Gbenedio, Simeon Okan (1938–2016)

MICHAEL A. T. SENNE-AYA

Michael A. T. Senne-Aya, D.Min. (Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya) has been the pioneer president of the Edo Conference in the Western Nigeria Union Conference since 2012. He previously served as the last president of Edo-Delta Mission before its formal reorganization into two separate conferences.

Simeon Okan Gbenedio was the second president (1986–1990) of the Bendel Mission in Nigeria (now Edo and Delta Conferences).
Early Life

Simeon Okan Gbenedio was born March 6, 1938, into the polygamous family of his father, Chief Gbenedio Onohwoakpona of Orhoakpor. His mother was Madam Erherieroro Gbenedio, and they lived in Isiokolo of Orhokpokpor-Agbarho, in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. He was the fourth child and the only son among five siblings of his mother.\(^1\)

Education, Early Career, and Marriage

Gbenedio started formal education at the African Church Primary, Orhokpokpor, in 1947, and continued and completed it at Local Authority School, Oviri-Agbarho, on December 28, 1955. He also obtained the secondary modern school Leaving Certificate in March 1959 from Local Authority Secondary Modern School, Ughelli. He passed the University of London General Certificate of Education in 1965 and 1967.

Gbenedio was led to the Seventh-day Adventist Church through the Bible correspondence program of the Voice of Prophecy (VOP) domiciled at Ibadan, Oyo State capital, Nigeria, in 1959. He completed the required lessons assisted by VOP representative Pastor Lazarus Ovuem Osekete and subsequently was baptized into the church on December 10, 1960, at Agbarho by Pastor John Nwogwugwu, from the then East Nigerian Mission in the West African Union Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.\(^2\)

Simeon O. Gbenedio served as a field overseer with the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Orogun between 1959 and 1970 but resigned his employment to pursue his ministerial dream with the Adventist Church. He attended the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) in 1970, where he obtained a ministerial certificate (1972) and a bachelor’s degree in theology and history (1976). He also received a master’s degree in religion from Andrews University (Nigerian cohort) in 1997.\(^3\)

While on transfer to Agbarho-Otor from Orogun, all in Delta State, he met and married his lovely wife, Martha Oyabevwe (Oshokare) in 1965. The marriage was blessed with six children: Dorcas, Gift, Emmanuel, Helen, Joy, and Fortune.\(^4\)

Ministry

Pastor Simeon O. Gbenedio was a good student of the Bible, and this helped him in his evangelistic thrusts. He was instrumental in the establishment of many churches, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Orogun in the early 1960s (now Orogun District) and the one at Okpara-Inland between 1966 and 1970\(^5\). He formally began his ministerial career with the church at Uromi in 1976 after graduation. Uromi was then the Ishan District headquarters. By this time, all churches in Edo and Delta States were part of the West Nigerian Mission. Gbenedio served at Ishan District from 1976 to 1980. He was ordained to the gospel ministry on May 16, 1981, and was transferred to the Warri District (now entire Delta State) to serve in 1981 and remained there until 1984. He became the secretary of the Bendel Mission under President Chima and also is listed as the secretary of the Lay Activities and Sabbath School departments and the Communication and Education departments.\(^6\) He was also the district leader in Benin in 1985.

After the death of Paul C. Chima, the first president of the Bendel Mission, on December 6, 1985, Pastor Gbenedio was elected as the second president of Bendel Mission, a position he held from 1986 to 1990. From 1991 to 1992, he was the district leader of Owan District and the director of South East Mission, Calabar, from 1993 to 1995. He returned to the Bendel Mission (now Edo and Delta Conferences) in 1996 and was made the leader of Sapele District between 1996 and 1999. He retired from denominational employment in 2004, his send-off ceremony was conducted in March 2005 by the new conference administration of young officers: J. E. Umoru (president), M. A. Senn-Aya (secretary), and A. O. Ibhidieju (treasurer).\(^7\) In his retirement, he was the pastor of a church in Isoko District. He finally settled at Sapele, due to old age. At the centenary celebration (1914–2014) of Adventism in Nigeria, Pastor Gbenedio was honored by the Edo, Delta, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom Conferences for the meritorious services he had rendered in those conferences. At the time of his death, Pastor S. O. Gbenedio was survived by his wife, six children, nineteen grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, three daughters-in-law, and two sons-in-law. He died on August 10, 2016, and was buried in his hometown of Orhoaokpor-Agbon, in Ethiope East Legal Government Area of Delta State amidst pomp and pageantry, on Tuesday, December 20, 2016.

Contribution/Legacy

Dr. Adekunle A. Alalade, a former vice-chancellor of Babcock University, noted, “We need to commend S. O. Gbenedio for the SDA Church in Edo-Delta Mission.”\(^8\) Church membership had risen to 3,192 with 13 organized churches at the time he left the Bendel Mission. He will certainly be remembered as a worthy ambassador of Christ, a trustworthy and dependable man.\(^9\)
SOURCES


S. O. Gbenedio Worker’s Questionnaire, December 30, 1999, Nigeria Union Mission Archives.

NOTES


8. Ibid., 56.