

A PROFILE OF VERY REV. FR. PROFESSOR HYACINTH EMENTA ICHOKU

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The historical evolution of the life of Prof. Hyacinth Ementa Ichoku articulates the peculiarity of a transcendental otherworldly tale of the thermodynamics of the eternal elements of providence and sustenance. This particularity is defined, unlike the inferno of a revolution, by a motion beautifully formed by a swaggering gait, transmuting the retinues of life's fundamental forces into an edifice that would stand the test of time. This edifice is Prof. Hyacinth Ementa Ichoku, an edifice we attempt to describe its various dimensions. His life's definition was captured several years ago by Abraham Lincoln: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in".

Prof. Ichoku, popularly known as Owa, hails from Nawfia, a centre of ancient civilization and culture in Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State. Nawfia, where he was born in 1959, is surrounded by major neighbouring towns like Enugwu Ukwu, Nise, Amawbia and Enugwu Agidi. It is not only one of the ancestral homes of the Igbo people in terms of origin; it is a town connected to other towns, thus preparing its

citizens for a cosmopolitan spirit and lifestyle. And this local cosmopolitan character of Nawfia town is at the base of Prof. Hyacinth Ichoku's Igwebuike spirit that makes him appreciate the beauty of alterity in all its good forms. Like Plato, he holds that: "It would be better for me ... that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself." His life form squares with what Plato captures thus: "Every heart sings a song, incomplete until another heart whispers".

He is the son of the great legend, the Late Mr Johnson Ichoku Owa and the Late Mrs Mary Akuenu Ichoku Owa, a woman of cultural sensitivity and sturdy character on various fronts. From the hands of his parents, Prof. Ichoku received the fundamental cultural and human formation that set the parameters for the future. His parentage is at the base of his self-awareness, self-confidence and sense of mystery.

Professor Ichoku is a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Awka, Anambra State, and was ordained by the Late Archbishop Albert Obiefuna. At the time of his ordination in 1988, he was the first Catholic priest from the whole of Nawfia. He is, however, a Professor of Development Microeconomics with a primary interest in Health Economics. Until he was appointed the Vice-Chancellor of Veritas University Abuja in 2018, he was a Professor at the Department of Economics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), where he taught Microeconomics, Econometrics and Public Finance.

As a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Awka, he has served in the following capacities: Chairman Project Implementation Committee for the Proposed Peter University; Chairman of Awka Diocesan Health Scheme; Chairman of Awka Diocesan Pension Scheme; Member of Uzondu Micro-Finance Bank. Beyond his diocese, he was also a Member of the Finance Committee of the Catholic Bishops Conference Finance Committee.

His academic training started at Ojoko Memorial Primary School, from where he proceeded to All Hallows Minor Seminary, Onitsha, where he distinguished himself as a genius in the sciences, especially mathematics, physics and chemistry. It is, therefore, not surprising that during his prefecting at All Hallows, after sitting for WAEC, he taught the students of All Hallows Physics and mathematics. He did his Major Seminary studies at Bigard Memorial Seminary Ikot Ekpene and Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, where he bagged degrees in Philosophy and Divinity in 1984 and 1988, respectively. While at the Major Seminary, he was the Editor-In-Chief of the *Bigard Torch Magazine* and was so professional that he was nicknamed the Editor-In-Chief. His articles were second to none.

After his ordination, he was sent to serve as the Finance Administrator at the Catholic Institute of West Africa (1989-1992). In 1998, he went to study Economics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he obtained a BSc degree in Economics. He was awarded the Scholarship of the Government of Sweden (SIDA fellowship) to do his Master's Degree at the University of Cape Town (South Africa) in 1999, where he graduated with Distinction in Dissertation in the year 2000 and enrolled for his PhD in 2002 before he was recalled to take up a teaching appointment in the Department of Economics at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. He combined this lecturing assignment in UNN with his PhD Research at the University of Cape Town until he was awarded a PhD in 2006, after which he returned fully to Nigeria.

From 2003 to 2012, the Professor combined intensive classroom teaching and extensive research work for which he was awarded several international research grants from notable global institutions, like the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada, the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRFSA), and the

African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) in Nairobi, which sponsored his PhD field research. Professor Ichoku has published more than 50 papers in international peer-reviewed journals in the fields of health economics and general development microeconomics. Given his contribution to his field of research, he was raised to the rank of Full Professor by the Governing Council of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 2012.

As a result of his widespread and quality contribution to knowledge, it is not surprising that Prof. Ichoku has attracted a variety of quality attention from reputable organizations, also accounting for his wide range of field experience from consultancies undertaken for several international organizations including World Bank (WB), United States AID (USAID), Department of International Development (DFID), European Union (EU), World Health Organization (WHO), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Results for Development (USA), Apt Associates, just to mention a few.

The Nawfia cosmopolitan spirit, accompanied by the fundamental life elements of commitment, diligence and hard work, has taken Prof. Ichoku to different places outside of his home country. As a cosmopolitan scholar, he has served as PhD Examiner to the University of Cape Town (South Africa); he has also served in the same capacity at the North West University (South Africa), University of Lagos and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, among others. He led an international accreditation team to the University of Technology Namibia and was a member of the international accreditation team to St. Augustine College, Johannesburg.

At the University of Nigeria, Prof Ichoku served in several capacities and chaired over 10 Committees of the University. He was the Director of Academic Planning at the University of Nigeria from 2011 to 2014 and the Director of the Institute of

Maritime Studies from 2014 to 2018. It was while serving in this capacity that he was appointed the Vice-Chancellor of Veritas University in September 2018. Since 2018, Prof. Ichoku has been the Vice Chancellor of Veritas University, gradually transforming the institution into one of the best citadels of learning and a centre of academic excellence in Africa.

In the spirit of Pope Francis, Prof. Ichoku has not only given himself to the service of the Church and humanity, he has been very creative and innovative in his work with young people. The greatness of his service at Veritas University lies not in the quantity of what he has accomplished but in the love with which he accomplishes them. Mother Theresa says:

“It is not how much we do,
but how much love we put into the doing.
It is not how much we give,
but how much love we put in the giving.”

Added to love is his courage. And in this, he shows that love requires courage to be love. The sight of Prof. Ichoku reminds his admirers of the words of Christopher Columbus:

“You can never cross the ocean unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

As Vice Chancellor of Veritas University, he has shown himself to be a moderate and pragmatic administrator who is more comfortable with practice than theory. He believes that if there are dreams about a beautiful Veritas University, there are also roads that lead to this goal. Two of these roads are vision and hard work. The question that animates his commitment to duty is once raised by Winston Churchill: “What is the use of living if it is not to strive for noble causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?”

Our generation will not likely encounter the likes of Prof. Ichoku at every point of our historical context, so it falls to us, as best we can, to carry forward the example that he set. He no longer belongs to us; he belongs to the ages. May he be ever sustained by a profound faith, nourished by unceasing prayer, fearless in unshakable hope and deeply rooted in Love with God.