

AUGUSTINIAN MISSION TO NIGERIA: FROM 2001-2014

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Abstract

Raymond Hickey, OSA, an Irish Augustinian and the finest mind when it comes to the recounting of the history of the Augustinians in Nigeria has already written on the Augustinian mission in Nigeria: From 1938-2001. The present work continues from 2001 to 2014. It is therefore complementary in character. The primary purpose of putting down these pieces of history, that of Fr Raymond and the present, is to testify to the passing of time, help illumine reality, vitalise memory and to bring the tidings of antiquity to our generation.

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Preface

Cicero, in his *Pro Publio Sestio* wrote that “History is the witness that testifies to the passing of time; it illumines reality, vitalizes memory, provides guidance in daily life and brings us tidings of antiquity”. So is the history of the presence of Augustinians in Nigeria. Rev. Fr. Raymond Hickey, OSA, an Irish Augustinian and the finest mind when it comes to the recounting of the history of the Augustinians in Nigeria has already written on the Augustinian mission in Nigeria: From 1938-2001. The present work continues from 2001 to 2014. It is therefore complementary in character. The primary purpose of putting down these pieces of history, that of Fr Raymond and the present, is to testify to the passing of time, help illumine reality, vitalise memory and to bring the tidings of antiquity to our generation.

However, as the number of Nigerian Augustinians increased and their aging Irish confreres decreased, Fr. James Daman, OSA, was elected Vice Provincial after late Fr. Vincent Hickey, OSA. Rev. Fr. James Daman, OSA led the Vice Province of Nigeria from 1997 to 2000³⁶. By 2000, after his re-election into office as the Vice Provincial of the Vice Province of Nigeria, he was appointed Bishop of Jalingo in December 2000. His appointment drew attention to the primary aim of the Order of Saint Augustine: the service of the Church, and set the stage for a new beginning³⁷. With this appointment, an election was held, which saw Rev. Fr. Patrick Akinrimisi, OSA emerge as the Vice Provincial, the choice of a clear majority of the friars. Thus, the first phase of the history of the Augustinians in Nigeria from 2001-2014 was piloted by Rev. Fr. Patrick Akinrimisi, OSA from 2001 to 2005. The new Prior Provincial had the honour of attending the General Chapter of the Order in Rome, during which a new Prior General was elected, Rev. Fr. Robert Prevost OSA and the Order in Nigeria was accorded full Provincial status. The new status marked a new phase in the historical evolution of the Order of Saint Augustine in Nigeria. During the Mid-Chapter of 2003, it was decided to close Dassa-Zoume, Benin Republic, which took effect on 8th December, 2003. On 13th November, 2004, the Province celebrated the 1640 Anniversary of the St Augustine's Birth at St Monica's Parish, Jos. With Father Akinrimisi, talks about the establishment of St Augustine's College Mararraba had begun, awaiting full manifestation. He it was who initiated the involvement of APURIMAC ONLUS.

Fr Patrick was succeeded by Rev. Fr. John Niyiring, OSA during the 2005 Chapter in Jos. On 1st October, 2006, the Province celebrated the 750th Anniversary of the Grand Union in 1256, at St Monica's Rantya, Jos, Plateau State. Fr. John Niyiring, OSA remained in office until his appointment as Bishop of Kano in 2007. He is the 6th Augustinian to be called to serve as Bishop in Nigeria after Dalton, Cotter, Sheehan, O'Donnell and Daman. During his short stay as Provincial, he started the Augustinian Community in Enugu: Assumption Parish, Nkwo-Nike and got the financial commitment of the Curia towards the

³⁶ Raymond Hickey, *The Genesis of the Nigerian Province*. Order of Saint Augustine Eucharistic Celebration of the Official Inauguration of the Province of St Augustine of Nigeria, 2001, p.vii.

³⁷ Raymond Hickey, *The Genesis of the Nigerian Province*., p.vii.

establishment of Saint Augustine's College, New Karu. He also laid its foundation stone.

After the appointment of Rev. Fr. John Niyiring, OSA as the Bishop of Kano Diocese, Rev. Fr. McDonnell Brendan, OSA served as the Vicar Provincial from 2007 to the Chapter of 2008, during which Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Kangyep, OSA was elected the Prior Provincial of the Nigerian Province. During this period, new houses were opened in Kaduna, Zaria Diocese: Saint Paul's Catholic Church, Jaji, Warri Diocese: All Saints Catholic Church, Ogharefe, Lagos Archdiocese: St Vincent's Catholic Church, Apapa and Minna Diocese: Our Lady Queen of Peace, Bida. In 2007, 17th January, the Province lost Fr Clement Danock in Maiduguri and was buried on 26th January the same year at the Augustinian Monastery, Jos. In 2008, a formal erection of the Pius Union of St Rita was done. During the same year, a proposal was made for a Southern Vicariate in 2008, which was discussed during the Ordinary Provincial Chapter. In 2009, the Assistant Prior General, Very Rev. Fr. Franz Klein, OSA visited the Province from November-December 2009. St Rita's Clinic was also erected in Mararaba the same year. In 2009, September, St Augustine's College was officially opened. Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Kangyep brought the Irish and the Americans on board financially. He got the project up and running with military precision.

The year 2010 began with the loss of Rev. Fr. Callistus Mbanusi, OSA. He was appointed to St Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi, Benue State, 2nd October 2004, as full-time resident lecturer. After a brief illness, he died 2nd February 2010, at Bishop Murray Hospital, Makurdi, Benue State. He was buried at the Augustinian House of Philosophy, Makurdi, Benue State, now the Augustinian Institute. In the same year in August, the Province had her Intermediate Chapter which was held in the Augustinian Monastery, Jos. This Chapter would be remembered, especially, for the full and open discussion of the proposal for the erection of a Vicariate in Southern Nigeria. During the year 2011, the Province spread her wings beyond Kenya, the Vatican City and Canada to assist the Provinces in England and Italy. In 2012, the Province had her 4th Ordinary Provincial Chapter, from 20th -24th August at the Augustinian Monastery, Jos.

The Ordinary Chapter of 2012 marked the end of Rev. Fr. Hyacinth's tenure as Provincial and the beginning of that of Rev. Fr. John Abubakar, OSA as the new Prior Provincial of the Province of St Augustine of Nigeria. This marked the beginning of another episode that is full of hope and promise for the Order in Nigeria and beyond, and for the Universal Church. A cursory glance at the miles already covered from 2012-2014 reveals tremendous strides. During this period, Saint Augustine's College New Karu has witnessed an expansion of its capacity in all fronts to meet up the basic elements of Augustinian pedagogy. The collective passion of the Augustinian brothers for an Augustinian Institute, which has lingered in the Province's Acts of the Chapter for a retinue of years has been finally established through the determination of the Prior Provincial. The basic requirements for its take-off have been put in place and this year will mark its second session since it began.

During this same period, the international character of the Order of Saint Augustine has shone out in a way that is distinctive. The Province acquired a community in Italy in 2013: Parochiale Sant'Aurea, Ostia Antica. From West Africa, the Province of Nigeria navigated to South Africa in 2013, where it has established a community: Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Pomeroy, Kwazulu Natal, Dundee Diocese. Pomeroy is a small town in KwaZulu-Natal Province South Africa, located between two cities, Durban and Dundee. It is 194 km north of Durban, the largest city in the Province and 56 km south-east of Dundee, a coal mining city.

In response to the international character of the Order, a college of brothers have been sent out to collaborate with our sister Provinces abroad. In order to be well prepared for their ministry, many Nigerian Augustinians have taken up the pursuit of studies in earnest. We now have Nigerian Augustinians schooling in Italy, Kenya, Philippines, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada. The intellectual capacity of the Province has never expanded with this speed. While tentacles were spread abroad, all the opportunities within the country were also attended to. A new community has been established in Makurdi. For some years the Province has tried to find its way into the diocese, but in 2013 it was realized. St Francis Catholic Church, in Makurdi town was given to the Augustinians in

Nigeria by Most Rev. Athanasius Usuh. The Province has also celebrated her 75th Anniversary, during which a secondary School at Rantya, ST MONICA'S ACADEMY was commissioned and dedicated to the first three Augustinian missionaries to come to Nigeria.

What lies at the future of the Province is the design not only of the Prior Provincial but of all the brethren. Thus, the Prior Provincial, Very Rev. Fr. John Abubakar, OSA, during his opening speech at the floor of the Provincial Ordinary Chapter in 2012 said that "In your hands more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course of moving our Order forward."³⁸ In another paragraph he wrote "We now realize more than ever our interdependence on each other; that if we must go forward, we must move forward as a trained and loyal family"³⁹. Above all, while we make our contributions, he further wrote that "We need to remind ourselves that our Order is God's project. We are simply mortal collaborators limited by time. ... let us learn to entrust the Order into God's hands and try to get our plans for the future from him."⁴⁰

³⁸ John Abubakar, "New Provincial's Address" in the Acts of the Ordinary Chapter, 2012, p. 29

³⁹ John Abubakar, "New Provincial's Address", p. 29

⁴⁰ John Abubakar, "New Provincial's Address", p. 29