

## **Part III**

# **Book Review**

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Cardinal Dominic Ekandem and the Growth of the Catholic Church in Nigeria*

Author: Cosmas K. O. Nwosuh, MSP

Publisher: Ambassador Publications Nigeria

Pages: 541

Price: not stated

ISBN: 978-978-931-878-0

Reviewer: Valentine O. Ekechukwu

The book is a piece of scholarly work, deeply researched and presented in such a flowing narrative that lends itself readily for easy reading. In the introductory quote from Pliny the Younger, the author notes; "*I hold it a noble task to rescue from oblivion those who deserve to be specially remembered*". The task the author has undertaken is as dignified and gracious as it is righteous.

Fr. Nwosuh has organised his book in such a methodical structure; adopting a systematic modular presentation of the chapters in a manner that one chapter flows logically from the preceding one but with each chapter autarkic, making its own independent meaning, including of course the preface, foreword and epilogue. It is presented à la carte for the lazy reader.

Chapters 1–4 deal in great detail with the birth, background, childhood, education, priestly training, ordination and early priesthood of Dominic Ekandem. In chapter 5, the author presents the elevation of the young – seven year old priest to Episcopal office. He thus became the first indigenous West African Catholic bishop. Bishop James Moynagh had recommended Dominic Ekandem as Auxiliary Bishop of Calabar without consulting him. *Ekandem's consecration became a reference*

*point and a weapon of indictment against other missionary bishops in dioceses with many native priests from where native bishops had been expected to emerge earlier. ... However, Moynagh had requested Ekandem's appointment as an Auxiliary Bishop "not to be a first" but to demonstrate his conviction that "the church in Nigeria must grow with its own Bishops."*

Ekandem's episcopal duties as Auxiliary Bishop of Calabar, his appointment as Bishop of Ikot Ekpene, the challenges of the Catholic Church during the civil war, the embarrassing crisis of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus and the indigenisation of the church are comprehensively treated in chapters 6–11. From chapters 12–15, the author chronicles what I would consider Ekandem's most prolific period of his episcopacy; his presidency of the National Episcopal Conference of Nigeria (precursor to the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria) from 1973, his appointment as Cardinal, his participation in the conclaves of 1978, his founding of the Missionary Society of St. Paul (MSP), his elections as first president of the Christian Association of Nigeria and as the first president of the Association of the Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa, the founding of the Catholic Institute of West Africa and his appointment as its first Pro-chancellor, the establishment of more dioceses and the Abuja Archdiocese were documented in this section. Chapter 15 documents the twilight of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem, all the honours – national honours, honorary degrees, chieftaincy titles, his retirement, his failing health and death and the Church he left behind.

The strength of Fr. Nwosuh's scholarship is the intellectual honesty. He surely eulogised His Eminence as profoundly spiritual and virtuous, presenting him, understandably, perhaps, as the best thing that had happened to the Church in Nigeria. Though he makes no apologies to any religious partiality the reader may encounter, he still found space to present the human weaknesses of the Cardinal. According to the author, the Cardinal could be intolerant and unforgiving. *He was known to be one who never believed in or accepted "confrontational politics" ... Perhaps this*

*explains why he was slow in forgiving betrayals, disobedience, and insubordination. It was common knowledge among his clergy that "those who disagree with him never know peace". He very rarely shifted his positions once a decision was made. He could be stubborn, unyielding and at times unforgiving (p. 257).*

The author also records the Cardinal's inclination to bias and favouritism with a rather imperious disposition. He writes: *In the opinion of some of his priests and people, Bishop Ekandem inadvertently alienated and confused many by promoting the candidacy of his choice in an insensitive manner. They recognized that he could have been neither indifferent nor neutral as to who his successor should be. They were disappointed by his apparent high-handed manner of approach in promoting his favorite candidate who was not popular (p. 261).* It is in chapter 9 that the author best exposed the frailty of the doyen of the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy in the crisis of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus. The ethnic bias against the Superior-General of the Congregation, Mother Gertrude Nwaturuocha and her subsequent exile was so aptly demonstrated.

The author lays no claim as to this book being a history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria. I perfectly agree. It is simply a biography of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem and, of course, his profound contributions to the Church. The Cardinal's eminent position in the history of the Catholic Church in Nigeria is typically within the context of his being the first in respect of his episcopal ordination and elevation to the cardinalate. An impression that may be read from the book is that of weaving the history and development of the Catholic Church in Nigeria around the Cardinal. This could be a major weak point of this book. A more quantitative presentation, i.e., more data in numbers would have been useful in many of the chapters dealing with the cardinal's contributions to the growth of the Church but I agree that the author's discipline may have influenced his

aversion to numbers and thus the excessive qualitative presentation.

In his epilogue, Rev. Fr. Dr. Cosmas K. Okey Nwosuh, MSP, a self-confessed disciple of Dominic Cardinal Ignatius Ekandem, inadvertently or perhaps wittingly builds a strong case for the beatification of Dominic Cardinal Ekandem. It would be wrong for me not to agree!

## BOOK REVIEW

### *Liturgical Renewal and Participation in the Church: Liturgical and Theological Reflections*

Author: Cosmas Olufemi Aina (late)

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Reviewer: Massdiile Onyenibadi, MSP

Revd Dr. Raymond Aina, MSP published posthumously the works of his late elder brother, Revd Fr. Cosmas Olufemi Aina, to enshrine the latter in the annals of history. It is indeed a worthy tribute to the deceased.

The book is divided into three unequal parts. **Part One**, titled “Lay Participation in the Eucharistic Ministry: A Critical Analysis of American Experience vis-a-vis the Church in Yorubaland” is part of the original thesis for the MA in Liturgical Arts which the author obtained at the University of Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois, United States of America. It has three chapters: “Order and Lay Participation in the Early Church”; “Contemporary Understanding of Lay Participation in the light of Vatican II”; and “Lay Participation in the Eucharistic Ministry: A Proposal for the Church in Yorubaland”. **Part Two** is divided into six chapters: “Adoration as Contemplating the Face of Jesus: History, Theology and Implications”; “The Heavenly Jerusalem as a Model for Church Art and Architecture”; “The Setting for the Liturgy and Ceremonial Actions in Our Liturgical Celebrations”; “Liturgical Renewal in Kaduna Archdiocese: Looking to the Future by Looking Backward”; “Women are Complicated, Men are Impossible: What Hope for the Christian Family?”; and “Death and Burial in the Church: Between Antiquity and Contemporary Period”. **Part Three** reads

“Homilies and Tributes”.

For a better appreciation of the book's contribution towards an organic and structural inculturation in the Church's liturgical life and action in Yorubaland, one must take cognisance of the *Sitz-im-Leben* [Situation in life] our author was addressing. Nearly Fifty years after the call made by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council for the active participation of the Faithful in the Church's liturgical life and action, very little seemed to have taken place in the Catholic Church in Yorubaland. The Ecclesiastical authorities in the Province seemed parochial in their approach to active participation of the Laity. On the other hand, there was a *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the laity themselves. Even in the parishes, parish priests enjoyed lording it over the faithful than collaborating with the laity. There was that attitude of *letting the sleeping dog lie* rather than playing the prophet by disturbing the ignorant quiescent among the laity. In the face of this unhealthy atmosphere, the author made bold to opine that it was high time all and sundry woke up and faced squarely to a reality that had cried long for attention.

The author struck a chord when he observed with historical accuracy that the early Church first lived out her liturgical life before order and theology were later introduced for greater organisation and proper articulation of the substance of worship and belief. At the very dawn of the Church, liturgy pertained to the whole community with the Apostolic College at the head and leadership of liturgical gatherings and activities. This facticity was attested to in the *Motu Proprio* of Pope Paul VI entitled *Ministeria Quaedam*. Granted that with time some of these ministries were attached to the office and ministry of those preparing for the sacred priesthood, the Vatican II fathers had real pastoral reason reverting to the earlier Church's practice, but with caution. The author was aware of this norm of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* but was disturbed by the apparent lack of will-power by the authorities to translate the norm into practical pastoral actions.

The first challenge is directed at the ecclesiastical hierarchy. However, being a trained expert on the Liturgy, the author laid greater burden of the challenge on the professionals

and experts in liturgical studies and related disciplines. The author underlined that it was incumbent on trained experts to assist the hierarchy of the Church in this regard by gently drawing the latter's attention to what ought to be done to make the Church take proper roots in the culture of the people and for the laity to be more actively committed in the Church's liturgical actions and activities. He challenged trained experts to come together and organise themselves into a body in order to pull their resources together for the benefit of the Church. On the other hand, the author singled out intrigues among the laity, caused by their inaction and resistance. These shortcomings prohibit the laity from reasoning together to find ways to make the Church's Liturgy their own, participating actively and consciously.

The author identified some cultural elements that are not healthy and do not promote pro-activeness. One such ill is the traditional *status quo ante* mentality. The next is the poor conception of respect for the elders. Without inciting rebellion or anything of that sort, the author insists that the laity have the right to be heard and the right to take active part in the Church's liturgical worship and actions. He challenges the laity to be proactive instead of waiting on the Church's hierarchy before they can do anything at all. There is no room for being passive in the Church's Liturgy.

The book calls for proper implementation of the call made by the Council Fathers fifty years ago. The Church is indeed hierarchically structured in her administrative governance, in her Sacraments and in her membership. The hierarchical nature of the Church notwithstanding, the author suggests some fundamental procedural method to follow. The first is the responsible participation of the laity. Second, Church leaders have to be actively involved as animators and promoters of active collaborators. Third, the establishment of liturgical institutes and formation of interdisciplinary research groups on liturgical innovations.

I see in this book the sowing of the seeds for future healthy laity participation and lay ministry in the Church in Yorubaland.