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Journal of African Christian Biography

Journal of African Christian Biography: v. 6, no. 3

2021-07

Kato, Byang Henry (B)

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Kato, Byang Henry (B)

1936-1975

Evangelical Church of West Africa (now Evangelical Church Winning All)

Nigeria

From Juju to Jesus Christ.

Byang Kato, a Nigerian evangelical theologian of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (now Evangelical Church Winning All), was born in June 1936 to the pagan family of Heri and Zawi in Sab Zuro, Kwoi of Kaduna State in Northern Nigeria. His father dedicated him to be a juju priest and made every effort to instruct him in fetish practices. At the tender age of ten, Byang underwent a traditional Jaba initiation ritual that lasted for one week.

Soon after this initiation rite, Kato came into contact with Ms. Mary Hass, a missionary of Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) who frequently visited his village to tell the story of Jesus to the children in the difficult language of Jaba. Kato was among the children who listened to Mary Hass. Thereafter he began to attend the Sunday school and the primary school established and run by the SIM.

As Kato's father considered school a waste of time, he did not allow him to go so that he would concentrate on their farm work. Another missionary named Ms. Elsie Henderson went along with an elder of their church to plead with his father to allow him to continue his schooling. Afterwards, even though he was allowed to continue, his father denied him food and clothing. When Kato's teacher taught them about salvation in Christ Jesus, with the illustration of Noah's ark, Kato desired to enter Christ's Ark of salvation. He made a public declaration of faith in Christ. When his father heard this, he was livid and stopped paying his school fees. As a result, the missionaries provided him with part time employment which enabled him to pay his school fees and buy clothes and books for his use. To pacify his father, Kato helped him with the farm work in the mornings and went to school in the afternoons. He completed his primary school training with flying colors.

In 1948 Kato was baptized by Rev. Raymond Veenker and given the name Henry. Thereafter, he became involved in Boy's Brigade, Sunday School, Youth for Christ and other church activities. When Kato was 19 years old, he went to a Bible college at Igbaja. He graduated in 1957 and was assigned to teach in a Bible school in his village, Kwoi, on a salary of about \$15.00 a month. While he was teaching he took correspondence courses from England in preparation for his General Certificate of Education exams. He passed the GCE Ordinary and Advanced levels exams in 1961 and 1963 respectively.

In the midst of his academic strivings, he got married in January 1957 to Jummai, a young woman from a Christian home. The couple placed great emphasis on prayer and Bible reading in their home. They showed by their family life and work what

a Christian home should be like. They were blessed with three children: Deborah Bosede, Jonathan Nzuno and Paul Bulus Sanom.

After serving for two years as a Bible School teacher in his village from 1957 to 1959, Byang was transferred to Lagos to serve on the staff of the publishers of what today is called "Today's Challenge." While in Lagos, he received some training in journalism. From 1961 to 1963 he went back to his village as a Bible teacher. Later in 1963 he enrolled at London Bible College and graduated from there with a B.D. degree in 1967. That year, he was appointed to the office of the General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of West Africa – the ECWA. He was the first person from Northern Nigeria to hold that post. As a result of this appointment, Kato moved to Jos, where the ECWA headquarters were located.

Later, with the support of his church, the ECWA, he enrolled for his post graduate studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. He concluded his doctoral studies there and received his Th.D. in May 1974. The topic of his dissertation was "Universalism and Syncretism in Christianity in Africa." It was later published by the Evangel Publishing House in Nairobi, under the title *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*. Having finished his doctoral studies, Kato was unanimously chosen to be the General Secretary for the African Evangelical Association, the first African to hold that post. He was also appointed Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission of the ECWA. Since his services were needed at the Igbaja Theological Seminary, he was given financial grants to enable him to travel to the Seminary to give lectures. Byang was in great demand to preach and teach both in Nigeria and internationally. He attended the third All Africa Conference of Churches General Assembly meeting in Lusaka, Zambia in 1974 as an observer. He was one of the keynote speakers at the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne Switzerland in 1974. Byang served as a member of the Lausanne Continuation Committee on World Evangelization as well as a member of the Executive Committee of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the chairman of its Theological Commission. He attended the fifth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Nairobi in December 1975. During the the course of this General Assembly, the Katos entertained many guests.

In view of the many speaking engagements he had in different parts of Europe, he decided to go with his family to the sea shore at Mombasa for some rest, reflection and relaxation. There, a most unexpected tragedy happened. On December 19, 1975, Byang, a swimmer, drowned in Mombasa River under mysterious circumstances. His body was recovered a day after he disappeared. The people of Kwoi, his hometown, think that someone must have attacked him. Others believe that witchcraft, – that is, the powers of darkness of this world – was involved in Byang's untimely death. Some think Byang might have died of exhaustion.

In fact, the real cause of Byang's death remains a mystery. He died at a time when he was very much needed. The whole evangelical world both in Africa and in the rest of the world were greatly shocked at his tragic death. Byang was an African evangelical

theologian of outstanding merit. His life as a prophet was marked by courage, boldness, moral purity, and discipline. He will always be remembered for his selfless service to the cause of Christ, not only in Africa but throughout the Christian world.

Emele Mba Uka

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This article, received in 2001, was researched and written by Rev. Dr. Emele Mba Uka, a Project Luke Fellow, Professor of Theology in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at the Federal University of Calabar, Nigeria (UNICAL).

Kisula, Jeremiah Mahalu

1902-1984

Africa Inland Church

Tanzania

Jeremiah Mahalu Kisula was the first bishop of the Africa Inland Church of Tanzania. He was born at Sima, Kitongo-Magu Mwanza in Tanzania, a Msukuma by tribe and belonging to the Bagolo clan. His family name was Kisula Mahalu and his nickname Mlindajulya. His father's name was Kisula and his mother's name was Luli. He dreamed of being a medicine man and a traditional dance leader. His education only went as far as the fourth grade but he spoke Kisukuma, Kiswahili, English, Kikerewe, and Kijita.

He accepted Christ on August 20, 1920 at Lugeye, Sima Mwanza in an AICT church under Paulo Masalu, a teacher. He was baptized on May 21, 1921 at Kijima Nera (Kwimba) by Rev. H. H. Zemmer, an Africa Inland missionary. He became a local unordained pastor (*Nangi*) in 1923 after two months of Bible training. He was assigned to the Bushini local church as an unordained pastor from November to December 1923 when he left the ministry because of his wife's health and living conditions in the area.

He and his wife, Kahabi, had seven children: Salome, Mathias, Samson, Jairus, Anna, Joyce, Eva, Joshua, and Adellah. They also had thirteen grandchildren: Charles, Agnes, Monicah, Sama, Stanley, Annet, Paul, Leah, Georgia, Lilian, Savonarora, Jane, and Grace.

He left the ministry to seek secular work with more pay on January 7, 1924 after his transfer request was denied by the missionaries. That same month he left for Tabora to seek clerical employment with the British Government, but he was not