

The Life of Dr. Byang Kato

as given by Dr. Handan Maigida at Dr. Kato's funeral on December 24, 1975 at Kwoi, Nigeria, the birth place of Dr. Kato,

Dr. Byang Henri Kato was born at Kwoi on 11th April 1936 to a family most devoted to the juju worship. He was initiated into that days' worship by his grandfather at an early age. Consequently, he was one of the very few boys of his age that went through this customary initiation at a time when the practice was declining in Kwoi due to the influence of Christianity. His grandfather soon realized to his great disappointment that the young boy was reluctant to go any further in the juju worship, let alone to potentially succeed him in leadership of this worship. Byang literally had to struggle in these circumstances to free himself from the life being patterned for him in order to become a Christian.

Both of his parents who earlier persecuted him for his faith, later accepted the Lord. Last September, Byang was thrilled at the Christian growth of his mother. This is what he said, "Never had I heard her pray as she did now." Byang was exceedingly exuberant.

Byang never missed an opportunity to witness for his Lord. In 1974 he had to be hospitalized in South Africa. Instead of lamenting his absence from a church growth seminar, he was participating in a choice that two nurses caring for him accepted Jesus as their own Saviour through his witness. I just quoted this testimony that was written in Kenya where Dr. Kato died.

Byang's entire life of 39 years could be reflected in his struggle and utmost determination to get education. He started school at the age of 12 in 1948 at the SIM Elementary School here in Kwoi. He was always at the top of his class up to Standard VI when he completed his primary education in 1954. He passed several entrance examinations from Mission, Government and other secular institutions, but he chose Igbaja Theological Seminary where he spent three years - 1955-1957 to qualify as a pastor.

He went back to Seminary at Igbaja in 1961 for further courses to qualify him for advanced study in theology. On his own he studied four courses and passed the GCE at advanced level examinations in 1963, and so proceeded that year to the London Bible College for his degree. He was a brilliant student there and graduated with flying colours in 1966 with a degree of Bachelor of Divinity.

As a young man who believed reaching the top at the end of the day, Byang decided despite all odds to go back to school for further studies in theology. That year he entered Dallas Theological Seminary in the United States for his doctorate in theology, and his hard work, perseverance and an alert mind enabled him to complete his Ph.D programme in record time by 1974.

Byang's active working life dates back to 1958 following his completion of his course at Igbaja. Between 1958 and 1963 he taught at Kwoi Bible Training School and Kwoi Christian Training Institute, and then worked at the African Challenge, Lagos. On his return from London 1966, he was posted to the Igbaja Theological Seminary as a tutor. The following year he was elected as the General Secretary of Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA). The post was relinquished

in 1970 to proceed to the United States for further studies. While he still was pursuing his Ph.D. course in America he was elected Secretary General for the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar which has its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. This office he assumed in 1974 and held it until his untimely death last week, Friday, 19th December, 1975. Dr. Byang Kato is survived by his wife, Jummai, and their three children: Deborah, Jonathan, and Bulus.

As Secretary General of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, Dr. Kato travelled all over the world across the seas to attend conferences, seminars, workshops, etc., theological and other Christian activities. Byang was such a determined and dedicated man that he would not be content to only the second first 100 days before he became later a national and later an international figure. Byang Kato already met his motto. He was an ex-member of the Boys Brigade and became the first Northerner to win the national recognition officers' Proficiency Star. He later rose to the rank of Sergeant in the Boys Brigade.

As an active Church member he introduced choir service into the Church at Kwoi which he organized as its first leader. At one time he served as the financial secretary to the Local Church Council (LCC). His contributions to the evangelical organizations progress and general welfare of the Church here at Kwoi and his influence on young men and women here at home cannot be over emphasized.

Byang held the following position at the time of his passing: General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, the Executive Secretary AEAM Theological Commission, Vice-President World Evangelical Fellowship, Chairman World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, member Advisory Council Asia Theological Association, member of Lausanne Continuation Committee of International Congress of World Evangelization, Chairman Board of Directors ECWA Productions, Ltd., Nigeria.

The first of life history of Byang Henri Kato should be an inspiration of all young men. He was literally a self-made man who involved a religious life, and Byang claimed the truth of Bible verses. These are found in Philippians 4:13: *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*, and John 3:30: *He must increase, but I must decrease*.

Byang was modest but honest and sincere in his convictions. Such a dedicated young man who devoted his whole life, his whole life in winning the world to Christ. He achieved so much in such a short life. Byang Henri Kato died too young. We have suffered a great loss.

I would like us to sing the two verses of his favourite hymn - the third and the last:

*Though many dangers, toils and snares I have already come
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home*

*Yea when this heart and flesh shall fail and mortal life shall cease
I shall possess within the Vail the life of joy and peace.*