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JONATHAN UDO EKONG AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA, (1936-1982)

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ABSTRACT

Church history in Africa and Nigeria in particular will be incomplete if a significant portion is not accorded the late Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong. Undoubtedly, he was a path-breaker and an outstanding religious leader. He was the first African to establish contact with the Lutherans in the United States of America and negotiate for the denomination to be established for his people; the first black from this part of the world to accept the Lutheran faith, doctrines and practices, and thus, recognized as the founder of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria. He was the first African to be awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Theology by the Concordia Seminary, St. Louis Mission, United States of America, in recognition of his many years of faithful and fruitful ministry. As an outstanding instrument of "native enlightenment" in Nigeria and one of the "makers" of the present-day Nigeria, he liberated Nigerians through the impartation of educational skills, medical services and religious indoctrination. His contributions are recognized both within and outside Nigeria. Indeed, the series of national and international awards attest to this fact about this early bird.

INTRODUCTION

The Church organization known today as the Lutheran Church of Nigeria came into existence 75 years ago, precisely, on the 24th of April, 1936. The Church has its operational headquarters at Obot Idim, Ibesikpo in Ibesikpo-Asutan Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.¹

The Lutheran Church world wide was founded by an outstanding reformer called Dr. Martin Luther, who was born in Eisleben, Germany in 1483 and died in 1546.² The circumstances relating to Luther's confrontation with the papacy and his subsequent ex-communication from the Catholic fold are familiar facts of history and need not to detain us here. However, it is

important to note that Dr. Martin Luther's reformation agenda resulted in the emergence of a world wide religious body, known as the Lutheran Church, which spread to many parts of Europe and the American continent.

In the 1930's, Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong an indigene of Akwa Ibom State, who was studying in the United States of America established contact with some members of the Lutheran faith and therefore facilitated the advent of the Church in Nigeria. Seventy five years after the establishment, the Lutheran church has registered indelible marks on the Nigerian landscape, such that no meaningful appraisal of Nigerian social history could be successfully undertaken without a consideration of the Lutheran story.

This study is concerned with the biography of Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong, the founder of the Lutheran movement in Nigeria. It traces his birth, education, the circumstances that triggered his far search for a new denomination for his people in Ibesikpo clan, and his role in the growth of what has clearly emerged as one of the most successful Christian denominations in Nigeria. In addition, some specific milestones recorded by the Church which have come to impact positively on the lives of Nigerians will also be examined.

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

The year 1881 is very significant to the whole world in general and Akwa Ibom State in particular. While it witnessed the alliance of three Empires, made up of Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary in world history, a religious leader in the person of Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong was born. He was born in Afaha Etok, in Ibesikpo-Asutan Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State to Obong Udo Ekong Ndem Ekping Udo Nkok Eto, an outstanding chief, a traditional ruler, head of the clan and executive leader of *Ekpo Nyoho* secret society. His mother was Mma Ubaha Anwa.³

Afaha Etok is unique among the Ibesikpo villages. It is the birth place of many prominent sons and daughters such as the late Professor Donald Ekong, a distinguished scholar of international repute and founding Vice-Chancellor of many Universities, late Ambassador Joe Ekong and His Grace, Most Rev. Christian Ekong, the incumbent National President of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, among others. Afaha Etok Ibesikpo is also the traditional centre of *Ekpo Nyoho* in Ibesikpo clan.⁴

At birth, the young Jonathan Ekong was christened *Akai Ubaha* (the forest that consumes lives) by his father. This was done in the fear that since his earlier children had died young; Jonathan too might die young and would be buried in the same forest. On the other hand, his mother named him *Okponesip* (she would have been great if all her children were alive). The name "Jonathan" was given to him in accordance with the prevailing Christian custom in those days which dictated that converts brought for baptism must be given Christian names which invariably meant English names or at least Bible names.⁵

Jonathan Ekong grew up under his parent's influence. Because his father was the executive leader of *Ekpo Nyoho* in Ibesikpo clan, Jonathan, the earliest surviving son, was initiated into the society as a toddler. The *Ekpo Nyoho* society was the government and law enforcement agency of the day. It controlled power, movements of persons and goods, made and enforce laws and adjudicated on matters affecting the community. Male children were also initiated into *Ekpo Nyoho* cult as a way of ensuring that they had freedom of movement during the cult's season, otherwise, they would be lumped together with women and driven off the streets of the villages at every turn. Based on Jonathan's background, it was his responsibility to assist the father in the process of offering sacrifices to the deities. It was also expected that at the death of his father, Jonathan would inherit the religious practices. But for some reasons, he abandoned such orientation.⁶

JONATHAN'S ROLE IN EVANGELISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT OF HIS PEOPLE

By 1909, the Qua Iboe Mission which was first established in 1887, at Ibeno in Akwa Ibom State, by Rev. Samuel Bill⁷ had spread to Aka Offot village (now in the heart of Uyo capital city) and located about five kilometers from Afaha Etok Ibesikpo. As was a common practice, a small village school was also established there by Rev. Jimmy Willie Westgarth, the pioneer missionary to the area. The news of the missionary enterprise soon spread to Afaha Etok Ibesikpo. Young Jonathan Ekong, along with other youths from Afaha Ibesikpo on hearing the news of the "white man's exploits" went to Aka Offot to see things for themselves. Indeed, this contact had tremendous impact on him and eventually resulted in the abandonment of his traditional beliefs and the assimilation of the Christian faith.⁸

The news of Jonathan's contact with the missionaries was not well received by the members of the *Ekpo Nyoho* society. In fact, they became very upset about Jonathan's lead role and invited him to the village square for questioning. They complained bitterly that it had come to their knowledge that, where there was a Church, *Ekpo Nyoho* society could not operate and when *Ekpo Nyoho* member dies, a son who was a Church goer could not see the father's face. They sternly reminded Jonathan that his father, Udo Ekong Ndem, was a prominent *Ekpo Nyoho* head and that his grandfather, Ndem Ekping, had sacrificed his first daughter for *Ekpo Nyoho's* cause. *Ekpo Nyoho* society members therefore hoped that based on such antecedents in the Ekping's family, Jonathan's father might give his son away to be killed, because in their opinion, once the ring leader was eliminated, the whole idea would have been laid to rest.⁹

However, despite the confrontation by *Ekpo Nyoho* society, Jonathan and his companions rather than being discouraged, agreed to go ahead to invite the white man to bring his Church and school to their village. When the request was received by Rev. Westgarth, he explained to them that they were young people who would neither be able to obtain land for the building of the Church nor procure stakes for such building since such tasks were meant for the adults. But such reply did not discourage Jonathan in his ambition to evangelize and enlighten his people.

Because of the dauntless tact of Jonathan and his companions, some elders in Afaha Ibesikpo later bought their vision of establishing a Church and school in Afaha Ibesikpo and spoke to the Village Council who eventually invited Rev. Westgarth to the village. However, after a Church building had been erected in a plot of land donated by the Village Council, a prominent Warrant Chief and *Ekpo Nyoho* leader, Chief Udo Udo did everything to see that Christianity was stopped from taking a foothold in Afaha and Ibesikpo clan - his area of authority. He eventually made a bitter complain to the Divisional Officer at Uyo, Mr. Robert Brooks, by laying claim to the land on which the Church building was erected. This development forced the Divisional Officer to direct the missionaries not to continue any longer with the project and the Church building was pulled down.¹⁰

It was during this period when everything seemed to have reached a dead end that a door was opened. One elderly man from Afaha Ibesikpo by name, Ete

Udo Mbom had a friend by name Chief Itam Okpo Eneokpon from Otung in Creek Town, Cross River State, whom he knew when he served as a labourer at Calabar. Chief Eneokpon who was one of the leading labour-buyers in Afaha Ibesikpo villages used to pay visit to his friend, Ete Udo Mbom in Afaha Ibesikpo. During one of his visits to Afaha Ibesikpo, Chief Eneokpon observed that certain daring youths from the area always trekked to and from Aka in that rain and sun for the purpose of attending school and were sometimes molested by *Ekpo Nyoho* masquerades. Moved by pity for the poor lads, Chief Eneokpon promised to lead them to have a Church and school in their own village, Afaha, if they would be interested. These pioneers became very anxious and expressed their interest to Chief Eneokpon and his companion, Edet Eriam Etikwe.¹¹

As one of the earliest literate indigenes of the village, Jonathan was saddled with the responsibility of writing the letter of invitation through Chief Eneokpon to the Creek Town Women Association of the Church of Scotland Mission (Presbyterian Church) for the establishment of the Church, he scribbled on a piece of paper with a pencil, the following application: *Eda Iko Abasi edi-o*¹², meaning (bring the gospel). After some months of anxious waiting, a reply was sent and Jonathan and his young companions were invited to Creek Town for interview.

On the 11th of December, 1912, some workers sponsored by the Creek Town Women's Association of the Church of Scotland Mission (Presbyterian Church) arrived at Afaha Ibesikpo bringing with them the first batch of trained teachers and pastors to begin Church and school work in Afaha. The first batch of teachers included, Mr. Asiya Eyo Ndiyo, Nyong Okon, Etim Eno, Okokon Itam and few others. The first preacher was Essien Oku Abasi Etim and the Officiating Minister was Rev. Ekpe Nko, who administered the sacraments quarterly. The teachers were ex-pupils of Duke Town, Hope Waddell and Creek Town Schools. The arrival of these pioneer workers and the subsequent establishment of the Church and school between 1912 and 1913 marked the beginning of a revolution not only in Afaha Ibesikpo itself but also in Ibesikpo clan as well.¹³

The problems associated with World War 1 (1914 - 1918) also had some setback for the mission project in Afaha Ibesikpo. For instance, Rev. Ekpe Nko could no longer undertake the visitation regularly to Afaha, hence, the

unes of the Afaha Church continued to dwindle until 1918, when the
hers started to abandon their mission and vision and devoted their interest
nonetary matters. Consequently, Afaha people, led by Jonathan Udo
ng, went to the Church Session at Creek Town to report the ugly
elopment to the authorities. The case was referred to Duke Town in
abar for deliberation. At the General Session in Duke Town, the
tionship of Afaha Church with the United Free Church of Scotland was
efully scrutinized. The Afaha people were informed by the Session that
e were boundaries mapped out for the different denominations in the
abar Province, in order to avoid conflicts of interests. It was clearly
ted out that Rev. Ekpe Nko had undertaken the work in Afaha Ibesikpo
ch was in Qua Iboe Mission area of influence. On that note, the Afaha
ple were advised to transfer their Church to the Qua Iboe Mission. The
eral Session eventually wrote a letter to facilitate the merger with Qua
e Mission. Consequently, the Afaha Church was officially merged with the
Iboe Mission.¹⁴

RLY EDUCATION

athan's early contact with Rev. Westgarth resulted in his admission into the
Iboe Mission School, Aka Offot from 1910 to 1912. He went on to attend
Scottish Mission School at Afaha Ibesikpo from 1913 to 1918, for his
nentary studies. In 1921, he was admitted into Etinan Institute and was
e until 1923 when the school was temporarily closed down due to the
cipal going on leave.

REER AS A MINISTER IN QUA IBOE MISSION

(Dr.) Jonathan Ekong's long and successful career as a minister of the
pel was made possible by an invitation extended to him by Rev. Westgarth
1923. He was charged with the responsibility of serving the Church at Itam,
Local Government Area and the out station in Aka Offot, in Christian
ctination, morning prayers, Sunday schools, evangelism, interpretation
other Church services.¹⁵

en he grew stronger in the faith, he was posted to Nnung Udoe area in
ikpo-Asutan Local Government Area. After sometimes, he was sent to
Nsit I, in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area, where he discharged his
isterial duties effectively and was described by Rev. Westgarth as "a most
t worthy worker". In July 1924, during the Qua Iboe Mission Field

Executive meeting, with Etubom Samuel Bill (founder of the Qua Iboe
Mission in Nigeria) in attendance as chairman, and Westgarth, Gamble and
Nelson as members, Jonathan was appointed as Assistant Evangelist for Itam,
with the responsibility of directly assisting Rev. Westgarth, who had an
estimated 60 congregations under the Itam Superintendency with 16 of such
congregations in Ibesikpo clan. His salary was £24 per annum.¹⁶

THE YEARNING FOR EDUCATION AND SECESSION FROM QUA IBOE MISSION BY THE IBESIKPO PEOPLE.

Whenever the Church was established, the people would cry for a school to be
established along with it. In this respect, many people in Ibesikpo wanted
schools and especially in view of the fact that the Qua Iboe Mission Central
School at Itam and Etinan Institute, Etinan were too far to serve the Ibesikpo
children who were yearning for educational opportunities. This background
informed Jonathan Ekong's decision to begin to canvass for the establishment
of a mission school in Ibesikpo clan to enable the children of the area to study
up to Standard Six.

By 1926, Ibesikpo stations and teachers under the Qua Iboe Mission School
management far out-numbered all other stations and teachers in the same
Mission in Uyo Division. These Ibesikpo teachers flocked around Evangelist
Jonathan Ekong whom they recognized as their leader and then formed a
strong union of Ibesikpo Teachers under the Qua Iboe Mission. After several
meetings by the group, they sent a delegation to Rev. Westgarth demanding
that a central school be opened in Ibesikpo. In June 1926, an agreement was
reached that the proposed school should be called "Ibesikpo United School"
and should be sited at Obot Idim, Ibesikpo. The resolution was forwarded to
the Qua Iboe Mission. But at the Area Conference in Etinan, the request was
turned down. Instead, the Qua Iboe Mission opened a school at Obot Idim
Nsit, Nsit Ibom Local Government Area, an act the Ibesikpo people
considered a slight.¹⁷

The other scenario that heightened the tension between the Qua Iboe Mission
and the elders of Ibesikpo Church was that the request made by them for
Jonathan Ekong to acquire a full-fledged pastoral training at the Church of
Scotland Mission Bible Institute, Calabar, under the headship of Dr. Dean,
was not obliged by the Qua Iboe Mission's European Field Conference
meeting held at Etinan between the 3rd to 7th of January, 1927.¹⁸ A portion of

the meeting which dealt with Ibesikpo request states thus:

A deputation was received from the people of Ibesikpo District, Itam Centre, on behalf of Jonathan Udo Ekong, the evangelist at Itam, asking that he be allowed to attend Dr. Dean's theological class, under the United Free Church Mission, in order to be trained as a minister, as Dr. Dean could not accept him without the sanction of Conference. After an enthusiastic discussion, Mr. O'Neil proposed and Mr. Westgarth seconded that, "as no Theological course is available in Qua Iboe Mission, Jonathan's attendance at Dr. Dean's be sanctioned by this Conference". The motion was declared lost by 8 to 5....Conference resolved that it would not give sanction for Jonathan to attend this class...¹⁹

The refusal of the Qua Iboe Mission European Field to grant their request marked several turning points in the history of the Qua Iboe Mission in Ibesikpo clan. First, it eventually led to the secession of the Ibesikpo people from the Qua Iboe Mission and also strengthened their resolution to train one of their own sons to lead and teach them. In addition, it also triggered the eventful departure of Jonathan Ekong to the United States of America. As events unfolded, the people of Ibesikpo continued to strategize. During one of their meetings, which was attended by one Mr. Edem Okon Edem from Calabar, as an observer, along with an Ibesikpo man, Okon Eyo Ukpung, Okon Edem suggested to the people of Ibesikpo that the only way out of their problem was to send their son to the United States of America to train for the work of the Church. Mr. Edem then offered to write to Howard University in America for admission for Jonathan.²⁰

In response to the application, the University forwarded all particulars of admission to Jonathan Ekong and the sum of £53 was raised by the people of Ibesikpo for that purpose. Jonathan contacted the Post Master at the Uyo Post Office to help him send the money to Howard University. In filling the Guarantor's form, the Post Master made a sad mistake by writing the two names of his guarantors (Chiefs Inyang Udo Akpan and William Akpan Ekpo) in the column meant for Jonathan's name as the student. In sending the receipt for the £53 received, Howard University stated that it was a part payment of fees for two students (Inyang Udo Akpan and William Akpan Ekpo). In spite of Jonathan's disagreement with the Qua Iboe Mission, Rev. Westgarth demonstrated great sense of maturity and interest in him and undertook upon

himself to apply for a passport for him. With these documents (passport, the receipt and the particulars of admission) Jonathan was able to travel to Calabar for clearance.²¹

Finally, on 27th of October, 1927, an official send-forth was held for Jonathan Ekong by his people. On arrival in Lagos, some complications in his travel plans that delayed his travel occurred. For instance, he needed a written guarantee from the people who sent him to America that would pay his fees regularly until he was able to complete his studies. These problems forced him to return home. Needless to say that he was greeted with a lot of mockery and sarcasm when he reached his village. But on the 19th of May, 1928, he set off again after these issues were resolved.²²

Before this time, a storm had been gathering over the Ibesikpo Churches and schools and it became obvious that the eventual collision between Qua Iboe Mission and the Ibesikpo people was just a matter of time. With the successful departure of Jonathan Udo Ekong to the United States of America, the collision finally occurred on the 10th of December, 1930, when the 16 Congregations of Qua Iboe Mission in Ibesikpo clan seceded from the Qua Iboe Mission and constituted themselves into the Ibesikpo United Church, though it was never incorporated as a Church in Nigeria.²³

The matter came for deliberation at the bi-annual meeting of the Qua Iboe Mission European Field Conference held at Etinan from the 5th to 9th of January, 1931. The matter which the Conference called "Ibesikpo palaver" seemed to have dominated the agenda of the meeting, which was held under the Chairmanship of missionary John Nelson with W. L. Wheatley as Secretary.

At the end of the day:

The Conference had delegated two of its members, missionaries McEwan and Moffat to visit the disaffected Churches and talk to the members. Eventually, the team that undertook the tour of the Ibesikpo area comprised Mr. McEwan, Mr. Doran and Peter Udo Ima. This team spent three days visiting the Churches that had seceded, and it reported that what it met everywhere was "a most hostile reception". In some Churches they were not allowed to speak, and in every town, they were insulted and booted out of the Church²⁴

The Qua Iboe Mission then took a drastic disciplinary action by closing down all schools under its management in Ibesikpo and also dismissed all the teachers. After the closure of the schools, Ibesikpo people under the leadership of Chief Nyong Etim Udo went to Calabar to meet the Resident on the issue. After the meeting he was issued with a letter to the Divisional Officer at Uyo, directing him to authorize the re-opening of the schools. On the receipt of the Resident's letter, the Divisional Officer issued a letter dated 22nd March, 1931, authorizing the re-opening of all the schools.²⁵

Matters did not rest there. Sometime in 1933, the Qua Iboe Mission filed a suit to get back the schools. The Church was relying on the existence of a law enacted in 1913, to the effect that if any Church secedes from her proprietor, leaving behind even one or two remaining members, all the property belonging to that Church must be handed over to the one or two remaining members; while the secessionist must go and set up their own Church building elsewhere. When this case came up before the court, the presiding Magistrate Mr. M. D. W. Jeffreys, nicknamed, *ntokon* (pepper), because of his stern character in judging or handling conflicting issues, decided in favour of the Ibesikpo people, on the 23rd of December, 1933.²⁶

The judicial victory in the matter was important in the history of the Ibesikpo people because the decision would open the way for the Lutheran Church to come to Ibesikpo in Nigeria.

EDUCATIONAL TRAINING IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CONTACT WITH THE LUTHERAN MISSION

It was in the United States of America that Jonathan Ekong got his further education. While there, he first attended a summer school at the Howard University and later, Prince Elementary and High School in Salisbury, North Carolina. Records of what he studied there are not accessible. But if it was High School, then it was preparatory to getting into College or University. Upon the completion of his High School, Jonathan went to College. He received his College education at Livingstone College, Immanuel College and Agriculture and Technical College in Salisbury, North Carolina, where he earned his B.Sc in Agriculture in 1936. His Thesis, "The Ibibio Tribe in Southern Nigeria, West Africa" was accepted with interest and became the basis for the work entitled, *Brighter Light for Africa*, by Dr. John Theodore

Mueller, a member of the Missionary Board of the Synodical Conference.²⁷

While studying in the United States, he did not forget what his people sent him to achieve there: to bring back a Church that would preach pure word of God and also build good schools for them. From the first day he arrived the United States of America therefore, he started to learn about American Churches. Soon, he arranged with Bishop Mathew of the Methodist Episcopal Church, requesting that on his next visit to Africa, Bishop Mathew should visit Ibesikpo to see what help his Church could give to the Ibesikpo United Church. This plan did not work.²⁸

In 1936, he registered for further studies in Theology at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary, Greensboro, North Carolina. This earned him a degree in Theology in 1938, and he was consequently ordained into the Lutheran ministry on July, 3, 1938. His ordination took place in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, St. Luke, Chicago, Illinois, and was performed by Rev. O. C. A. Boecler, a member of the Missionary Board.

Meanwhile, the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North Carolina had been formed on July 10, 1872. This Conference consisted of delegates from the six Lutheran Synods in the United States of America. One of the objectives of this Synodical Conference was to embark upon joint mission work, especially among the Blacks in America; and to extend the outreach to others especially in Africa. In August 1925, at the Synodical Conference Convention, holding at Concord, North Carolina, the Black American Lutherans themselves resolved to send missionaries to Africa, and they started to make offerings for that project. By 1929, more concrete plans were being discussed to send two missionaries to visit four different areas in Africa, namely, French Equatorial Africa, Liberia, the Belgian Congo and Angola. Nigeria was not part of that plan.²⁹

The Conference did set up an African Missions Committee during the Convention in Quincy, Illinois, in August, 1930. The first meeting of the African Missions Committee was scheduled to take place on May 21, 1931 and its Chairman was Rev. E. L. Wilson. According to Paul Volz, in his book, *The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nigeria, 1936-1961*, it was these plans for Lutheran missionary work in Africa which eventually came to the attention of Jonathan Ekong. In his memoirs called, *A Great Miracle*, Ekong

records thus:

One day during this period, a great miracle happened. I was going out on a certain evening, when one of my fellow students, who was a newspaper vendor, handed me some newspapers and said, "please, Mr. Ekong, could you keep these papers for me? I will pick them when I come back....As I got into my room to keep the papers, I glanced at the pages and stumbled on a news item that at a certain North American Lutheran Convention, the Black Americas Lutherans had raised the sum of Sixty Thousand Dollars for the work of the gospel in Africa. They wanted this money to be used specifically for the gospel outreach among their kinsmen in Africa.³⁰

Jonathan immediately made inquiries and eventually got in contact with Pastor Vorce of St. John's Lutheran Church in Salisbury, who in turn directed him to Rev. Drewes, Director of Missions for the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America. After contacting Rev. Drewes, Jonathan sent a letter to his people in Ibesikpo to inform them of the development. The Lutheran Synodical Conference sent questionnaires to Jonathan and the Ibesikpo people who promptly answered and returned the papers to them. In addition, to the questionnaires, the people of Ibesikpo, under the leadership of Chief Nyong Etim Udo, also forwarded the names of all preachers to the Lutherans in America.³¹

It is reported that the Qua Iboe Mission did not take the proposed coming of the Lutheran kindly and even attempted to obstruct the coming of the Lutheran Mission. The struggle informed Jonathan's decision to send a petition to Sir Graeme Thompson, the Governor of Nigeria asking for his intervention in the matter.

Despite the challenges, at a Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on August 8th to 13th 1934, a resolution was taken to undertake aggressive mission work in the "Ibesikpo country" and then extend it to unoccupied fields in Nigeria or in parts of Africa adjacent to Nigeria. The climax was reached when on January 5, 1935, a survey team made up of Dr. Henry Nau, a former missionary to India and the President of Immanuel College, the Reverend Immanuel Albrecht and Rev. O.

C. A. Boecler left the United States of America for Nigeria and arrived at Nnung Udoe, Ibesikpo on February 4, 1935.³²

The three missionaries made a thorough survey of the situation, visiting the Churches and schools, meeting and holding discussions with chiefs, teachers, Church leaders and with other Christian missionaries working in the area. After discussions and evaluation before Boards and Committees, a decision was reached for the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference to take up the work in Nigeria, starting from "Ibesikpo country". On April 11, 1935, Pastors Boecler and Allbrecht left Nigeria, while Dr. Henry Nau remained to organize the congregations and schools. For the next six months, Dr. Nau work hard and translated the Lutheran small catechism into Efik, with the help of some of the teachers who spoke the Efik language. Dr. Nau also made a trip to Ogoja in Cross River State with the aim of establishing a mission station there.

It should be noted that following Jonathan Ekong's graduation from the Lutheran Seminary and his ordination into the Lutheran ministry on July 3, 1938, he became an ordained minister of the word of God who had by this time executed the mandate of Ibesikpo people: that Jonathan qualify to pastor his people, find a Church that would come out to teach them the word of God and build schools and colleges to train their children. Ever before Jonathan ended his 11 years sojourn in the United States of America, the Lutheran Church was firmly planted among his people in Nigeria.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA

April 24, 1936 has remained a milestone in the annals of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria and the history of Christianity and education in Ibesikpo for it marks the birthday of the Church which by 2011 turned 75 years old in Nigeria. It was on that day that Dr. Henry Nau, accompanied by his wife, returned to Nnung Udoe Ibesikpo to start his missionary adventure among Nigerians. On his return Nigeria, Rev. Henry Nau's major concern was to meet the spiritual needs of the Ibesikpo congregations. Meetings were held with Church leaders and teachers. He himself started to learn some phrases of the local languages so as to make direct contact with the people. Instruction classes were held in all the congregations of the 16 Ibesikpo Congregations inherited from the Ibesikpo United Church which also constituted the nucleus

of what the Lutheran Church of Nigeria.³³

The foundation laid by Dr. Nau is attested to in an introduction to the book written by Nau, *We Moved into Africa*. Rev. (Dr.) William Schweppe who joined Dr. Nau one year later noted as follows about Dr. Nau:

In April, 1936, accompanied by his good wife, Dr. Nau landed in Nigeria. Immediately, he took to work, and for the following 18 months he kept an unbelievable pace. He was on the go from before dawn until 10 p. m. and later at night, with not infrequent interruptions during the night, for seven days a week. He was busy conducting meetings, instructing, advising, settling palavers, working on translations, administering aid to the sick and dying. The Lord was good to him and granted him special measure of strength. Otherwise, he could never have held up under the strain. We venture to say that during those 18 months, he met more people, and was permitted to bring the message of God's love in Jesus to more Africans than many who may have spent a decade and more on the continent.³⁴

JONATHAN EKONG AND THE SPREAD OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN NIGERIA

By the time Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong returned to Nigeria in July 1938, the work of the Lutheran Church had taken roots and was in full swing. The Field Superintendent of the Mission at this time was Rev. William Schweppe, who retired in 1957. Having returned to Nigeria, he was posted to Nnung Udoe to supervise the work in Ibesikpo, Iman, Nsit, Uruan and Eket. In July 1939, he moved from Nnung Udoe to Abiakpo, Abak, from where he could supervise the work in Ukpum, Okwe and Ekpe Inuen, Ikot Ibritam and Ikot Obio Enin all in Akwa Ibom State.

While still at Ukpum, the people of Nsu (Umuezeala Nsu) in Igbo land sent emissaries to him to come and establish a Church for them. In 1946, he moved to Uyo and was instrumental to the establishment of the Church in the city. On the 3rd of March, 1948, he re-located to Calabar to plant the Lutheran seed in the former Provincial Capital. Though he faced a lot of challenges in Calabar, he still went ahead to succeed.

However, the early beginnings of the Church in the city is credited to one Mr. Okon Thomas, an indigene of Nnung Oku Akpasima in Ibesikpo-Asutan

Local Government Area, who, upon accepting the Lutheran doctrines initiated the idea of regularly gathering a small group of people for prayers and instruction at 4 Wilkie Street, Calabar. Later the Church activities shifted to the residence of Mr. Okon Edem Udofia at 40 Enendem Street, Calabar. On his arrival in Calabar, Rev. (Dr.) Ekong stayed at 12 Ewa Ekeng Street. As the Church grew, there was need for a bigger accommodation, the Cobham Town Hall (called *Efe Ekpe*) at 14 Boco Street was rented and used as a place of worship and a Junior Primary School with about 55 pupils.³⁵

The next task was where to set up a permanent Church building. After some frustrating search, he was directed to one Chief Imaikop from Eket, who offered to sell a plot of land to him. "The plot was located far away from the road, because at that time what is now Fosbery Road did not extend much. They had to cut through the bush for a long distance to get to that plot of land. There was a lot of filth, because the night soil men had been using that location as their dump. To make matters worse, part of the plot was swampy because of stagnant rain water.³⁶ The ugly situation influenced members of the Church, to object very strongly the idea of acquiring that particular plot of land.

Despite the challenges, Rev. (Dr.) Ekong remained undaunted. He convinced the Church members to purchase the land which was sold at the rate of £120 every 10 years.³⁷ The plan by the Mission to build a school was well received by the Colonial government. From Calabar, Rev. (Dr.) Ekong advanced to Aningejie, Qua Falls to establish the Lutheran Church and also build what became the first school in the area. He was also instrumental to the establishment of the Lutheran Church in Oban Rubber Estate, Ikot Effio Enang, about "17 miles from Calabar" and another congregation at Ikot Essien. From there his team moved to Creek Town, Adiabo Ikot Ukp and Obot Nda Nkut.³⁸

Rev. (Dr.) Ekong's exploit in planting the gospel and Western education in Efik land was considered as a great accomplishment by him about 36 years earlier, to be precise, in 1912, he was the one who wrote a letter to the people of Calabar to bring the gospel to his people in Ibesikpo clan, an invitation that resulted in the establishment of a Church and school. After a period of seven years of active missionary enterprise in Calabar area, and seeing that the work in the Churches and schools were firmly established, he left Calabar in 1954.³⁹

He was posted to the Lutheran High School, Obot Idim, Ibesikpo as a teacher, and he taught in the school till 1963, he was appointed Parish Supervisor for the entire Church with special responsibility to go round all districts and parishes of the Church to strengthen the men and women, young and old, white and black. He executed his task diligently to the admiration of every member of the Church. In 1971, the Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, United States of America, awarded him an Honorary Degree in Theology in recognition of his many years of valuable services.

Available records reveal that by December 2011, the Lutheran Church had 14 Zones, 43 Districts, 33 Circuits and 391 Congregations with hundreds of thousands of communicants. In addition, the Church, through the ministry of the Foreign Mission, has established many Parishes in Gambia and Jamaica.⁴⁰

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

Theological Education

Education had always occupied a central place with the leadership of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria from the inception and it became obvious that there could be no enlightenment or development of any magnitude without education. As earlier pointed out, the quest for education motivated the people of Ibesikpo to sponsor one of their sons, Jonathan Udo Ekong to study abroad. Upon the arrival of the Lutheran Church in 1936, Dr. Henry Nau took over the management of the existing schools and the Lutheran Mission was given proper recognition by the Nigerian government as a private agency with authority to manage schools. The Mission Field Superintendents who were managers of the schools took charge of the administrative duties and were assisted by few experienced teachers who were appointed as Travelling Teachers.

The Lutherans did not end its educational strides with primary education. In his proposal to the Missionary Board as contained in a letter dated 1st July, 1937, the visionary Dr. Nau noted: "besides the work in the Churches, there is ever more pressing work of training teachers, catechists and evangelists and future pastors". The proposal was scrupulously followed. Theological Institutions were started for the training of pastors and evangelists at Obot Idim, Ibesikpo. On January 2, 1940, the Lutheran Seminary in Nigeria was opened with seven men admitted as students. With the work of the Church increasing and the fields expanding, two Bible Institutes were established in

1960, one at Ikot Enin Atai in Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State and another at Okpoma in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State.⁴¹

Since its inception, the Lutheran Seminary has trained and graduated candidates from Nigeria, Ghana, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) Sierra Leone and Gambia. In 1989, the Seminary was re-named after the founding father of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria; and is now known as the Jonathan Ekong Memorial Lutheran Seminary (JEMLS). It has been affiliated with the University of Uyo since April, 1994 for the award of University Diploma in Religious Studies. The institution has a linkage with Concordia Theological Seminary, Indiana, in the United States of America. Through their relationship, qualified staff and students of (JEMLS) are offered opportunities for Post-Graduate studies in Forte Wayne Campus of the University.

The Mission has also contributed immensely in the area of teacher education. With the steady rise in the number of schools, provisions were made for the training of young teachers. In 1947, a One-year Training Course (O. Y. C.) started at Obot Idim, Ibesikpo by Rev. Walter F. Stahkle. The programme helped in preparing teachers for the Junior Primary School and also rearing them for the pursuit of full professional Teacher's Course when the Teacher's Training College came on board.

In January 1950, the Lutheran Normal School was opened with 24 students for the Teacher's Training Course leading to the award of Grade 111 Teacher's Certificate. The institution started to attract government grant in 1953 and was permitted by government to attach the Higher Elementary Department, leading to the award of Teacher's Grade 11 Certificate. Another Teacher's Training College was also opened in Ogoja, Cross River State.⁴²

Secondary and Primary Education

In the area of secondary education, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria pursuit has been based on its guiding philosophy, "the Soul of Education is the Education of the Soul". The Church sought to establish a secondary school. However, it was not until December 27, 1949, that the government approval was granted. Consequently, the first Entrance Examination into the school was conducted on January 9, 1950 and 28 candidates were admitted in 1950.

The Lutheran High School, Obot Idim was ideally founded and ideologically driven. From 1955, when the school presented her first batch of students for the final examinations (at that time the Cambridge School Certificate Examinations), until the year 2010, the school had graduated about 6,000 students. "The result of the school's achievement is enviable, positive impact made is enormous, and her contributions to academic excellence and manpower development globally unparalleled".⁴³

The Lutherans also opened Lutheran Secondary School at Ikot Obong Edong in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State in addition to another specialized schools and training centres, such as the Girls's School at Nnung Udoe, Ibesikpo and Ikot Obio Enin Attai in Abak Local Government Area. The Lutheran Vocational School was opened in 1949 in Eket and later the Women's Home Training Centre at Obot idim.

Communication: Broadcasting

Since 1958 when the Church became the pioneer Church organization in Nigeria in the production and airing of the gospel through the air waves, it has remained consistent in the area. The first edition of a 15 minute Efik religious programme, *Edikworo Christ No Kpupuru Owo*, meaning (preaching Christ to all people) was broadcast in that year, while the Igbo version *Ikwusa Christ Nye Nile*, was introduced in 1960. The Christian Radio Studio, Obot Idim, Ibesikpo now takes charge of the production of programmes which have been aired in several radio and television stations across the country. They include, "Meditation" on Bauchi Radio Corporation, Bauchi, "Moments with Jesus" on Plateau Radio/Television Corporation, Jos, "Sunday Meditation" on Radio Rivers 11, F. M. Port Harcourt, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (R. R. C. N.), Abuja; "Bringing Christ to the Nations" on Ondo State Radio Corporation, Akure, "In Tune with God" on the Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State, Ibadan; and "Midweek Meditation" on Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation, Uyo.⁴⁴

Communications: Print Medium.

As early as 1942, the Church published its first monthly magazine known as "Lutheran Witness". The name was later changed to "The Nigerian Lutheran". The magazine served as the official organ of the Church through which religious articles, news items, announcements and relevant

information were disseminated. It was kept alive for about 10 years. The pioneer magazine was succeeded by another monthly edition called "The Lutheran Herald". In 2011, the Church launched a monthly devotional material with daily Bible portions, words of meditation and brief prayers to strengthen the faith of readers.

Health Care Delivery through Hospitals and Clinics

The Lutheran Church has always seen the health needs of the people as a vital aspect of evangelism and has thus made significant impact in the area of health delivery. Special clinics and dispensaries had been operated from time to time by wives of missionaries, notably at the Lutheran High School, Obot Idim, Ibesikpo and the Teacher's Training College at Ibahachi. However, a major break was recorded in this area when a Christian couple in the United States of America who had lost their only daughter in the 1950's committed funds for the building of a hospital in her memory. Additional help for the project was received from the government of Nigeria which made it possible to start the construction in 1955. On June 10, 1955, His Excellency, the Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson took part in the corner stone laying ceremony at the Immanuel Lutheran Hospital Eket. The Immanuel Hospital, Eket had a glorious mission. Its fame spread very rapidly to all nooks and crannies of Nigeria. The Church also established a medical centre at Yahe, in Ogoja, Cross River State, to serve patients from Ogoja, Ikom and Abakiliki among other places.⁴⁵

Fight against HIV/AIDS

In March, 2002, the All-African Lutheran Churches Conference of HIV/AIDS was held in Nairobi, Kenya. It was sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation. The Lutheran Church of Nigeria, being a full member of the Lutheran World Federation, and fully conscious of her responsibility to help her members and other citizens fight the dreaded disease, took part in the Nairobi Conference. In April 2003, the Church launched her community based programme on enlightenment of HIV/AIDS. Among its other activities, the Committee in charge of this programme arranges seminars and workshops to educate the public on the dangers of the scourge.

International Debt Relief

At the Regular Council of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, the issue of international indebtedness by Nigeria to developed nations and their creditor financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary

Fund (I. M. F.) was discussed. The Council noted with concern that Nigeria and other poor African nations spend more each year on re-payment to their creditor nations, than four or six times the total amount they spend on health and education of their citizens. The entire Church was therefore urged to join "the International Jubilee 2000" call. This call went out in November 17, 1998, from a Conference of all the Debtor Nations, calling for debt cancellation and economic justice by the year 2000. The Lutheran Church was called upon to join in endorsing this communiqué and in crusade for debt cancellation, in order to bring relief to the masses of the debtor nations. In 1999, the Church openly declared her strong support for the efforts of President Olusegun Obasanjo, to bring about debt relief for the benefit of the world's people. They reasoned that without economic justice, there could be no guarantee of peace and development for the vast majority of human beings.⁴⁶

Though the Lutheran Church may not take credit for the debt relief granted Nigeria during the Obasanjo's era, it is obvious that for embarking on such an aggressive campaign for social justice, the Church clearly played its social responsibility as a crusader of the Nigerian people.

Response to Climate Change

The issue of climate change which is a global environmental problem has for quite some time occupied a front burner in international discourse. It is generally agreed that the earth's climate is changing in a manner that spells disaster to the majority of human beings, plants and animals. It has also been observed that the water resources are rapidly decreasing while atmospheric temperatures are alarmingly rising. In some parts of the world, severe droughts have been recorded. In other parts, it is severe floods that devastate the inhabitants, while storms and hurricane have become very frequent more than ever. The disastrous effect of climate change on food production is also raising an alarm worldwide and the consequences on food security in Nigeria, Africa and the rest of the world are realities that must be faced.

Based on these reasons, the Church in 2010 set up a committee under the leadership of a former member of the National Assembly, Dr. Emaeyak Ukpong, to study the problem, to enable the Church among other things approve and support the establishment of local, national and global partnerships and collaborations with appropriate government and non-governmental as well as faith based organizations as necessary.⁴⁷

DEATH

After about 58 years of fruitful service to God his creator and fellow human beings at home and abroad, Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong died at midnight on January 6, 1982, just four days before the Lutheran Church celebrated her golden jubilee. He was buried on January 30, 1982.⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong was more than just a man of God. He was a crusader for development, enlightenment and one of the makers of present-day Nigeria, with prophetic vision of the word of God and education as the foundation for progress and development. His crusade to bring the word of God and education to Nigerians – always in that combination which he regarded inseparable - has generated substantial impact beyond Akwa Ibom State and across Nigeria and other parts of Africa).

He began his struggle to bring a Church and school to Ibesikpo clan, and by the time he died in 1982, there were not only Churches in every Ibesikpo village, but also Nigeria Lutherans serving with distinction in virtually every occupation and profession. The present generation of Nigerians must learn from the remarkable modesty and his self-effacing and selfless, but relentless devotion to mission. Hence, the necessity of documenting his exploits so that this extraordinary chapter of Nigerian and Church history is not lost and forgotten.

On September 19, 2004, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, while addressing the Abuja Convention of the Lutheran Church noted rightly, that the Lutheran Church was one of the Churches he knew too well to be "Bible-based and has produced very faithful and honest leaders to the service of Nigeria".

This and other aspects of his achievements largely un-known would not have been possible without the grace of God and the vision and determination of Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong. Though dead, Rev. (Dr.) Jonathan Udo Ekong's services will be remembered by this generation and those yet unborn. His life and duty to humanity are worthy of emulation.

Evidently speaking, in 75 years of its existence, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, starting from Obot Idim, Ibesikpo clan of Akwa Ibom State, has spread to reach many parts of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

ENDNOTES

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