

Mourning Prof O. B. Ella

By Adagbo Onoja

It was a mini-national burial, what with the delegation of five from Bayero University, Kano where he got his first teaching appointment as a lecturer in Building Engineering; Benue Polytechnic where he was the Rector for eight years and whose principal officers, staff and students became the institutional chief mourners; the Federal University of Technology, Minna where he was an Associate Professor before his rather violent and instant demise in an auto crash on June 1st, 2015. Along with him in the car that day was Mrs Comfort Okpella Ella, the wife of his senior brother, Ejembi C Ella, a retired Water Engineer. The pain and sense of loss in the extended Ella family is obvious. But it is more for an impoverished community like Edemoga District of Okpokwu LGA in Benue State which has not got many tested or experienced managers of state establishments but losing one of such few. Having managed Benue Polytechnics for eight years, however that was, he was a ready-made material for whatever such responsibilities that came his way. The communal sense of loss will, therefore, take a very long time to fade.

The burial for the two from 17th to 19th June, 2015 was understandably one of the most solemn and emotion charged rite of passage for everyone who was there. It was solidarity with someone who, somehow, cut very powerfully into communal psyche. An unusually unassuming and rather withdrawn Ella surprisingly metamorphosed into a community activist with his appointment as Rector. In spite of the financially, politically and communally constraining environment



when I read his notes today, I wish he were still alive so that I could go and say, 'thank you. You were a great teacher of News Reporting and News Writing'. Gudu moved to Benue State originally to join The Voice, the Benue State Government newspaper. That didn't work out eventually. He then moved into Benue State University before meeting his death shortly after. May his soul rest in perfect peace!

I think it was Ogbe Obande who was also lecturing in Chemistry at BUK then whom we eventually took Ella's manuscripts for the initial assessment and comments. That must have been his first publication, a magnificent proletarianisation of science to the level of our brothers and sisters who are not lucky to have the kind of educational foundation that would enable them to easily overcome the cultural and linguistic barriers in English. Interestingly, Ella was to end up as Rector of Benue Polytechnic in 2003, the same job Dr. Obande completed his own tenure before moving on to become Nigeria's ambassador to Switzerland. He said at Ella's burial that all the eulogies showered on him were informed by the truth. In other words, Ella earned them all.

Man can say to death: do not be proud. For me, that is nothing but a statement of frustration. Why wouldn't death be proud if it could snatch away anyone anytime irrespective of how much communal responsibility the victim was shouldering? And even when his or her children are still very young! And the father was a wreck coming to grips with the unbelievable. Or when death could touch and take away Mrs Comfort Ella just after retirement from