

# Ubani, Friday Okoro (1922–2013)

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ONYEBUCHI THOMAS OPARA

Onyebuchi Thomas Opara

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Friday Okoro Ubani was a pastor and administrator in Nigeria.

## Early Life, Education, and Marriage

Friday Okoro Ubani was born in October 1922 on a prominent market day called Nkwo. Hence the name Okoronkwo as he was fondly called by his mother Nwala.<sup>1</sup> Ubani's father, Nweke Ubani, was a *dibia* (native doctor) of great repute and known as the greatest and most powerful spiritist in Obete Umuoha. As a young person, he was acquainted with the worship of the gods of his father. He grew up into a young, vibrant, energetic, and hardworking man.<sup>2</sup>

Ubani, like other privileged children, went to school and successfully completed his standard six level of education. At the end of the 1964-1965 school year, he received a diploma certificate from the Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA). From 1970 to 1976 he studied at the same school and earned a Bachelor of Arts in theology degree. His passion for excellence was his motivation throughout his undergraduate studies at ASWA.<sup>3</sup> After graduation, Friday O. Ubani got a good job as a clerk at the Wide and Skin Company in Kano, in northern Nigeria. He prospered as a businessman. He was known to enjoy dancing and he frequented places of dance.<sup>4</sup>

Ubani returned home from Kano with the desire to marry a woman who would be his dance partner at the disco club. Fortunately, he discovered through his future wife that there was a better place to go than the disco club, and that is God's house.<sup>5</sup> The marriage was blessed with three sons and three daughters.

Elina returned from school and saw the young Friday for the first time in the company of his father and uncle. The prospective in-laws from Ibeme were directed by people who knew Elina Fred Njoku as a reserved and focused Seventh-day Adventist who refused to be distracted. Their only fear was if Elina would accept Friday's hand in marriage. On the condition that Friday Okoro Ubani would become a Seventh-day Adventist, Elina Fred Njoku accepted the marriage proposal and they were married.<sup>6</sup>

## Conversion and Pastoral Ministry

Friday embraced Christianity through his wife. At the beginning of their marriage he had no intention of becoming a Christian, let alone a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, as he was already a member of the D. Lawrence Fraternity, an American based secret cult. At first he did not allow his wife to attend church services, as he himself did not attend church. Elina persevered and started a home Sabbath School, when he had gone to work, with help of Adventist pastors and other church workers. Akawo Friday, as he was popularly known, eventually surrendered his life to our Savior Jesus Christ through the ministration of his wife.<sup>7</sup>

The young and famous Akawo Friday was faced with the immediate challenge of losing his well-paid job which promised a good future, since he would no longer work on Sabbath. He accepted the challenge in good faith, left his job, and became a literature evangelist from 1958 to 1963. Evangelist Friday O. Ubani walked through the streets of Kano preaching the gospel through the printed pages.<sup>8</sup>

Working as a literature evangelist served as a springboard for the leap into pastoral ministry. In 1964 he proceeded to the Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA) where he acquired a diploma certificate. From 1970 to 1976 he returned to ASWA and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in theology, graduating with a first-class division.<sup>9</sup>

His wife, who was God's human instrument to bring about his conversion, worked hard in various departments at ASWA to provide financial support to her husband to ensure he graduated from ASWA (now Babcock University). Her support and diligence were rewarded in 1976 as she saw her husband graduate.

His first place of ministerial assignment was Emii Owerri as an evangelist between 1977 and 1979. He was then assigned as a district leader from 1980 to 1982 in Owerri township district. From 1983 to 1985 he served as the Sabbath School and Lay Activities director in the East Nigeria Conference. In 1986 he became the president of the East Nigeria Conference.<sup>10</sup> Due to an administrative challenge, he could not complete his three-year tenure, so he voluntarily stepped aside and asked to be sent to the field to continue his pastoral function. He served as district leader in Nkpor from 1988 to 1990. In 1991 he returned to Ntighauzor as the district leader and served there for seven years. He then retired in December 1997 and moved to his home village of Obete Ibeme.

His pastoral ministry was characterized by many remarkable events and miracles which are still appreciated. One such remarkable event in the ministry of Pastor Ubani was the miraculous conversion of his father, the great *dibia*, from an idol worshiper into a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, together with his mother. It was a sight to behold as the shrine and the gods were burned, but it did not happen without resistance from the camp of the devil. The demons resisted with loud cries that could be clearly heard by observers, and they violently shook the place, but they were subdued and rendered harmless by the power of God.<sup>11</sup> Through the faithful ministry of God's servant, all the shrines in Ntighauzor and Obete Ibeme have been razed to the ground and their places occupied by civil centers or church buildings or other structures that are beneficial to these communities.<sup>12</sup>

On two different occasions, Ubani prayed and helped a mentally deranged woman and a man. These events led to the conversion and baptism of many who were witnesses to divine intervention.<sup>13</sup> During the burial service for his father, the clouds were gathering and Ubani's son noted that it was going to rain, but the pastor replied that it would not rain. The rain is falling his son insisted. Pastor Ubani rose from his seat, went to the middle of the arena, and prayed with his hand stretched to heaven. A moment later the rain gave way to sunshine, and it did not rain again until three days after the burial. This further witnessed to all who were present that God honors those who honor Him. Mrs. Nwalu Ubani, the mother of Friday Ubani, became an evangelist after her conversion. Each time a member of the church or community came and shared a burden or challenge with her, she would simply say "Go to the Man (Jesus) who took away my addiction to inhaling snuff and He will take your burdens from you." With this simple but weighty testimony, she led many to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Pastor Ubani's life and ministry were characterized by soul-winning. People traveled across communities just to hear him preach the word of God during his many revival and public evangelism meetings. He was referred to as an ambassador of peace and a harbinger of love. Ubani lived a simple, faithful, and peaceful life. Those who knew him testify that he was ardent in keeping the Sabbath. Though his tithe was deducted from his pay, he never failed to pay a second tithe. People who knew Ubani well disclosed that he would always divide his salary into three equal portions. One portion was for himself and his family, another one-third for the less privilege, and the last portion for taking care of strangers that may cross his path within the month!<sup>15</sup>

On August 14, 2013, Pastor Friday O. Ubani was called by God to rest from his labors. He was buried on August 29, 2013.

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## SOURCES

Burial Program, Celebration of the Lives and Times of Pastor F. C. Ubani and Shepherdess Eunice N. Okoro Ubani. August 29, 2013. In private collection of the author.

"Friday O. Ubani," Service Record. Eastern Nigeria Union Conference archives, Osisioma, Abia State, Nigeria

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## NOTES

1. Burial Program, Celebration of the Lives and Times of Pastor F. C. Ubani and Shepherdess Eunice N. Okoro Ubani, August 29, 2013, in the author's private collection.
2. Ibid., 7.
3. "Friday O. Ubani," Service Record, Eastern Nigeria Union Conference archives, Osisioma, Abia state, Nigeria.

4. I. O. Nwadiuko, interview by the author at Obete Ibeme village on May 31, 2019.
5. D. N. Ahuwa, interview by the author at Obete Ibeme village on May 31, 2019.
6. Burial Program, Celebration of lives and Times of Pastor and Shepherdess F. O. Ubani and Eunice N. O. Ubani, August 29, 2013.
7. Ibid., 12.
8. Friday O. Ubani," Service Record.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. J. W. Nwaulu, F. C. Ogbonna, and Obia Blessing, interview by the author at Obete Ibeme village on May 31, 2019.
12. Levi Nwaeze, interview by the author at Ntighauzor community on May 30, 2019.
13. C. Ubani, M. A. Nwaukpa, and R. N. Nelson. interview by the author at Obete Ibeme village on June 1, 2019.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.

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