she make sure the children were well-fed and well-clothed, she attended them when they became ill. Her kitchen always had a piping hot pot of chicken and vegetable soup for a convalescing child as well as food ready for any hungry visitor. The couple was very proud and passionate about their children. When Gadi, the last born of their children, announced on September 12, 1974, the birth of a son, Saburi immediately travelled all the way from Suji to Kibondo District, about 1,000 km away, to see the grandson, Semkae. Holding the son of his youngest child in his hands, Saburi thanked God. "I have seen what I have been waiting to see. I cannot ask God to keep me alive to see the child of this grandson."

Adventist Teacher (1916-1925)

In February 1916 Paulo Saburi completed his education and became a teacher. He started work at Ntambwe in the Pare Mountains on a monthly salary of six German shillings. But war soon interrupted. In August 1917 the British, who had overrun that part of the country by then, halted all educational activities. They interned all teachers at Lushoto in the Usambara Mountains for two months, not releasing them until the end of October.

But even then, since the authorities had proscribed all gatherings, church members had to conduct their meetings and prayer services in homes. Not till January 1919 did the British allow educational activities to resume with Paolo Saburi again appointed to teach children of converts at Suji. Although he started with 12 students, the enrollment grew rapidly as people appreciated the value of education.

Journey to Gendia, Kenya, and Arrival of English Missionaries (1921)

Since the outbreak of the war, church work in Sukumaland (Mwanza) south of Lake Victoria had been without senior leadership. Denominational leadership requested Paulo Saburi to go there to encourage local workers and to baptize converts. They also selected a Kihuriro church elder, Ezekiel Kibwana, to accompany him. In August 1921 the two men left with the church members' prayers for safety while making the long journey. When they reached Kisumu in Kenya, they found themselves short of Kenyan money to pay their way to Mwanza. They decided to go to Gendia, the site of an SDA mission. They travelled by boat all night and in the morning reached Kendu Bay. From there they climbed a short distance to Gendia mission. Paulo Mboya,¹¹ a teacher at Gendia, hosted them for a week before the British missionaries, Pastors William T. Bartlet and S. G. Maxwell, returned from a trip. When the missionaries arrived, Paulo Mboya made the introduction. The missionaries were happy to meet the visitors and said their arrival had opened the way for themselves to go to Pare. The next morning they instructed Paulo Saburi to return to Suji to prepare for their coming, while Ezekiel Mbwana would later accompany them. The trip to Sukumaland was cancelled. Bartlet and Maxwell reached Kihuriro in September 1921. From there they passed through Mamba and arrived at Suji. All members of the four local churches gladly received them. The missionaries established themselves in Pare.

The following year between September 1922 and January 1923 Paulo Saburi assumed responsibility for carrying out adult education for church members at Suji. He taught them literacy, arithmetic, geography, history, and other subjects necessary for them to become informed church members. In January 1923 leadership transferred him to Mamba to perform the same work of adult education for two years. They ordained him as a church elder at Mamba in addition to his role of teaching adult church members. The next year he opened a new school at Miamba, also in Mamba. Many of the pupils who went to the school also attended the Sabbath School, converted to Christianity, and were baptised.

Evangelist Work (1925-1932)

In August 1925 Paulo Saburi was among five individuals chosen to do pioneer missionary work in the Usambara Mountains. They started preaching at Marindi and Mwangoi ya Mlalo. Paulo Saburi and Elieza Lukwaro soon transferred to Kingo ya Gare near Soni. Building a mission was difficult work with limited resources, having been given only 10 shillings for buying structural poles.¹² The poles were available at a place five miles away from the construction site. The men had to cut down the trees and carry them to the building

site themselves. Church members from Pare came for some days to help them. After erecting the structure, they fetched grass for thatching as well as applying mud to the walls. It was a time of famine at Usambara so they survived on one meal a day. Their monthly salary of only 20 shillings required stringent economy and sacrifice.

Saburi had learned frugality early in his career. He recorded everything that he bought, at the end of every month he examined his expenditures to see what he could have done to realize more savings. He would then apply what he had learned with the objective of saving more every month. When he had saved enough, he would buy a heifer and entrust it to someone who wanted a milk cow with the arrangement that they divide with him any calves born. In this way it was a win-win situation for both the him and the keeper of the cow and would supplement Saburi's income.

Church building work in the Usambara Mountains took place at a number of places. Evangelist Yohana Makanta, for example, started work at Tekwa, Bumburi. After every three months they traveled to Pare for the purpose of receiving continuing in-service educational instruction. In two years time many Pare people in Usambara joined the church. The Shambaa people were much more resistant to accepting the gospel. But Saburi happily later noted during the late 1950s that "the word of God endures; it does not fall down without germinating. Nowadays there are many Adventist followers with a number of churches."

In 1927 the Suji Teachers Training College admitted Saburi for the purpose of obtaining a Grade Two teaching certificate. He, together with Yohana Makanta and Elisa Manongi Kilonzo, qualified and received The Tanganyika National Grade Two Teachers Certificates. They were among the first recipients in the country.¹³

Appointed Director of Publishing Department of Tanganyika Field (1928-1934)

In January 1928 leadership granted Paulo Saburi a ministerial license and appointed him director of the publishing department of the East Tanganyika Field. Along with three other colporteurs, he started doing literature evangelism all over the country, selling a book titled *Current Major Issues* (Mambo Makuu ya Leo); together with a magazine named *Sweet Tidings* (Maongezi Matamu). At Tanga, going around to the sisal plantations, he was often alone. At times he sold a thousand magazines in a day. The magazines went for five cents and every book at one shilling. He started with 250 books and quickly went through his supply. Obtaining a print run of 4,000 copies, the mission instructed the colporteurs to go to Zanzibar. Unfortunately, they found it difficult to sell the books there. Muslim opposition to the enthusiastic response they were getting from the general public hindered their efforts. They therefore went to Dar es Salaam and Morogoro at a place called Kimamba. After three months they returned to Suji. During those days literature evangelists earned a third of the amount of their sales which they depended on for all their expenses and income. Paulo Saburi, however, received 30 shillings per month and a daily allowance of 50 cents, because he was the leader and instructor. All

of them had to economize. Unable to afford rice, they ate potatoes, bananas, porridge, and beans. The clothes they wore were modest. Others would have given up, but Paulo Saburi persevered. He went on doing colporteur work at Dodoma, Singida, and Lindi. Little did he know that enduring such difficulties was a testing period, preparing him for being certified as a church minister. He and Elisa Manongi were ordained as pastors in 1932, the first Tanzanians and nine years before any others. Saburi continued with colporteur work while stationed in Dar es Salaam.

In the same year, in addition to leading the literature evangelism program, the mission assigned him the task of pioneering church in Dar es Salaam. Leadership transferred Esikia Wande Kirekero to Kinondoni, Dar es Salaam, to assist him in this task. Obtaining land, they started first by building a residential house. They had been provided with 400 shillings to purchase building poles and palm fronds for thatching as well as three doors and four windows. To succeed with that small amount of money, they decided to start with a kitchen, doing most of the construction themselves even while continuing to preach and sell church literature. At this time, they had no salary or allowance and had to sell some books to earn the one third of the price just to survive. They did not get any followers except a Jim Mankokwe who hailed from Zomba in the Shire Highlands of Nyasaland. Believing the Adventist teachings, he wanted to go to Suji to learn more. Since Paulo Saburi only had enough money for his own fare, they decided to walk on foot from Dar es Salaam through Bagamoyo to Mheza (about 160 miles). From there it was possible to pay the fare for transportation to Makanya from where they climbed the mountain to Suji. At Suji, Jim Mankokwe continued to receive religious instruction and was baptized. After two years he returned to Zomba in Nyasaland to start church activities there. Saburi later visited him at Zomba and was happy to find many Adventist congregations that had resulted from Makonkwe's efforts. Saburi continued to work at Kinondoni, but the health of his wife, Kirindi Nakizhwa, interrupted his mission. Pregnant, she had become very ill. Returning to Suji, she received treatment and recovered. The following year (1933) he continued his literature evangelism at Moshi, Arusha, Masama, Marangu, and Mamba in Kilimanjaro. At that time Bishop Stephen Moshi was still a young unmarried teacher, and the two struck a close and friendly relationship. Before starting on any journey, Paulo Saburi always prayed that the Lord should lead him safely and find him a place to stay. For that reason everywhere he went he was welcomed, and his friendship with Bishop Moshi is a good example. He remained at Kilimanjaro for six years.

Pastoral Evangelist Work (1934-1975)

In the year 1934 he assumed pastoral work at Suji, continuing to preach in villages and peoples' homes. At that time satellite Sabbath Schools did not exist in the region. Everybody came to Suji for church service. During 1935 Paulo Saburi made an effort to obtain believers at Tae, Gonjanza, and Makanya. Every week he went to Tae, Mzumra, He Igonti, He and Kamphombe, Mhezi, returning through Gonjanza. Sabbaths he spent at Suji. By 1937 school children began assisting with Sabbath Schools in the villages. Suji Seminary Academy students and

teachers joined in, two going to Tae and two to Gonjanza. The following year (1938) he led an evangelistic series at Makanya that resulted in 20 converts. Chief Herieli Makange and his deputy (mlao) became converted. A school was built for the church branch, and church members paid the teacher's salary. The effort prospered, and more people accepted baptism. After two years (1938-1939) church members volunteered to build a brick church structure. They were also commendable in their faithfulness in providing tithe and offerings.

In addition, Saburi selected qualified church members to take charge of new church satellites. He would offer to pay the school fees for the children of such individuals as well as small allowances from his savings obtained by selling church literature. After making sure that such a worker had land to cultivate, he would then donate a heifer to provide milk for his family. As always, any calves would be divided between the worker and Saburi. In this way he would have a number of individuals assisting with the spiritual care of new converts. Also, he believed that God rewarded him with more monetary resources.

About this time he demonstrated leadership ability when he mediated a conflict between the missionaries and the laity of Vugwama. Church leadership had prohibited the cultivation and sale of sugarcane, because of its use in preparing traditional sugarcane mead (*dengelua*), a strong alcoholic drink. The edict upset the members. Saburi, on his own initiative, went and discussed the issue with church members who recognized that sugarcane had many uses. Products like honey were also used to prepare mead. Writing a letter to missionary F. B. Wells, he outlined the issues and recommended that the regulation be reconsidered. It led to a resolution of the conflict.

As the oldest and most respected Pare Pastor, he acted as mediator with loyalties on two sides: missionary dominated church administration and ordinary folks, and succeeded to allow members to resume cultivating sugarcane. Saburi's willingness to air and to present the view of the laity avoided a crisis in the church.¹⁴

Acting Mission Director at Mbeya (1941-1943)

A German missionary, Rudolf Reider, had left teachers of Mbeya Mission by themselves in the wake of World War II. In 1940 leaders appointed Paulo Saburi as acting mission director at Mbeya, but his family could not join him until the next year. Six new church members and many attending services and in baptismal classes soon rewarded his work there.

Work among the Kurya in Tarime (1943-1947)

In 1943 he transferred for pastoral-evangelistic work to Utimbaru (Kibumaye) at Tarime in the territory of the Kurya people. A European missionary, Pastor Reid, and Pastor Okello, a Luo, took care of the lowlands where the Luo people lived while Paulo Saburi had charge of the highlands, the home of the Kurya. A drought had caused famine, and their salary was only 50 shillings a month. But they prevailed, and God's work prospered.

People were eager to hear the Word of God and many believed. A number of church members accepted the call to relocate to take care of the new converts. When Subari first arrived, he found one church, four branch Sabbath Schools, and four primary schools. Soon they quickly added 10 more Sabbath Schools and four new primary schools opened. One of the new locations was Buirege (Bwirege), a place far away from Utimbaru. Since prospects seemed promising there, Paulo Saburi moved to the region in 1945. Well received, he lived at Nyasincha. The local church members included his family in communal agricultural activities, and the fertile land produced bountiful harvests. The church also prospered, developing into a large congregation with a school. At the end of 1947, when he returned to Suji, he left behind two new congregations and many branches that soon organized into churches as well as a full-fledged primary school. He stated that since the work grew and prospered, clearly God had sent him.

Work in Western Pare (1948-1953)

Between 1948 and 1953 Paulo Saburi had charge of work at Suji that involved West Pare. Church leaders decided that more experienced and able workers should cover the eastern part of the territory and assigned the less experienced ones to Saburi in the western part. Together, he and his associates prayed to God for success. They had two organized churches at Suji and Chome and three branches. One worker took charge of Chome, another Vudee Nyika, and the third, a young man, Mhezi, and the fourth Mbagha and Msindo. By 1953 the four biggest branches were ready to assume the status of full churches: Gonjanza, Makanya, Tae, and Mbagha Msindo. Seven new branches had also come into existence.

Appointed to Direct Kipsigis Mission

In 1954 leadership appointed Paulo Saburi in charge of Kipsigis Mission, situated at Kabokyek, 15 miles from Kericho. When he arrived there with his whole family, the people received him enthusiastically. Since he hailed from Tanzania, some thought that he was a *laibon*. Legend had it that the spiritual leaders of the Kipsigis once moved into Tanzania but promised to return some day. So he told them that indeed he was a messenger of God and had come with good tidings. People were eager to listen. The area had two organized churches and four branches as well as five schools and four evangelists. Tithe amounted to 6,000 shillings a year. Saburi and his fellow ministers reached out to the people, leading to the formation of six new branch Sabbath Schools and four full churches, making it necessary to employ two more evangelists to minister to the increased membership. Tithe and offerings grew every year. Tithe alone reached 9,000 shillings.

Now 68 and long past the retirement age of 60, in 1958 he returned to Suji to rest after serving for 30 years. When administration informed him that he had earned the right to retire and receive half of his salary as pension, he was of two minds. He believed that it is better to retire when one is still strong, but also felt that he still had much to give to Adventist mission.

Mission Director of Kenya Coast (Changamwe) (1959-1961)

As a result, he asked leadership to allow him to continue with his work. In 1959 he became director of Changamwe (Kenya Coast Mission) in Mombasa, Kenya. When he started there, it had two workers and two branch Sabbath Schools. They started new work at Kaloleni in Kwale. Many believed in the Adventist faith, and they built a church on the farm of Petro Ngala, who had converted through reading Voice of Prophecy materials. Petro accepted baptism together with four of his colleagues. Together they preached to others, and many joined baptismal classes. At the end of 1959 the mission baptized 20 people and reached a church membership of 25. Saburi's work at Changamwe Mission lasted for two years.

Strengthening the Church in the Machakos District (1961-1963)

Because of certain problems that needed resolving, in 1961 Paulo Saburi received a request to assist in directing the work in the Machakos District in Kenya. He transferred with his family to the Mtitu¹⁵ church. The district had two churches, one evangelist, and three schools. Through prayer and much soul searching he and others discovered the source of the problems. The actions of one teacher had caused the loss the church's credibility among the membership. He had misused school fees to the amount of 2,000 shillings. His repentance served as a catalyst that led more than 50 others to confess their own sins and repent, cleansing the church.

Once those difficulties were removed, God's hand again led in His work there. Another issue that Paulo Saburi dealt with concerned a group that had split off from the denomination and began calling itself the "remnant church." Saburi invited those church members to pray together at the beginning of every month. In two years time the dissidents rejoined the main church. It was then that he realized that it had been the work that God called him to do in the Machakos District. In 1962, when he departed, the Machakos District had four churches, three branches, and four schools.

Opening up Work in Chaggaland (1963-1965)

In 1963 Paulo Saburi returned to direct work at Moshi. With the support of two colporteurs, he preached and baptized all who believed. Paulo Saburi also personally sold church publications. He especially befriended the local Lutheran pastors and came to know 15 of them well. They bought Adventist books and recommended them to their own church members. Saburi frequently ate and slept in their homes. The Lutheran pastors allowed him to preach to their congregations. At Mamba he visited Bishop Stephen Moshi and sold him books worth 125 shillings. After reading the books, Moshi told his congregation that the books were very good. Soon it became possible for the Adventists to start 14 Sabbath Schools at Moshi Majengo, Arusha, Meru, and Kidugalo. As attendance increased, they had to erect a tent for worship space. It also became necessary to appoint an evangelist to take care of church members in Moshi. Saburi's friendly relations with Lutherans likely facilitated

the reception of Adventist teachings. The historian Kimambo noted that “in 1966 Reverend Paulo Kilonzo of the SDA church at Suji could recall ‘at the beginning we used to look at the Lutherans as enemies, but we soon discovered that this was foolish.”¹⁶ Saburi demonstrated leadership in forging friendly relationships with people of other faiths, perhaps as a result from his experience in literature evangelism. Having opened up Adventist work at Moshi and Arusha, he returned to Suji in 1965 to rejoin his family and to rest for a while in the Pare Mountains.

Pastoral Work on Pare Mountain (1965-1975)

At Suji he continued with his pastoral duties of strengthening workers and church members. In 1967, while stationed at Suji, he took the opportunity to tour the Pare churches to greet and pray with church members and emphasize the importance of paying tithe. He later related that it was comforting and a joy to meet acquaintances and friends whom he had not seen for 12 years while he had been away. Within a year an increase in tithe had rewarded his efforts. In 1968 administration divided the work in Suji between the lowlands and the mountains. Saburi assumed responsibility of the lowlands of Makanya and Hedaru which had one church and eight branches. Yearly tithe amounted to 6,000 shillings. Between 1968 and 1970 the groups meeting in Hedaru and Kitivo became full churches. He took charge of Makanya and Vukwavi (Maasailand). Tithe in this church increased to 9,000 shillings.

Later Life

In 1972, after he developed cardiovascular problems associated with high blood pressure, his doctors urged him to reduce his physical exertion. Although he initially accepted this advice, he indicated that he was not comfortable in reducing his work. He felt that when he visited church members to pray with them, their prayers gave him strength. That was his therapy.

Paulo Saburi Kilonzo kept his promise to God to work for him all his life. Even after his official retirement in 1975 following a stroke, he continued to minister to the faithful and toured the churches on Pare Mountain to meet and pray with the members he had established such a strong bond with. In 1978 he suffered further cardiovascular problems and pneumonia, which led him to being admitted to the Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Centre. The following year he became bed-bound but remained strong in his faith. He went to his rest on July 14, 1979, age 89, at his home surrounded by family and neighbors. He had served the church for 63 years. Saburi is buried at his family compound in a marked grave at Amani, Kitunda, Suji Same.

Contribution and Legacy

Paulo Saburi Kilonzo's motto in life was to keep his promises. In 1961 Pastor Thomas Ashlock visited Suji and met Pastor Paulo Saburi Kilonzo, who by then had already worked for the church for 55 years. Ashlock writes

about and quotes Saburi:

"Though I am 71 years of age, God still gives me health and strength, and I want to improve my witness for him in keeping with the promise I made years ago." ... In 1933 Pastor Kilonzo had gone into unentered territory of the Wachagga people to sell books and to investigate the possibility of opening up mission work. As he saw the eagerness of the people to buy his books and interest they took in his words, he promised the Lord that as soon as opportunity afforded, he would begin work among the people. With a smile of triumph and with radiant face of the soul-winner that he is Pastor Kilonzo explained: "That promise was made 30 years ago, and though I remember it daily I was never able to keep it, because my work always took me elsewhere. Now that I am on sustentation, which I requested, I have been granted the privilege of living in the city of Moshi in the heart of Wachagga territory. I am thankful that the Lord has preserved my life so that I can keep my promise to Him"¹⁷

Kilonzo's long ministry made him representative of two generations of church leaders. With a few others sharing Tanganyika Mission Field departmental responsibilities in the 1950s, Paulo Kilonzo spearheaded the development of national Adventist leaders. They gave the denomination an identity that went beyond a local Adventist folk church in character, one no longer dominated by European patterns. His enthusiasm for service and willingness to work even far away from home must be particularly recognized.¹⁸

Pastor C. T. J. Hyde, then Tanganyika Union president, noted that in 1962 that at the age of 72, Paulo Saburi requested permission to continue working so that he could take the Adventist message to the Chagga people in fulfillment of a promise and prayer he had made more than 20 years earlier, that if it be God's will, he would like to have the opportunity to take the message there.¹⁹

Of note also is Paulo Saburi's early recognition that a friendly and collaborative attitude with other Christian denominations is an effective strategy to reach fellow Christian believers and their leaders in giving them the Adventist message. It is an approach that more should emulate.

He also stands out in his self-sacrifice, and total submission as a self-imposed slave of Christ. Saburi was a model of fidelity in keeping promises, especially his covenant with God "to work all the days of my life." His generosity toward church members who volunteered to work for the church and his unstinted assistance to help with the education of children in the extended family is exemplary. Today, many spiritual children whom he mentored are in turn mentoring others. Across East Africa he is remembered with respect and gratitude.

SOURCES

Ashlock Ashlock Thomas M. "The Spirit of the Pioneers Lives on in Tanganyika." In *Australian Record and Advent World Survey*. Warbuton, Victoria. August 19, 1963.

Bull, A. F. "The Message Enters the Islands of Zanzibar and Pemba," AS February 1930 (*ARH*, September 4, 1930).

Danholz J. J. *Lute—the Curse and the Blessing*. Steigerdrck, Axams, Austria: Steigerdrck, 1989.

Hoschele, Stefan. "Christian Remnant–African Folk Church, History of Seventh-day Adventism in Tanzania 1903-1980." Ph.D. diss., University of Malawi, 2004.

Hoschele, Stefan. "Paulo Saburi Kilonzo 1890 to 1979 Seventh-day Adventist Church Tanzania." In *Dictionary of African Christian Biography 2005*

Hoschele, Stefan. "Seventh-day Adventism in Tanzania 1903-1980." In Marc R Spindler, ed., *Studies in Christian Mission*, vol 34.

Hyde C. T. J. "Seventy-one and still going strong." *ARH*, March 22, 1962.

Kilonzo, G. "Saburi Paulo Kilonzo." In K. B. Elineema, K. E. Mshigeni, and J. A. Lukwaro, eds., *Arise and Shine*, vol 1. Interpak Books, Pietermaritzburg: Interpak Books, 2015.

Kilonzo, G. "Paulo Saburi Kilonzo." In *Dictionary of African Church Biography*.

Kilonzo, Paulo Saburi. *Masha ya Mchungaji Paulo S Kilonzo* (unpublished autobiographical account of the history of the Kilonzo family and important events in his life, written in his own hand).

Kilonzo, Paulo Saburi. "God's Marvellous Leadings in Mombasa." *SADO*, May 1960.

Kilonzo, Paulo Saburi. "From Our Mail Bag." *SADO*, 1 August 1955.

Kimambo, I. N. *Penetration and Protest in Tanzania—The impact of the world economy on the Pare 1860-1960* Tanzania Publishing House, 1991.

NOTES

1. Nkogo is a neighboring hamlet in Suji village.
2. The Pare people know themselves as the Va-Asu and assumed the name of VaMphare when they settled on Mphare (Pare) mountain. They are kin to the Taveta people of Kenya, VaAsu who happen to inhabit the Taveta Hills.
3. See John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Heinemann, 1990).
4. KwaNkanja is the spot where the missionaries camped. It became a sanctuary for believers and later mission station.
5. A curse, lute, literally "spitting bad saliva," is believed to affect the subject according the words uttered by the elder who has been disrespected. It is likely that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy re-enforced by the attitude and expectations of people around the subject who are aware of the curse.

6. Kilonzo was a renowned warrior who was a hero of many battles. He could not have failed to kill Saburi if he had meant to. Likewise, the missionary sanctuary at KwaNkanja would not have protected Saburi against this warrior. It is likely that Kilonzo only wanted to scare Saburi into submission rather than to kill him.
7. Literally meaning "bad spittle," it is a curse uttered, after spitting, by an elder when grievously wronged by a younger person
8. J. J. Danholz, *Lute—the Curse and the Blessing* (Axams, Austria: Steigerdrck, 1989), 16, 26.
9. The experience of escaping from home because of his new faith must have left a lasting impression and influence throughout his life. His sense of mission and devotion to evangelism clearly went beyond the call of duty, notably his refusal to retire even when advised by his doctors. He also,, despite his meager salary, provided living expenses to volunteers who transferred to church branches to minister to new converts.
10. Makanya is a railway station at the foot of Suji Mountain about 18 km west of Suji.
11. Paulo Mboya was the father of Tom Mboya, who later became a prominent national leader in the government of Kenya.
12. Poles from Eucalyptus trees (miti ulaya).
13. Paulo Saburi received Grade Two Teacher's Certificate Number 90 in the year 1927.
14. Stefan Hoschele, *Seventh-day Adventism in Tanzania 1903-1980* in Marc R Spindler, ed. *Studies in Christian Mission*, 34: 330.
15. Mtitu was a name that those who did not belong to the Akamba people used, because the actual name the Akamba employed was "Mbooni," suggesting the term for penis in Kiswahili and many other Bantu languages. "Mtitu" meant "forest" in the Kikamba language, since there were indeed many eucalyptus trees planted there.
16. I. N. Kimambo, *Penetration and Protest in Tanzania—The impact of the world economy on the Pare 1860-1960* (Tanzania Publishing House, 1991), 63.?
17. Thomas M Ashlock, "The Spirit of the Pioneers Lives on in Tanganyika," *Record*, August 19, 1963.
18. Stefan Hoschele, "Paulo Saburi Kilonzo 1890 to 1979 Seventh-day Adventist Church, Tanzania," in *Dictionary of African Christian Biography 2005*. :?
19. C. T. J. Hyde, *ARH*, March 22, 1962.

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000