

The Spiritual Formation of a Man of God

In this article we want to focus on some of the characteristics of Byang Kato. Kato's personal commitment to the gospel was exceptionally focussed and consistent, and did not go unnoticed by the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and Evangelical Church West Africa (ECWA) leaders. Four qualities of his character became particularly dominant, and that the Lord honoured, and that are a challenge to all who desire to honour God.

First, Kato's prayer life was detailed and methodical. He maintained a spiritual journal, a record of spiritual insights and thoughts. Entries show how he would list his prayer requests and the date that each prayer was answered. In September 1961, for example, he prayed that his wife would have more interest in study and love God and his word. Three months later, he noted that she was interested in attending the Girl's Christian Training Institute in Kwoi, which she did.

On January 14, 1962, also, he prayed for a bicycle. Two days later, January 16, he notes that the prayer was answered and includes a Scripture reference, Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Second, Kato had a tender conscience. An example of this comes from a missionary teacher at the Igbaja Bible School, Mr. Al Classen. Classen remembers one night when Kato turned up at his house in distress. Classen was in bed when Kato knocked on the door.

He wanted to talk to him about some issue of personal defeat. After reading with him and praying, Kato went home with peace of mind restored. Classen testifies that he saw in Kato "the secret of a life that was to become a blessing to many, including myself."

Third, Kato's Christian character was evident in how he cultivated his family life. From the time of his marriage in 1957, Kato had been determined to raise a distinguished Christian family.

One friend remembers.

As young married people, Byang and Jummai demonstrated what a Christian home should be like. From the first day, they read the Bible and prayed together. I never saw them frown or talk harshly to each other.

By late 1960 he and his wife had three children and Kato had developed a biblical theology of the Christian family. Part of this can be attributed to a course he did with the American-based Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) in the summer of 1966. This course had a huge impact on Kato and his understanding of child evangelism and conversion.

At the first assembly of AEAM in Limuru, Kenya in 1969, he gave a lecture on "The Youth in the African Church." In this lecture he lamented that "in many Christian homes family worship, joint family devotions, and prayers are not observed," and he argued that "a good Christian home should be the foundation of youth work."

According to the testimony of his wife he was patient in the home and taught the children the Bible, making sure they understood what he was reading.

He later wrote,

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 **fourth** characteristic of Kato's commitment to the gospel was his insatiable desire for learning, his diligence in study, and love of books.

In one account Kato visited the home of a missionary one evening in Zabolo. When he entered the living room he went straight for the bookcase, and falling on his knees, said, "when will I have books like these?"

As time went on, however, Kato became persuaded of the importance of theological training, a conviction that would only grow stronger. He became convinced that the theological problems in the African church in his day were due to biblical ignorance and an "inadequate emphasis on theological education on the part of missionaries."

He said,

most of the missionaries lack sound theological education. In some circles it has been felt that those candidates who could not qualify for higher level seminary studies could go to the mission field instead So a mammoth church has been established without the depth of theology that the church needs. Christian leaders are now vulnerable to the tactics of ecumenism with its basic universalistic premise....