

# A PORTRAIT OF DR. BYANG H. KATO

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*The late Dr. Byang Kato has left a lasting mark on the Christian Church in Africa. Little does the younger generation understand the rich legacy which he has imparted, both in his life and in ministry. His conversion and commitment to Jesus Christ is a challenge to us all. His commitment to the Word of God and the living Gospel of Jesus Christ is a model for us to follow. His leadership in the Association of Evangelicals of Africa has provided a permanent contribution. His tragic and untimely death is one of those mysteries which must be left to the sovereign will of Almighty God. Dr. Christien Breman has provided the Church in Africa a real contribution in her detailed research into the life and ministry of this servant of the Lord. May this biographical account of our late brother, Byang Kato, stir the hearts of many to follow in his footsteps,*

## INTRODUCTION

The name of Dr. Byang Kato is well known in evangelical circles in Africa, and not only there. He was the General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA)<sup>1</sup>, which is situated in Nairobi. Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo is the present General Secretary. The AEA was founded in the mid-sixties on the impulse of two American mission agencies: the International Foreign Missions Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies (EFMA).

These mission agencies realized that the Ecumenical Movement was influencing many national African churches with the aim of bringing one large African Church under leadership of the World Council of Churches (WCC). To use Professor J. van den Berg's definition, ecumenicals are "those persons, groups, and churches who orientate themselves on the basis and aims of the Ecumenical Movement which has taken shape in the WCC. They are prepared to [engage in] conciliar consultation and all sorts of forms of cooperation among churches of very different traditions."<sup>2</sup>

The evangelicals are united within the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). To use Waldron Scott's definition - Scott was the General Secretary of the WEF in the 1980's - "... WEF must be more like an 'extended family' whose members are united not on the basis of a common stance toward some other body or bodies, but on the basis of a common experience of regeneration in Jesus Christ, a common loyalty to

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the Scriptures ..., a common pursuit of holiness, and a common commitment to spreading the Good News throughout the world."<sup>3</sup>

According to Eric Maillefer, a missionary then working at AEA's office, the WCC had earmarked more than 5 million US dollars for scholarships in the early sixties and this alarmed all the mainly American evangelical missions. The reason for this anxiety was that evangelical Africans accepted WCC scholarships for studies overseas. They were trained at schools the evangelical leaders did not want them to go to. The leaders feared these students would come back as liberal pastors.<sup>4</sup>

Two representatives of both mission agencies, i.e. the IFMA and the EFMA (Clyde W. Taylor was one of them), were sent together in 1962 together on a trip to seven countries in Africa (Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Congo (former Zaire), Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone) to hold two-day conferences in several countries with a few key leaders. The purpose of the conferences would be spiritual fellowship, instruction in current ecumenical trends, and encouragement in evangelical cooperation, but not immediate organization at the time of the visit.

The National Evangelical Fellowships were established a few years later when Rev. Kenneth L. Downing, a missionary with Africa Inland Mission, and partly accompanied by Pastor Jacques Blocher of France and Pastor Assani Bénédic of Zaire (now again Congo), visited most of these countries. Both Kato and Adeyemo have put much effort into making these Fellowships viable. Kato doubled the Fellowships from 8 to 16 in the two years he was in office and Dr. Adeyemo has doubled them from 16 to 32 or even more.

During Kato's time AEA's image was quite negative. The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) saw it as its counterpart. The present AEA is a well respected para church organization. After this introduction I will now concentrate on Kato, a radical and genuine African evangelical theologian, who affirmed very strongly the centrality and absolute authority of the Bible, and who defended the essentials of the Christian faith.

## KATO'S YOUTH

Byang Kato was the firstborn in the family of Heri and Zawi in Kwoi, Kaduna State, Nigeria. Kato himself wrote, "I was dedicated to serve the Devil as a baby... All the other children born after me (eight of them) died except one. In the eyes of the pagan worshippers this was proof of the power of fetish worship. The Devil was looking after his baby."<sup>5</sup> Byang means "you hate me."<sup>6</sup> Kato was the first in his family to become a Christian. Kato was born on June 23, 1936, in Kwoi, in the mid-seventies a town of about 15,000 people, situated in northern Nigeria.

A few months after his birth his pagan father dedicated him to be a *juju* priest.<sup>7</sup> Juju comes from the French word *joujou*, meaning toy. This religion is known in countries like Nigeria and Ghana. Juju demands bloody sacrifices, also human sacrifices. Juju demands torture and keeps women and children in fear. According to

Kato people who serve juju are hardhearted, cruel, wicked, and bloodthirsty. Kato himself writes about it in an article "From Juju to Jesus Christ."<sup>8</sup> Kato's father took every opportunity to instruct his son in fetish practices. At the age of ten Kato passed through Jaba tribal pagan initiation rites, a "school" that lasted eight days.<sup>9</sup> Soon after this happened, Miss Mary Haas, a missionary of the Sudan Interior Mission, now called SIM International, came to Kato's part of the town several days a month. She told the children about Jesus in the Jaba language. She had with her a "black box" [a phonograph or grammophone], which could sing and talk Hausa, the trade language of that area. The black box was fascinating to Byang and his friends. He always wished that he could see the people talking and singing inside the box. Byang became so interested that he started attending Sunday School, and at the age of 11 the SIM Primary School.<sup>10</sup>

### KATO'S CONVERSION AND HIS FATHER'S REACTION

After a few months his father forced him to leave school as he considered this a waste of time and he needed his son for farming. The following year Byang started again. A missionary by the name of "Fatu," Miss Elsie Henderson, and the local church elders had come to plead with Kato's father to allow him to continue in school. Although the physical beatings by his father ceased, Byang was denied food and clothing. Within his first month at school at the age of 12 Byang's Nigerian class teacher explained to the children the way of salvation, using the story of Noah and the ark. Byang realized that he needed to enter the boat of salvation just as Noah's family had done. So he stood up in front of the class to ask Jesus Christ to come into his heart. Although he had done this several times before, this was the time he could point out convincingly that he understood the Gospel enough for a conscientious decision.<sup>11</sup>

Byang's father was furious when he learned about Byang's public commitment to Jesus Christ. Byang's father absolutely refused to pay for his school fees, which were only \$1.50 per year. Missionaries provided him with a part-time job which enabled him to pay for his school fees and buy some clothes and school supplies, such as books. Following his new dedication, Byang's programme was changed. Instead of roaming about at night, he learned to spend time at home on his studies. Homework was hardly known in Africa at that time, but Byang started concentrating on reading over his notes. In the morning he helped his father farming, in the afternoon he went to school, after school he had his part-time job. As he spent more time on his studies, he ranked first in the class throughout his last three years in Primary School.<sup>12</sup> (He was then 13 years old.<sup>13</sup>) After Christian instruction, missionary Rev. Raymond R. Veenker baptized Kato along with some three hundred others in November 1948.<sup>14</sup>

Soon after Kato had become a Christian he became involved in Boys' Brigade, Sunday School, Youth for Christ, and other activities. By the time he was 16 he was a Boys' Brigade leader, Sunday School teacher and superintendent and Director of an *African Challenge* (an SIM Christian magazine published in West Africa) reading unit. Kato became the first Nigerian to win the Proficiency Star when he was only 18.<sup>15</sup>

## **KATO'S TURNING POINT**

A real turning point came during a church conference at Kwoi, when Kato was 17 years old. The Christians in the town of Kwoi<sup>16</sup> were challenged to send out their own missionaries. The Sudan Interior Mission church, later known as Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA), had organized an African Missionary Society, now the Evangelical Missionary Society (EMS). The Christians at Kwoi were stimulated to support this movement through sacrificial giving. A mighty revival swept through the church. Byang felt moved to go forward and gave one of the two shirts he possessed.<sup>17</sup> He then dedicated his life to God, indicating he would be willing to go anywhere and do whatever the Lord wanted him to do. He also confessed his youthful sins and promised to live a life of greater commitment to God. This was the turning point in his life. Two years later he was in Bible College, preparing for the ministry.<sup>18</sup>

## **STUDY AT IGBAJA BIBLE COLLEGE AND OTHER TRAINING**

When Byang was 19 years old he went to Bible College. One week before he was due to leave he got an envelope with enough money to pay his train fare to College. His local church told him that week that it would pay his school fees for the first year. Kato took as his life's motto the Bible verse from Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." His other favourite Bible verse was John 3:30, "Jesus must increase, but I *must* decrease." Igbaja Bible College was 300 miles away.<sup>19</sup>

Upon graduation in 1957 Kato was assigned to teach in a Bible School in Kwoi. Meanwhile he took correspondence courses from England to try to make up for his lack in secondary schooling. He received his O-levels 1961. Two years later he earned A-levels in two subjects.<sup>20</sup>

## **MARRIAGE**

In his last year of training at Igbaja Bible College, Kwara State, Kato married a girl named Jummai (or Juma) Rahila in 1957, born of Gandu and Kambok, also from Kwoi. Jummai's grandmother Lydia was a godly woman, who taught the family the Word of God morning and evening. She was the one who sent Jummai and her sister to Sunday School and church. Jummai moved to Igbaja after her marriage, which was not easy for her, as the people there did not speak her tribal language Jaba, but Yoruba which she did not know. She felt shy and lonely. Her husband was away the whole day for study and work. The couple soon was blessed with three children: Deborah, Jonathan, and Paul. Byang felt that three children were enough for them. He promised God that he would provide for them spiritually and materially.<sup>21</sup>

From the very first day of their marriage both Byang and Jummai put an

emphasis on prayer and Bible reading in their home. They showed what a Christian home should be like. Byang and his wife established a family worship,<sup>22</sup> a time set apart for family devotions.<sup>23</sup> His family worship was proof of his taking Jesus' Christ Lordship seriously in all his activities. The children accepted the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour, when they were 8, 7, and 6 years old respectively. A three month course at the Child Evangelism Fellowship in Paris, France, had convinced Kato of the importance of evangelizing children.<sup>24</sup>

## JOURNALISTIC WORK

After having been a Bible School teacher and a youth leader for about two years, Kato was asked in 1959 to join the staff of the *African Challenge* magazine [now *Today's Challenge*] in Lagos as a counsellor for journalistic or editorial assistance. The magazine received many letters every month from readers, seeking help and guidance.<sup>25</sup> Soon after this change, the editor in chief, the Rev. Harold Fuller, offered him further training in journalism. However, Byang refused, as he felt the need to train for the pastoral ministry. From 1961 to 1963 he was again a Bible School teacher at Zabolo, Kwoi. He also taught at the Men's Christian Training Institute.

## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES IN GREAT BRITAIN

In 1963 Byang enrolled at London Bible College (LBC) for both the College 'Associate' diploma and the London University Bachelor's Degree (B.D.) course. Three years later he was among the 40% successful candidates in the College for the London University B.D. And LBC was proud to announce that Byang was the first African to do so from their College.<sup>26</sup> Jummai joined Kato when he was halfway through his course at LBC.

## GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE ECWA

Kato was a Professor at Igbaja Theological Seminary from 1966 to 1967. In May 1967 he went as a delegate to the ECWA's General Church Council. During the sessions Kato acted as interpreter for the northern Hausa-speaking delegates. At the end of the Council meeting he was chosen as ECWA's General Secretary, the first Northerner to hold the post. It was a full-time position, so he moved to the ECWA Headquarters in Jos, Plateau State.<sup>27</sup> Kato became directly involved in different relief programmes of ECWA-SIM during the Biafra-war. He was ordained as a pastor in 1968. During Kato's leadership the ECWA had 1,400 churches with an average total attendance of about 400,000 persons throughout the country.<sup>28</sup> Yusufu Turaki, the present General Secretary of the ECWA in Nigeria is preparing (or has prepared already) a study on the life and work of Dr. Byang Kato.

While serving as ECWA's General Secretary Kato realized the need of more advanced education, which was recognized by the ECWA as well as by the SIM. It

happened at that time that Dr. George Peters of Dallas Theological Seminary - one of the leading American evangelical seminaries - was visiting Nigeria for a series of seminars. He challenged Kato and others about keeping records, laying plans, and setting up goals. He furthermore emphasized the need to develop strong national leaders, trained at seminaries with national faculty members of outstanding scholarship. Dr. Peters introduced him to Dallas Theological Seminary, even though some missionaries did not see the necessity of advanced education.<sup>29</sup>

## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES IN THE USA

With the help of the SIM and the ECWA Kato was admitted in Dallas to the Master of Sacred Theology (S.T.M.) programme in August 1970. He was the first African student there. Kato flew to Dallas via Alaska, where, before entering the Seminary, he worked for about three months to earn some money for his school fees and daily living.<sup>30</sup> Imagine, coming from a hot tropical country as Nigeria and then working in Alaska, a very cold part of North America.

It was a two year course at Dallas, which Kato did in one year. He graduated with honours, and also won the Loraine Chafer Award, given to the student with the best performance that year in the field of Systematic Theology. Kato embarked upon the Th.D. programme. After one year in the Th.D. programme he won the Four Way Test Award, which is granted to the student who ranks highest in personal relationship in and outside the school, who is consistent in his Christian life, and with a promise for leadership. Kato felt unworthy of this award, but it was a challenge for him to live up to it. To Kato this was the *greatest award* he ever received. His deepest desire was not to be a great theologian, nor the best student, but to be a consistent Christian who brings glory to the Lord.<sup>31</sup> Kato did not speak in tongues.<sup>32</sup>

In May 1974 the Th.D. degree was conferred on Kato by Dallas Theological Seminary. His dissertation is in the area of universalism and syncretism, which was published by Evangel Publishing House in Nairobi, under the title *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*. He was the first evangelical theologian in Africa who took a doctor's degree. In the sixties there was hardly any trained evangelical African leadership.

Kato also taught at Dallas as an instructor in missions in 1972. When he was studying in the United States he was invited to speak at the Inter-Varsity missionary conference at Urbana in 1970, where he addressed more than 12,000 students. He told them, "I stand here as a living witness of what the Lord Christ Jesus has done through missions."<sup>33</sup>

## GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE ASSOCIATION OF EVANGELICALS

In 1973 Kato completed his classes for his doctoral studies and went back to Nigeria. On the way back he visited Kenya, where he was invited to present a paper

at the Christian Education Strategy Conference, held in Limuru, sponsored by AEA.

A week later the AEA Second General Assembly was held. It was at this General Assembly that Byang Kato was unanimously chosen as AEA's second General Secretary, the *first African* to this post. It had been vacant for three years, as the Association had not been able to find a qualified General Secretary after Downing's resignation. Kato was also appointed Executive Secretary of the newly formed Theological Commission.

As Kato was very much needed as a professor at Igbaja Theological Seminary, the Assembly gave him grants of leave so that he could make some trips to be a visiting professor at Igbaja Seminary during the next two years.<sup>34</sup> Kato's time was filled also with travelling, teaching, and preaching. He even found time for writing. He visited almost every African country.<sup>35</sup>

He attended for instance the Third AACC General Assembly at Lusaka, Zambia in 1974 as an observer. He was one of the main speakers at the International Congress on World Evangelization, held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. He was chosen a member of the Lausanne Continuation Committee for World Evangelization as well as member of the Executive Committee of the World Evangelical Fellowship, Chairman of its Theological Commission, and member of the Advisory Council of the Asia Theological Commission. Sophie de la Haye in this connection quotes a Hausa proverb, "If the camel is large, its load is great."<sup>36</sup>

One of the last activities Kato was involved in was preparing AEA's *Theological Conference* in Nairobi of which he was the Chairman, to be held in the middle of November 1975. "While he recognized the importance of the post of General Secretary, he really felt at his best as Executive Secretary of AEA's Theological Commission."<sup>37</sup>

The Fifth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, which was also held at Nairobi, overlapped the Theological Commission Conference. Kato attended this Assembly from November 23 to December 10 as an observer. He and his wife entertained a lot of guests during that time. Moreover, he had speeches to give. He was under much pressure and was exhausted. He decided to take a few days off to have some time with his family at the seashore near Mombasa, as there was a three month speaking trip to different European countries ahead of him. He wanted to use that time to write a short report commenting on the WCC Assembly, before he took off for his trip. Later he could write a more extensive report.<sup>38</sup>

A major activity of Kato was the establishment of the *Bangui Evangelical School of Theology* (BEST). The roots of BEST go back to the Second AEA General Assembly in Limuru, 1973, which was a pivotal year for this school.<sup>39</sup> At the instigation of Kato, during this Assembly chosen as Executive Secretary of the Theological Commission and as General Secretary of AEA, it was decided to launch two theological schools at university level, one in francophone and one in anglophone Africa.<sup>40</sup> Priority was given to French speaking Africa, because English speaking Africa had about ten times as many evangelical theological institutions, seminaries, and Bible Schools as in French speaking Africa.<sup>41</sup> To Kato, "the great

need in Africa today is ministerial training, coupled with in-depth teaching in the church. We should make an effort to convince missionaries and Christian leaders that while evangelism should *not* be neglected, teaching the converts we already have should be our priority. A well-taught Christian will become an evangelist." BEST offers "training of trainers." Kato emphasized the need for sound theology and Bible knowledge in evangelical churches in Africa. He saw the danger of syncretism, universalism, and independent churches and sects springing up. The Church in Africa needed well qualified and evangelically trained pastors.

### RELATIONSHIPS OF THE AEA AND THE AACC DURING KATO'S LEADERSHIP

Under the leadership of Kenneth Downing and Byang Kato in particular the AEA was outspokenly anti-WCC. It is said that the WCC used evangelical language to conquer Africa for ecumenism. Kato had been "particularly outspoken against liberalism and WCC efforts to 'take over the local situation.'"<sup>42</sup> Kato was invited by the WCC to participate as a fraternal, a brotherly delegate in the Fifth WCC General Assembly (Nairobi 1975). Kato, however, did not want to be seen as a brotherly delegate and declined the invitation. He requested lower "observer" status, given to people spiritually far removed from the WCC, which was granted. Dr. Philip Potter, then WCC's General Secretary replied, "But people like you are close to us like brothers."<sup>43</sup> The Kenyan church newspaper *Target* of October 19-26, 1975 had a front page article entitled "'Evangelicals' deny fighting WCC Assembly" on AEA to which Kato replied in a lengthy article "Africa's Evangelicals and the WCC," in which he examined and refuted the nine allegations mentioned in the church newspaper.<sup>44</sup>

The relationship with the All Africa Conference of Churches was more or less the same. The initial public impression was that the AEA was a reaction against the AACC. Kato speaks about "missing links" in the AACC basis of cooperation. He found the doctrinal basis not specific enough.<sup>45</sup> The AACC was seen by AEA men like Kato as an instrument of the WCC, although it is officially not a member of the WCC.

The AACC invited AEA to send four *fraternal* delegates to its Third Assembly in Lusaka in 1974. AEA decided to send *one observer* in the person of Byang Kato. Peter Falk in his book *The Growth of the Church in Africa* writes that "the All-Africa Council [Conference, CB] of Churches and the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar seek a closer fellowship and greater cooperation in the common task they have under the one Lord."<sup>46</sup> According to Jonathan Hildebrandt AEA is a smaller organization than the AACC, and "it does not receive such massive amounts of money from outside sources as the AACC does. Nethertheless the AEAM is playing a greater role each year in assisting its member evangelical Fellowships expanding the gospel witness."<sup>47</sup>

Another difference between the AACC and the AEA is that the former is an organization of *churches*, whereas the latter - through its National Evangelical Fellowships, is a *conglomeration* of denominations, free churches, mission



agencies, para-church organizations, and the like. On a national level one can compare the National Christian Councils with the National Evangelical Fellowships. The Christian Councils, however, are not full members of the AACC, but *associate*, while the Evangelical Fellowships are *full* members of the AEA.

Prof. Mugambi, the registrar of Nairobi University makes another distinction. He sees the AEA as an association of *individuals*, not of churches, as the AACC. In an interview with me Mugambi stressed that the emphasis within the AEA is very highly individualistic.<sup>48</sup> It is a fact that the name of the AEA speaks of "Evangelicals in Africa" and not of "Evangelical Churches in Africa." It is true that evangelicals tend towards individualism. They see a change of heart, prayer, and a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as more important than changing society, although since 1974 (the Lausanne Movement) things have changed.

### KATO'S MYSTERIOUS DEATH

After the Theological Conference and the World Council of Churches General Assembly the Kato family took off for Mombasa on December 16, 1975. Kato drowned three days later under unknown circumstances, on his son Jonathan's 17th birthday. That morning he had given his son some driver's lessons. His body was found one day later. The boys had been to the beach with their father, but they had been hungry and had gone home. They missed *baba* a short time later when the one o'clock news was on. "Where is *baba*?", Paul asked. "He never misses the one o'clock news."<sup>49</sup>

Kato was a swimmer. The post-mortem revealed no indications as to why he drowned. No one saw what actually happened. When he left Nairobi, he was physically exhausted from a month of strenuous work during the AEAM Theological Conference and then as an observer at the World Council of Churches Assembly.<sup>50</sup>

Some people suggested Kato might have been killed by a poisonous fish, like the rockfish or stonefish common in Kenya, but there were no sting marks or any other injury on his body. People in Byang's town Kwoi in Nigeria could not believe that Byang drowned by accident. They thought that someone must have attacked him.<sup>51</sup> Up to this day there are still people who cannot understand that it was God's time for Byang. Many people believe that witchcraft from the side of "the powers of this dark world" was involved in Kato's death.<sup>52</sup> Maillefer quotes Rev. Gottfried Osei-Mensah, who believes Kato might have died of exhaustion.<sup>53</sup> The real cause of his death remains a mystery.

His sudden death was a shock to his family, to the AEA, to the whole evangelical world inside and outside Africa. He died at a time when he was very much needed. The whole evangelical world felt a sense of incalculable loss. "Byang provided outstanding leadership to evangelicals, not only in Africa, but worldwide; he will be sorely missed by us all," said Waldron Scott, then General Secretary of the WEF.<sup>54</sup> And Bruce Nicholls from New Zealand, now teaching in India, words his grief as follows:

A week after I returned to New Delhi from Nairobi I received a cable that Byang Kato had been drowned at Mombasa. In sorrow and bewilderment, I with many others could not help asking why our Heavenly Father had permitted such a tragedy, as it seemed that this was the hour when Africa needed him most. He was undoubtedly the most outstanding evangelical theological leader in Africa today.

Nicholls, moreover, writes:

Byang was a skilled Biblical exegete, theologian and apologist... Byang was a twentieth century prophet, somewhat in the school of an earlier African, Tertullian, for while he identified with black Africa in its cry for liberation against unjust oppression, he was fearless in his denunciation of all liberal theology and philosophy that deviated from the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. We were together for the WCC Assembly at Nairobi. I grew to respect the clarity of his understanding of the issues being debated. Within the limitations of his status as an observer he entered fearlessly into debate...  
Byang was also a preacher and a pastor.<sup>55</sup>

Dr. T. Adeyemo, AEA's present-day General Secretary, calls Kato a prophet. "His life as a prophet was marked by courage, boldness, moral purity and discipline. His message was forthright, powerful, uncompromising but always compassionate. As is often true of prophets, Kato lived before his time."<sup>56</sup>

Dr. Adeyemo was a theological student in January 1973 when he had the privilege of meeting and hearing Kato for the first and only time. Dr. Adeyemo sees Kato not only as a prophet and theologian, but also as an evangelist and statesman, who remained an evangelist at heart. "In his many travels in Africa and around the world, whether meeting Head of States or rural people, his consuming ambition was to preach Christ."<sup>57</sup>

### KATO'S BURIAL

Byang Kato's body was flown to Kwoi, Nigeria where the funeral service was held on December 24, 1975. The Boys' and Girls' Brigades formed a guard of honour, which stretched from the airport to the church. It was packed with people, 1,200 inside and many more sitting and standing outside. Memorial services were held in many places around the world.<sup>58</sup>

ECWA honoured their outstanding member, Byang Kato, by naming the library of its Theological Seminary in Jos after him, the Byang Kato Research Library. BEST, the theological school of which Kato was the initiator, did the same. NEGST, the theological school in Nairobi, has recently decided to call its multi purpose centre after Byang Kato.

## POSITIONS HELD AT THE TIME OF KATO'S PASSING

Kato held the following positions at the time of his passing away:

1. General Secretary of the AEA; Executive Secretary of the AEA Theological Commission
2. Vice-President of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF)
3. Chairman of the WEF Theological Commission
4. Member of the Lausanne Continuation Committee of the International Congress on World Evangelization
5. Chairman of the Board of Directors of ECWA Productions Ltd., Nigeria
6. Member of the Advisory Council of the Asia Theological Association
7. Elder of Nairobi Baptist Church.

Kato's favourite hymn was *Amazing Grace*.<sup>59</sup>

## KATO'S PUBLICATIONS

Rev. Jim Halbert, who replaced Maillefer during his furlough in 1974-1975, played "an important rôle in the editing and publishing of Dr. Kato's numerous articles which appeared in Christian periodicals around the world ..."<sup>60</sup> It is striking, that there are as many posthumous articles and other publications as there are articles published during Kato's life. I mention here in particular his dissertation, which was published under the name *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, which also has been translated into French. He discusses rising universalism and syncretism in Africa and African Traditional Religion. In chapter 5 he describes and rejects African Theology, of which is Dr. John Mbiti an exponent. Mbiti in one of his books is of the opinion that Kato has not understood him fully. In the following chapter ecumenism is described in a critical sense. Kato sees as the basic problem of ecumenism the lack of an authoritative source for the meaning of salvation.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PERIOD OF KATO'S GENERAL SECRETARIAT

The membership of the AEA was limited to around seven or eight African nations when Byang Kato accepted his responsibility as General Secretary in 1973. AEA's image was very negative at that time. This changed rapidly, as appears from Kato's diary, quoted by Sophie de la Haye:

Dec.15. A satisfying year [1975, CB] in the AEAM ministry is fast drawing to a close. It has been a joy to watch a growth of over one hundred per cent in less than two years. The membership of national bodies now stands at sixteen as compared to seven in 1973. AEAM now represents ten million Christians in Africa. The proposed Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST) is fast becoming a reality. Our publications, *Afroscope*, *Perception* and *Edification*, continue to be popular.<sup>61</sup>

Kato was also a reconciler,<sup>62</sup> who liked simplicity. The impression of a Dutch journalist who visited Dr. Kato at AEA Headquarters in December 1975, is as follows, "Its headquarters are situated just outside the city-centre of Nairobi in a villa, which it shares with some other organizations. Here no ostentation in comparison with the Fifth WCC Assembly, but only a small office with two or three fellow-workers."<sup>63</sup>

A characteristic of this period of expectancy can be found in Kato's paper *Ecclesiastical Structures Today*. At the Association of Evangelicals of Natal (South Africa) Retreat in 1975, Kato's views were also acclaimed by all present. In the above paper Kato outlined AEA's position as follows:

On the extreme Left you have the theological structure of the WCC, AACC, South African Christian Council - liberal ecumenism. The few evangelicals in WCC are outnumbered and outvoiced by the liberals who reject almost everything that is precious to us. Then on the extreme Right is the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) and its regional councils, with leaders such as Carl McIntire and Ian Paisley. We agree with them theologically but cannot go along with their methods - e.g. they had a demonstration against the Lausanne Congress because ICCC believes in 2nd and 3rd degree separation. Now I personally query Billy Graham's practice of sitting on the same platform as liberals, but he is an Evangelical and I would not join the ICCC in saying that what he has done is of Satan. No, we don't agree with this extreme Right position. We do see the need for separation from the world, and we stand on the Word, but we should not thrive on division within the church. It is very sad. I wish these groups would all stand together in the Word of God. In the MIDDLE, the meat in the sandwich, is the WEF, AEAM (uitleggen: oude naam) and national evangelical fellowships. That's why we have problems - we're in the middle! We are called names - 'neo-evangelical' by the Right, and 'separatist' by the Left. Missionaries have refused to have fellowship with me because 'I'm too ecumenical', and in other places I've been called 'a separatist who has been deceived by American missionaries!' Maybe we are in the right place when we are criticised by both sides! AEAM encourages evangelical Christians of like precious faith to stop some of the unnecessary divisions on secondary matters (e.g. church polity) and stand together. Not to form One Church - the thing that's wrong is not that we belong to separate churches (like the WCC says) but that we have unChristian attitudes to fellow-believers. Now in South Africa you have just formed the AESA with a good constitution. I hope denominations which are still true to the Word of God will join.<sup>64</sup>

ACTEA, the now well-known Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa, came into being at AEA's Theological Consultation in November 1975, which was chaired by Kato. ACTEA was officially launched at the AEA's Third General Assembly (Bouaké 1977).

It is true what De la Haye writes, "The AEA has come from being a small, sideline interaction of evangelicals, to a primary voice on the evangelical scene in Africa and even beyond."<sup>65</sup> Dr. Adeyemo gives the following assessment on Dr. Kato's

leadership:

Under his leadership within the space of less than two years before his tragic death, AEAM doubled its membership, improved the quality of its publications and services and thus became a force to reckon with. He literally placed the name AEAM on the ecclesiastical map of Africa. For my first three years in office, the only way people knew what I was doing and the organization I was working for was to mention the name Byang Kato.<sup>66</sup>

Dr. Paul Bowers wrote in 1975 about Kato, "Byang Kato was a young Nigerian theologian of unusual ability and vitality, with a profound concern for the continuing growth of biblical Christianity in Africa."<sup>67</sup>

I conclude with a quotation from the Ghanaian theologian Dr. Kwame Bediako, who writes in his book *Theology and Identity*: "Byang Kato's persistent affirmation of the centrality of the Bible for the theological enterprise in the Church in Africa must surely be reckoned to have been his most important contribution to modern African Christian thought."<sup>68</sup>

## END NOTES

1. Until November 1993 the name was: The Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar
2. Dutch mission journal *Wereld en Zending*, No. 4, 1975.
3. Waldron Scott in his letter of August 20, 1980 to Rev. Hugh Wetmore, General Secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa (EFSA), South Africa.
4. Interview with Eric Maillefer, former Administrative Secretary of AEA, on July 2, 1991, Lunteren, The Netherlands. Cp. also *Theological News of WEF*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1972.
5. "The Devil's Baby," *Africa Now*, January-March 1962, pp. 10-11.
6. Handwritten note on Byang Kato's curriculum vitae. AEA files.
7. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato: Ambassador for Christ* (henceforth abbreviated as *Byang Kato*), Achimota: Africa Christian Press 1986, p. 17.
8. Byang Kato, "From Juju to Jesus Christ," *African Challenge* (now *Today's Challenge*), September 1962, p. 13.  
Cp. also the article by an Anglican clergyman S.C. Onwuka, "I was a Juju Priest," in ed. E.A.Ade. Adegbola, *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Ibadan (Nigeria): Daystar Press 1983, 471 pp., pp. 2-11.
9. Byang H. Kato, *The Grace of God in my Life* (henceforth abbreviated as *Grace of God*), p. 3 of a 12-page autobiography (testimony), prepared by request of *Christian Life* magazine in the USA, however, not published. AEA files.
10. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 3.
11. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 4. Cp. also Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 19.

12. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 8. Cp. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 22.
13. Byang H. Kato, *Application for Work Permits*, July 23, 1973. AEA files.
14. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 20.
15. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 23. The Proficiency Star is most probably a distinction by the Nigerian Boys' Brigade.  
Cp. also T. Adeyemo, *Byang Kato lectures, Lecture One Byang Kato: The Man*, unpublished.(ACTEA International Lectureship 1986-1987), p. 3. AEA files.
16. Ninety percent of the population in Kwoi are now Christians. Interview with Rev. Zakariyu Salitu, Chairman District Church Council of ECWA, November 1993, Kwoi, Nigeria.
17. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 7. Also in Kato's unpublished *The Joy of Christian Service*, 5 pp., n.p., n.d. AEA files.
18. Byang Kato, *Grace of God*, pp. 6-7. Cp. also *The Joy of Christian Service*, p. 1 and Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 23.
19. Byang Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 9. See also Kato's *Application for Work Permits*, July 23, 1973.
20. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, pp. 9-10. See also *application for Work Permits*, July 23, 1973, AEA files.
21. Byang H. Kato, *Application for Work Permits*, July 23, 1973; Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 25-26, 107.
22. Kato himself uses the word "family altar," an indication the African home altar.
23. Kato writes in "Theological Trends in Africa Today," *Perception*, Vol. I, No.1, March 1974, p. IX, "The Christian home should be the first place for sound theological discussion. The old concept in Africa that a child should be seen and not heard does not promote parent-child discussion. This must change. The family altar should not be merely a dead ritual, but spontaneous discussion should mark the family get-together. The discussion around the Word of God should then be followed with sincere prayer. A child exposed to the Word of God at home is prepared for any atmosphere he will find in later life. If his questions are not dealt with at home he will take them somewhere else where he may not get a sympathetic, biblical-based answer. This is the challenge that African leaders and parents must face."
24. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 28, 43-48.
25. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 31.
26. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 10.
27. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 52. Cp. also T. Adeyemo, unpublished *Byang Kato Lectures. Lecture One Byang Kato: The Man* (ACTEA International Lectureship 1986-1987), p. 4. AEA files.
28. Byang H. Kato, *Grace of God*, p. 11. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, gives on p. 58 the figure of some 1,200 churches and 300,000 attenders.

29. Byang H. Kato. *The Problem of Theological Education in Africa*, n.p., November 1973, 9 pp., p. 5. ASEA files. Kato quoted under the heading "anti-intellectualism" several discouraging remarks by missionaries.
30. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 62.
31. Byang Kato, *Grace of God*, pp. 10-11.
32. Byang Kato, "The Power of the Holy Spirit in the Christian," *Today's Challenge*, September 1974, 6.
33. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 68.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
35. Cp. Kato's curriculum vitae in AEA files.
36. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 80-81.
37. Eric Mallefer, *Byang Kato was my Boss*, n.p., n.d. [Nairobi?, 1976?]
38. Sophie de la Haye. *Byang Kato*, pp. 88-90.
39. *Africa Pulse*, Vol. VI, No., 1, April 1975, p. 5.
40. Samuel O. Odunaiké, the then President of the AEA, in his Opening Address to the Third General Assembly (Bouaké 1977) said, "Our Graduate Schools of Theology are meant to put the foregoing into contemporary thought and language, clothed with the correct academic syllabuses. Furthermore, Africa does not wish to be drawn into the unhealthy divisiveness of our brethren in Europe and America even though some of them are well-meaning ... One thing which this Assembly must not overlook is the need to ensure that the strongest possible link exists between our Graduate Schools of Theology and AEAM. We should not establish the Schools and abandon them to scholars whose sole preoccupation is academic excellence. The Schools must be seen to operate under the overall umbrella of AEAM without losing their academic independence." *Afroscope*, No., 13, October 1977, p. 4.
41. Compare ACTEA Directory of Theological Schools in Africa, published in 1985 and ACTEA Directory Supplement 1988.
42. *Africa Now*, February 1976.
43. Paper Association of Evangelicals of South Africa (AESA) Council Meeting 1979 Agenda Item Position on Relationships with non-Evangelical Bodies, p. 3. AEA files.
44. *Target*, November 23, 1975, No. 175, p. 2.
45. Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Kisumu: Evangel 1975, p. 149.
46. Peter Falk, *The Growth of the Church in Africa*, Kinshasa: Institut Supérieur Théologique de Kinshasa 1985 (in 1979 published by Zondervan Cooperation), p. 470.
47. Jonathan Hildebrandt, *History of the Church in Africa. A Survey*. Achimota 1990, third revised

edition, p. 245.

48. Interview with Prof. J.N.K. Mugambi on February 17, 1992 at Nairobi University, Kenya.

49. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 15-16.

50. AEA's letter of December 31, 1975 to friends of AEA concerning Byang Kato's death. AEA files.

51. W. Harold Fuller of SIM in his letter of January 21, 1976 to Jim Halbert, AEA office, Nairobi and Halbert's reply of February 13, 1976. AEA files.

52. Interview with Rev. Gyukbok Choms from the Jaba tribe of Nigeria (Kato's tribe) on March 3, 1992 at NEGST, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya.

53. E. Maillefer, *Report of the Administrative Secretary to the Third General Assembly (Bouaké 1977)*, p. 2: "And as stated by Rev. Osei-Mensah in the memorial service held in Kenya, one could almost wonder whether Byang Kato died of exhaustion." AEA files.

54. *Global Report (WEF)*, Vol. 6, No. 1., p. 2.

55. Bruce J. Nicholls, "Byang H. Kato - A Personal Tribute," *Theological News (WEF)*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (January-March 1976).

Some other memorials and eulogies are to be found in:

Canon Burgess Carr, "African Church Leader Drowns," *AACC Newsletter*, January 1976, pp. 2-3.

P.A. Bergwerff, "In gesprek met dr. Byan (sic) Kato (I)," *Nederlands Dagblad*, Donderdag 8 januari 1976 and "In gesprek met dr. Byang Kato (II)," *Nederlands Dagblad*, Vrijdag 9 januari 1976.

"Byang Kato Drowns," *Good News Broadcaster* [?], February 1976, p. 12.

*Africa Now*, No. 85, March-April 1976, p. 7.

Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 98-104. She mentions comments and expressions from Rev. Simon Ibrahim, General Secretary ECWA, from SIM Deputy Director Harold Fuller, from Mr. Oyebabejo of the Nigerian High Commission in Kenya, from Mr. Eric Maillefer, Administrative Secretary of AEA, from Rev. Gottfried Osei-Mensah, from Howard O. Jones of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and from the late Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, the Founder of l'Abri Fellowship.

56. T. Adeyemo's Foreword in Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 11).

Cp. also T. Adeyemo, unpublished *Byang Kato Lectures*, Lecture One *Byang Kato: The Man*, p. 1, (ACTEA International Lectureship 1986-1987). AEA files.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

58. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, pp. 98, 100-103. De la Haye's book gives a chronology of Byang Kato's life, pp. 114-118.

59. This hymn was written by John Newton, a former slave trader, who later fought against slavery. The first stanza reads:

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found / Was blind, but now I see."

T. Adeyemo, *The Gospel and Salvation*, Presented at Lausanne II in Manila. International Congress on World Evangelization, July 11-20, 1989, p. 1.

60. E. Maillefer, *Report of the Administrative Secretary to the Third General Assembly (Bouaké 1977)*, p. 2. AEA files.



61. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 89.
62. Byang Kato, [Report of, CB] *Special Meetings of the C.E.B.K. (Community of Baptist Churches in Kivu) and the C.B.K. (Community of Baptists in Kivu) in Goma, Zaire, October 26-29, 1974*, 2 pp. AEA files.
63. P.A. Bergwerff, "In gesprek met dr. Byan (sic) Kato (I)," *Nederlands Dagblad*, Donderdag 8 January 1976 (translation mine).
64. Mentioned in the appendix to a letter of the Association of Evangelicals of South Africa (AESA) to Waldron Scott, then General Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), of July 22, 1980. The enclosure is entitled *AESA Council Meeting 1979 Agenda Item: AEA Position on Relationships with non-Evangelical Bodies*, pp. 2-3. AEA files.
65. Sophie de la Haye, *Byang Kato*, p. 106.
66. T. Adeyemo, unpublished *Byang Kato Lectures*. Lecture One *Byang Kato: The Man*, (ACTEA International Lectureship 1986-1987), p. 8. AEA files.
67. Paul Bowers, "Evangelical Theology in Africa: Byang Kato Legacy," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 1981, p. 35. See for an enlarged review *Themelios*, Vol. 5, No. 3, May 1980, pp. 33-34.
68. Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, Oxford: Oxford Regnum Books 1992, p. 413.