

Daniel, Luka Tambaya (1943–2019)

YOHANNA UCHOPO HARRY

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Luka Tambaya Daniel was an administrator, educator and author from Nigeria.

Early Life

Luka Tambaya Daniel was born to an agrarian family on January 23, 1943.¹ His father was Malaika Daniel Rabakaya and his mother was Peninnah Anafam Rabaya. His father had a younger brother who was an ordained minister of the Adventist Church and his name was Sila Rabakaya. Luka was the first and only child of his mother who died when he was young. As an orphan child, the responsibility for his early upbringing rested on his father and grandmother. His father remarried and, from his stepmother, Luka had 16 brothers and sisters.

The family lived in an obscure village, Ukamoff Kayarda, in a largely rural settlement along the Jos-Zaria Road, some 76 kilometers north of Jos, capital of Plateau state, Nigeria, and about 141.6 kilometers northwest of Kaduna, capital of Kaduna state, Nigeria. Though his parents were illiterate, through adult education his father learned how to read and write in the Hausa language, as this was a requirement for baptism at that time. When Luka was five, his parents embraced the Adventist faith and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1948. Before their conversion, the parents belonged to the Sudan Interior Mission Church (SIM). The acronym of this church has gone through several changes. From SIM the name was changed to Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA), but it is currently called Evangelical Churches Winning All.

It is well known in the family that at an early age Luka was highly sociable and kind to his peers. He could organize and lead in the local community farm labor (*gaiya*). Growing up in a remote rural setting, he had good knowledge of the folklore of his people, the Akurmi ethnic group.

Education and Marriage

Luka Daniel did not have the privilege of attending school in his early childhood until 1953 when, at the age of ten, he enrolled at the Jengre S.D.A. Primary School. On the strength of his proven leadership ability, he was appointed as a class monitor at the junior primary school. In his final year at the senior primary, he was appointed as the general monitor of the school. As a brilliant and hardworking pupil, he was always at the top of his class. He completed his primary school and obtained the First School Living Certificate in 1958 and was

baptized the same year.² While he was anxious to proceed to secondary school, government secondary schools were very few and their common entrance examinations were always scheduled on Saturday. Luka decided not to break God's command to keep the Sabbath holy. In addition, the fees for the few Christian high schools were so exorbitant that his father could not afford to pay for his secondary education. Luka ended up going to a Secretariat Institute at Zaria in 1959 where he spent two years and acquired knowledge in secretarial services and typewriting skills. This was a challenging experience for the young lad who, for the first time, left home in search of further education. In the course of his two years at the Secretariat Institute, Luka performed at his usual best and graduated in December 1960 at the top of his class.

On the completion of his course at Zaria, the North Nigeria Mission (NNM) immediately offered him an opportunity to serve the Church in 1961. That year the NNM headquarters at Jengre was transferred to Anguldi from Bukuru town. Not satisfied with his low level of education after working for some time, in 1966 he applied for admission to the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) to pursue a four-year junior college course for a ministerial certificate.³ ACWA was an international institution with students from all over West Africa, including Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leon, and the francophone countries in West and Central Africa. After graduation from junior college, he applied for a degree course in theology at the same institution.

In the course of his degree program at ACWA, in 1970 the institution became affiliated with Andrews University in the United States. The name ACWA was later changed to the Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA), and now, having received a charter, it is called Babcock University. Following the affiliation, the program of studies was expanded. In addition to theology, other subjects taught were accounting, business administration, and religion. Beginning in 1970, students who graduated from ASWA were awarded Andrews University degrees. The affiliation boosted the image and prestige of ASWA and there was a sudden increase in the enrollment of students because its graduates were awarded international degrees.

During his junior college and degree program, Luka proved his intellectual and leadership capabilities. He belonged to several singing groups such as the Ministerial Quartet, King's Ambassadors (a band led by Pastor Herman Bauman), The Collegiate, and the Seminary or College Choir.⁴ During this time, Luka became involved in the politics of the Student Association. He won the election to become president of the association. During his tenure as president of the Student Association, the college enjoyed a period of peace and full cooperation of the students. He graduated in 1974 with a B.A. degree in theology.⁵

Although Luka and Rifkatu both attended the same Jengre Primary School, little did they know that one day they would be united as husband and wife. At that time primary school usually lasted for six years. While Luka was in Standard Three in 1956, Rifkatu was in Standard Five. Following the announcement of a policy change in education by the government on the duration of primary school from six to a period of seven years from 1957, Pastor A. D. Roberts, the president of NNM, decided to send Rifkatu to Ihie in East Nigeria where she completed her Standard Six. When Luka was completing his Class Seven in 1958, Rifkatu had finished her Standard Six and

was then working in the house of Pastor Roberts. By 1960, when Luka was employed by the NNM, Rifkatu was already at the headquarters at Jengre. In 1961, when the headquarters of the mission was transferred from Jengre to Bukuru, both Luka and Rifkatu also moved there. Since they desired further education, Luka enrolled in a junior college course at ACWA in 1962, and the following year Rifkatu was admitted to study nursing at Ile Ife S.D.A. Hospital Nursing Training School.

On the completion of her nursing training, Rifkatu returned to work at the Jengre S.D.A. Hospital. Though Luka was still studying the degree program in theology at ACWA, they decided to marry on July 14, 1968⁶ God graciously blessed the marriage with three children: a son, Danjuma Dauda, and two daughters, Miriam Iya (Mrs. M. I. Ayite), and Peninnah Talatuwa (Mrs. P. T. Nwazue).

Ministry

According to Luka, his uncle, Pastor Silas Rabakaya, positively influenced him in the choice of his calling as a gospel minister.⁷ His first assignment with the NNM was immediately following his graduation from the secretarial course in Zaria in 1962. It was the backdrop of the positive influence of his uncle that caused him to go for the ministerial certificate course at ACWA where he graduated in 1970. During holiday times, Luka usually returned to work for the mission headquarters at Anguldi. In 1974, when he graduated with B.A. in theology, he was hired as the pastor of Jos Church where he served until 1976.

To satisfy his unquenchable desire for further education, Luka decided to study Islam, which is the dominant religion in northern Nigeria. In 1977 he applied for a master's degree program in Middle East Studies at Loma Linda University (U.S.A.). As part of his fieldwork, he spent some time at Al-Ahzar University, in Cairo, Egypt. In 1979 he completed the M.A. program. Not long after his return to NNM, he was ordained into the gospel ministry in 1979 at a special service at the Jengre SDA Church.⁸ Shortly after his ordination, he was elected as director for Sabbath School, lay activities, Voice of Prophecy, and the Bible Correspondence School. This was soon followed by his appointment as secretary of NNM in 1980, and in 1981 the post of treasurer was added to his responsibilities, making him secretary/treasurer of the NNM. This appointment marked a major turning point in his career. Luka served as both secretary and treasurer and this enabled him to gain practical experience in both areas. He learned administration in the office of the secretary, as well as good financial management in the office of the treasurer.

While serving as the director for Sabbath School, he was involved in the translation and printing of the Hausa Sabbath School Quarterly (*Kuyasuwar Ranan Asaba*). He also engaged in the revision and the printing of the Hausa hymnal (*Wakokin Yabo, Songs of Praise*), as well as reproduction of *God's Answers (Allh Ya Ansa Tambayanka)*. Furthermore, he encouraged and promoted the development of the Adventist Men's Organization and the Adventist Women's Ministries in the NNM. These two strong arms of the church made soul-winning activities their main goals. The combined efforts of these organizations, coupled with the evangelistic thrust of

Harvest 90, greatly increased the baptized membership of the church in the north. Luka sought financial assistance from abroad and, with funds generated internally, he built a church within the premises of the mission headquarters in Bukuru. He also laid concrete plans for the construction of a befitting house for the president of the mission.

He served the NNM so creditably well that at the Nigeria Union Mission Constituency Meeting convened at ACWA in 1984, Luka was elected as secretary of the union.⁹ The new post necessitated the movement of Luka and Rifkatu and their three children to Lagos, where he served with the first national president, Pastor Caleb O. Adeogun, who took over from Pastor Andersen. He served in the capacity of secretary until 1990 when he was elected as president of the Nigeria Union Mission, following the election of Pastor Adeogun as executive secretary for the Africa-Indian Ocean Division (AID).¹⁰

Despite the responsibility weighing on him as secretary, and subsequently as president of the union, Luka created the time to organize public evangelism campaigns, particularly in and around Lagos. He did not allow his administrative work to be done at the expense of his primary calling as a gospel minister.

At the 1995 General Conference Session, Luka was elected president of AID. It was while serving in this capacity that a major reorganization of the church in Africa took place and gave birth to the East-Central Africa Division, Southern Africa-India Ocean Division, and West-Central Africa Division. Following the reorganization, Luka was reelected as president of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD). He was again reelected as president of WAD, but ill health caused him to apply for early retirement in 2008.

Later Life

Luka retired early because of a brain tumor. Though the operation on his brain was successful, he subsequently encountered serious physical challenges that increased as the years rolled by. As his health continued to deteriorate, he was rendered partially paralyzed and he depended on the use of a specially designed walking stick and crutches during the remaining part of his life. The partial paralysis ultimately confined him to his house until his demise on October 30, 2019.

Administrative Challenges

Luka inherited some seemingly insurmountable administrative challenges from his predecessors. Among the major bottlenecks was the lack of educational and medical institutions. There were very few Adventist education and health institutions in Nigeria. In the West Nigeria Mission, the only educational institutions were ASWA and the Adventist Grammar School at Ede. In the East Nigeria Mission, there were two institutions: Adventist High School and the Nigeria Training College, both were located at Ihie, Nbawsi, and both of them were badly affected by the Nigeria Civil War which lasted from 1967 to 1970. With the exceptions of the Jengre S.D.A.

Primary School and the S.D.A. School at Laranto in Jos, the North Nigeria Mission had virtually no institution of post-primary education. The only medical institutions in the country were the Jengre S.D.A. Hospital, at Ile Ife which housed the Nursing Training School, the Ahoda S.D.A. Hospital, and the Ngwa Community Hospital operated by the Church.

Even these educational and health institutions had been taken over by the federal military government institutions and their operation was entirely at the discretion of the government. This short-sighted decision of the government left the Adventist foreign missionaries with no option other than to leave the country and returned to their home countries.

The action of the government had deleterious effects on the administrators of the Nigeria Union and the local missions. The departure of many of the expatriate missionaries created vacuums and drastically reduced the workforce of the Adventist Church in the country.

Undismayed by the enormity of the administrative challenges, Luka courageously rallied round the officials at the union and the various mission fields to use all available resources to tackle the problems that hampered the progress of God's work in Nigeria. To provide resources and maintain the union and keep the local missions going, he encouraged the stewardship department to promote the spirit of systematic giving to attain financial self-reliance. Despite the weak financial basis of the union and the local missions, Luka stressed the urgent need to boost the workforce of the Adventist institutions. He also encouraged and promoted the construction of Adventist educational and medical institutions in the local mission fields.

By the time Luka was elected president of AID, the Nigeria Union Mission had recorded some successes which left an admirable legacy. Among these were the construction and establishment of Adventist educational and medical institutions such as the Adventist Secondary Technical School, Owerrinta in Abia state; Hyde Memorial Secondary School in Jengre, Plateau state; the Ubakala Clinic in Umuahia, Abia state; and several rural clinics in the NNM at Warsa, Maigamo, Kurgwi, and other locations.

Legacy at the Union and Division

Luka is remembered for his remarkable achievements while serving the Adventist Church in several capacities even before his election as president of the union mission and the division. While serving as secretary/treasurer of NNM, he supported the organization and construction of the SDA church in Mistali, a suburban town of Jos, capital of Plateau state. Due to lack of qualified staff, he translated the English Sabbath School quarterly into the Hausa language (*Kuyasuwar Ranar Asaba*) when he was in NNM. He also applied the knowledge he acquired while working on his M.A. degree in the study of Islam to write some religious tracts while still in the NNM. The tracts were published when he was secretary of the Nigeria Union Mission. Among them were *Understanding Islam: The Mystery of Our Religion; Is God One or Three? Do the Qur'an and the Bible Agree?* and *Mohammed and Jesus were Brothers*. Though the tracts are now out of print, they were widely distributed and very useful,

particularly during evangelistic campaigns. In addition to his numerous responsibilities as the secretary and president of the Nigeria Union, he created time to organize evangelistic campaigns in and around Lagos, during which a substantial number of souls were converted and baptized, thereby increasing church membership. He played a role in arranging for Babcock University to be chartered by the government. On the occasion of handing over the certificate of the charter on May 10, 1999, in the office of the National University Commission at Abuja, on behalf of proprietors of Babcock University, Luka, with exhilarating delight and joy, received and lifted high the long-awaited answer to the prayers of the Adventist Church in Nigeria. This sealed one of the crowning achievements of Luka Tambaya Daniel.

Source

Funeral Program of Luka Tambaya Daniel published by Seventh-day Adventist Conference Headquarters Anguldi, Bukuru, Plateau state, Nigeria, October 30, 2019.

NOTES

1. Funeral Program of Luka Tambaya Daniel published by Seventh-day Adventist Conference Headquarters Anguldi, Bukuru, Plateau state, Nigeria, October 30, 2019, 4.
2. Funeral Program of Luka Daniel, 4.
3. Ibid., 5.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 5.
6. Shepherdess Rifkatu Daniel, interview by the author, December 19, 2019, Jos.
7. L. T. Daniel in informal discussion with J. G. Nengel, June 1984, Lagos.
8. Funeral Program of Luka Daniel, 5.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

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