

THE BIOGRAPHY
OF
REV. FR IHEANYI ENWEREM, OP
Compiled by Fr Frederick Ifeanyi Obananya, OP

Rev. Fr Iheanyichukwu Maurice Enwerem OP was born on the 23rd of July 1950 to the family of the Late Mr Daniel Enwerem and Brigid Nwadimma. He was a native of Nsu town, Ehime Mbano in Imo State but was born in ObehieAsa, Aba in the Catholic Diocese of Umuahia of the then East Central State.

On the 19th day of November 1971, Fr Iheanyi joined the well-known Catholic Religious Order, the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) and was received into the Novitiate by Fr. Bertrand Ebben OP, during the tenure of Friar Anicetus Fernandez, OP as Master of the Dominican Order. He made his First and Solemn profession of Evangelical vows as a Dominican on the 13th of February 1973 and 13th of February 1976, respectively. With his ordination to the Catholic Priesthood on July 8 1978 and following three years of pastoral work at Sokoto Diocese that culminated in his becoming Assistant Chaplain, in August 1980, at the then Ife University (now Obafemi Awolowo University), he embarked on a series of further studies. These began with a BA (Hons.) in Philosophy (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium), then a Masters Degree in Political Theology (University of Toronto), and then ending with both a Masters and a PhD in Social and Political Thought (York University), also in Toronto, Canada.

Fr Iheanyi's university teaching career began at the then Bendel State University (now Ambrose Ali University) in 1985 while on his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in the Department of Sociology and Political Science. Following his PhD in 1992, he was teaching in the History and Political Science Department of Kings College of the University of Western Ontario Canada when in August 1993, he was recalled home to become the founding President of the Dominican Institute of Philosophy and Theology while also teaching at the SS. Peter and Paul Major Seminary, Bodija, Ibadan. After six years of Presidency at the Dominican Institute, he joined the Political Science Department of the University of Ibadan in 1999 as a Senior Lecturer.

By September 2000, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) invited Fr Iheanyi to serve the Catholic Church at the national level. This was to pioneer, as Director, the Department of Church and Society as well as the National Coordinator of Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (CSN). His most outstanding achievement in the job, besides setting up the necessary administrative structure for the new Department, was the initiation and successful coordination in 2003 of the first-ever, nationwide Election Monitoring of

the country's General Elections of 2003 by the Catholic Church in Nigeria. The Church covered more than 60 per cent of the polling booths across the length and breadth of Nigeria in that exercise.

Following his serious ideological disagreement with the Bishops, Fr Iheanyi was eased off the job when it came up for renewal by the end of 2003. In early 2004, Fr Iheanyi was granted his request by his then Superior for an extended sabbatical leave in Canada. What was supposed to be for two years, lasted fourteen years during which period, among other things, he led the establishment of the Canadian Mission of the Province of St Joseph the Worker, Nigeria & Ghana. On his part, he served full-time as a Parish Priest in a number of parishes in the Dioceses of London Ontario and Saskatoon respectively. During two of his four years in London Ontario Diocese, was a full-time Seminary Professor at St Peter's Seminary - a Regional Seminary that trains priests for several Canadian Dioceses. For the ten years he stayed in Saskatoon Diocese, Fr Iheanyi combined Parish ministry with sessional lecturership in the Political Science Department of St Thomas Moore College of the University of Saskatchewan.

Fr Iheanyi's years on the Canadian Mission came to an end in 2018 when, at his request, he finally returned to Nigeria and was assigned to the Emmanuel Catholic Parish, Emene, Enugu, where he catered to the pastoral needs of the people with joy. In 2021, he got an appointment as a Senior lecturer with the Spiritan University Nneochi (SUN), Abia State, rose to the level of Associate Professorship and Headed the Department of Political Science.

Fr Iheanyi, a priest-scholar, had an abiding interest in the interaction between religion and politics in general. The interest gave birth, over the years, to the publication of several scholarly articles and books in Nigeria and beyond. Among his articles were "Politics or Politricks" and "The Crisis and Politics of Episcopal Succession in African Catholic Dioceses" (2023). Among his books were *A Dangerous Awakening: the Politicization of Religion in Nigeria* and *Crossing the Rubicon: A Socio-Political Analysis of Political Catholicism in Nigeria* - which one of its international reviewers described as "a very important book... that raises serious questions that the Catholic Church needs to address if it is to have the moral authority to challenge Nigeria's political elite" (2010). Another of his books, *Hidden and Forgotten* challenges the Canadian Catholic Church for the racially biased poverty of its pastoral outreach to Canadian Catholics of African descent. Fr Iheanyi was working on another book, "Politics and Intrigues of Episcopal Succession in the Nigerian Catholic Church: A Metaphor for Decolonizing the Church" until his death.

To celebrate Fr Iheanyi's immense contribution to scholarship in Nigeria and internationally, especially his service to the Dominican Province of Saint Joseph the Worker, Nigeria and Ghana, as the pioneer president of her prestigious school, Dominican Institute (now Dominican University Ibadan), a festschrift, titled *Politics, Religion & Education in African Context & Culture: Essays in honour of Rev. Fr Iheanyi Enwerem*, edited by Frederick Obananya, Francis Chiadi, Ugo Aniga, and Stan Ukwe (2024), was published. The selected themes for the book were a synthesis of a wide range of areas of Fr Iheanyi's scholarly interest.

As a person, Fr Iheanyi was daring. His classmate, Rev. Fr Chris-Angelo Otuibe, OP said that Fr Iheanyi intimated to him that his father told him to be bold and never cower before people. His position on issues was often clear even if "unpopular". Hence, to some persons, he may seem to have been more "controversial" than "popular". But behind what some people may have described as "controversial" was a man who acted in conscience and deep conviction. As a Dominican, he was a fearless consummate preacher and a rigorous searcher of the "Truth". His search for truth kept him ever-vigorous though, sometimes made him disagree and part way with friends; but all was done in love and for the love of the "Truth".

Fr. Iheanyi was also a very good musician and a composer of liturgical music. Among his beautiful compositions were "Let me be", "I am the Light of the World", "Jesus Christ the Cornerstone of Our Life", and "Our Father" which till today are sung widely during masses all over Nigeria and overseas. He often began his homilies with songs, such as, "I know His name...His name is Jesus Christ, I know His name."

Among his contemporaries, Fr Iheanyi enjoyed a good health. He had no underlying ailment and was always meticulous about what he ate. In early 2022 he had a fall in his room in Enugu, was diagnosed with malaria, promptly treated and later flown abroad for further scrutiny and medical check-up. He got well and returned to Enugu. In the middle of 2023, he was involved in an accident on his way to the University but to the glory of God, he survived it without any complication. By July 2024, Fr Iheanyi had a serious "bathroom accident" and was rushed to the hospital where it was discovered that there was fluid in his brain. Given the short time for surgery to be done, Fr Iheanyi together with his religious and biological family had no other option but for the surgery to be done in Nigeria. He was confident and cheerful even in the face of the many challenges. He personally updated his Dominican brothers on his health status, and the decision for a surgery in Nigeria, and asked for their prayers. But as a wise man, it was as if he knew his time of transit to the life of blessedness was near, he requested that a new habit – the sign of his religious consecration, be sent down to Enugu from Ibadan. The surgery was

conducted successfully and he was due to be discharged when suddenly he went into a coma.

On the afternoon of July 24th 2024, it pleased the Most High God to call "His General" back to the eternal home where there will be no more sickness, pain or sadness. Fr Iheanyi's demise came as a shock to his religious and biological family members, parishioners, colleagues, relations and friends.

However, we are grateful to God for a life well lived and for granting Fr Iheanyi the grace to have received the Last Sacraments. May God bless Fr Peter Amaya-Akpala, OP and Fr Joseph Ahukanna, OP who administered the Sacraments. We cannot forget Mrs Dorathy Enwerem and Mrs Chinwe Enwerem, his sister in-law and niece-in-law respectively, Sr Bisi Ojo, Sr Mary-Salome Ike, IHM, the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Sisters, the entire staff of both Mother of Christ Specialist Hospital, Enugu, and National Orthopaedic Hospital, Enugu, who have been very helpful since Fr Iheanyi returned to Enugu; the wonderful parishioners of Emmanuel Catholic Parish, Emene and the Sisters of Daughter of Divine Love school Emene, his colleagues at Spiritan University Nneochi (SUN), and the entire Enwerem family, especially Ezenwa, Okechukwu and Ugochukwu and other relations, and friends who have been part of Fr Iheanyi's story.

We pray that the Angels and Saints may accompany Fr Iheanyi to that supreme banquet where God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are to the elected ones, true light, full satisfaction, everlasting joy, consummate pleasure and perfect happiness. Amen.