Vestiges Biographical Notes Series

A Biographical Sketch of Reverend Jonathan C. Yep, 1934-2018

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Born in 1934 close to Dembe, one of the oldest Mambilla villages, Rev. Jonathan C. Yep was a Christian clergyman who broke from the Mambilla traditional religion despite his parents being its custodians (Kangla 27 Jan. 2014). Dembe, his hometown, is located in the Eastern part of Gembu, the capital of Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State.



Jonathan Yep in 2018 a few days before his death. Photo: Nadir Nasidi CC BY 4.0

Jonathan Yep was from the Mambilla ethnic group. Despite the fact that he was from a conservative family deeply rooted in Mambilla traditional religion, he embraced Christianity and was baptized at 5:30 pm on the 15th of January, 1958 (Nasidi, 2014: 38). After this he was persecuted by some of his family members, but he stood firmly by his beliefs (Yum 16 Dec. 2013; Abba 4 June 2014).

To help Yep develop further, in 1964 the Christian Missionaries enrolled him into a literacy class at the Mambilla Baptist Convention Church so he could learn how to read and write in English. Due to his academic excellence, he obtained sponsorship from the North American Baptist College to further his education in Ndu, Cameroon which he completed in 1967 and where continued as a teacher for seven months.

Upon his return from Cameroon, Yep was posted to Mayo-Ndaga as a pastor in 1968 and rose to the position of a Reverend. Mambilla pastors are influential in their communities. Although pastors are sometimes critical of their Fulbe neighbours, Yep served as a bridge linking the two seemingly competing and sometimes warring factions (Blench and Dendo, 1984: 6; Ahmed, 1992: 291-292). This he did through preaching, persuasion and his unique sense of camaraderie (Tukur 16 June 2014).

In 1979, Yep was invited by concerned individuals to become involved in politics, which he rejected at first. However, he was persuaded by his colleagues, especially Muhammadu Baru and Muhammad Auwal. Initially, he joined the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), but due to some inconsistencies in the party's structure and manifesto, he, together with his camp, later joined the Great Nigeria People's Party (GNPP). In 1979 Yep was elected as the party chairman; Salihu

Dogo became the first chairman Sardauna Local Government Area and Alhaji Abubakar Barde became then governor of the now-defunct Gongola State (continuing until 1983).

Through his political activities on the Mambilla Plateau, Yep contributed greatly to the development of the area, especially by settling ethnic disputes between the Fulbe and the Mambilla (Nasidi, 2016: 570-571). A typical example was the conflict of 2002, which claimed a lot of lives on both sides and led to the destruction of property valued at millions of Naira (Sa'idu and Nasidi 2018). Yep also promoted the building of roads at Sardauna and Bali Local Government Areas, the construction of some air-strips for the easy landing of helicopters on the plateau, to mention but a few of his contributions.

Although Yep suffered from a stroke in 2009 he continued to serve his people, particularly in peace-building and the formation of *Jugulde*, a community based organisation that patrols the breath and length of the plateau to ensure security, peace and stability. It was for this meritorious service to his people that in 2015, the Baju of Mambilla Land, Dr. Shehu II turbaned him as the Masanin Mambilla, a traditional title given to orators who are not only wise, but also conversant with the history of the people.

On the 7th of July, 2018, Jonathan Yep died at the age of 84. His funeral was blessed by hundreds of people because of his sound moral character and sense of justice, especially to the Muslim Fulbe. He was married to Monica (also from Dembe) in 1958 and the marriage was blessed with eight children; four male and four female (Nasidi, 2014: 9-13).

Further research is planned on the life of Jonathan Yep with particular reference to his dual roles as a clergyman and as a traditional leader who played a significant role in the administration of justice and the promotion of peace and stability on the Mambilla plateau. This

will provide basic information about the nature and dynamics of Christian/Muslim relations on the plateau, as well as the role of traditional leaders in the promotion of peace and stability.

Note on Sources

This short piece relies on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included oral interviews conducted with both Christian and Muslim leaders on the Mambilla Plateau. The interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014. The secondary sources include published journal articles, theses, book chapters and books.

Interviews

Abba Paul 4th Jan. 2014, Kambu Quarters.

Kangla Joseph 27 Jan. 2014, Dembe.

Tukur Ahmad 16 Dec. 2014, Gembu.

Yep Jonathan 2nd Feb. 2014, Gembu.

Yum Corou 16 Dec. 2013, Dembe.

References

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SA'IDU, S.J. and NASIDI, N.A. 2018. 'From Friends to Foes: Intergroup Relations in the Mambilla since the Conflict of 2002'. *Pacem Journal of Peace and Development*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Veritas University, Abuja, pp. 103-105.

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