



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine

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Introduction

The book publication, *Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine*, is a timely and profound contribution to contemporary Catholic thought. Written by two leading Augustinian intellectuals in Nigeria—Rev. Fr. Prof. Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony OSA, Prior Provincial of the Nigerian Province, and Fr. Emeka Xris Obiezu OSA—the book introduces readers to the personality, spirituality, and ecclesiological vision of Pope Leo XIV. It situates his papacy not only within the historical trajectory of the Leonine papal line but also within the Augustinian tradition of communal life, interiority, apostolic zeal, and love for truth.

The central thesis of the book is that Pope Leo XIV embodies both continuity and renewal: continuity with the Augustinian spirituality of his order and the Leonine heritage of earlier Popes, and renewal in his commitment to dialogue, bridge-building, social justice, and missionary outreach. Seen through the philosophical lens of Kanu's **Igwebuike philosophy**—a communitarian framework that emphasizes unity-in-diversity, complementarity, and collective responsibility—Pope Leo XIV emerges as an “Igwebuike Pope.” In this sense, he is a cosmopolitan Pope committed to bringing together modernity and tradition, ancient wisdom and contemporary realities, including all peoples across boards, all hands united in Christ for the mission of a reconciliatory and peace-driven Church. A Church, where Christ is the centre and world where healing and peace create a better atmosphere, amidst political tensions, war and global insecurity and the widening gap in poverty continents like Africa. The Pope is interested in a collective peace that enables is to do and live better as people of God and the world.

Augustinian Identity and Ecclesial Mission

A rich section of the book emphasizes Pope Leo XIV's declaration: “*With you I am a Christian, for you I am a Bishop.*” This underscores his humility and profound understanding of his role. The authors remind us that Leo's Augustinian identity is not nominal but existential. He has lived the Augustinian values of community life, interiority, and apostolicity throughout his career—from Prior General of the Augustinian Order to Bishop in Peru, then Cardinal, and finally Pope.

Kanu and Obiezu highlight that Pope Leo XIV's vision resonates with the **Second Vatican Council's** call for each religious order to reclaim its spirituality for the good of the Church. His insistence on synodality, dialogue, and fraternity mirrors the Augustinian conviction that faith is lived in community (Kanu, 2015). Here, the link with Igwebuike philosophy is evident:



the Pope's identity is deeply relational, affirming that one is truly oneself only in communion with others. Just as Igwebuike holds that the "strength of the palm tree is in its fronds," Pope Leo XIV insists that the vitality of the Church lies in its members united in mission and love.

Continuity with the Leonine Heritage

The book also situates Pope Leo XIV in dialogue with the long line of Popes named Leo, from Leo I (the Great) through Leo XIII. Each Pope Leo carried forward a legacy of courage, reform, and commitment to truth. Pope Leo XIII, especially, stands out for his groundbreaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), which founded modern Catholic social teaching by addressing the rights and dignity of workers (Schuck, 1991).

By choosing the name Leo XIV, the new Pope signals continuity with this heritage. As Kanu and Obiezu explain, the symbolism of the "lion"—strength, courage, and leadership—is significant. Yet, Leo XIV is not nostalgic; he strikes a balance between tradition and modernity, between safeguarding the heritage of the faith and engaging contemporary questions such as globalization, social justice, and peace. This balance illustrates what Kanu's Igwebuike philosophy calls *complementarity*: the ability to hold differences together without contradiction but as mutual enrichment (Kanu, 2015). In this way, Pope Leo XIV's papacy becomes a bridge between the past and the present, between tradition and reform.

The Igwebuike Pope: Unity and Peace as Hallmarks

One of the strongest aspects of the book is its portrayal of Pope Leo XIV as a reconciler and peace builder. His first messages as Pope underscored peace, justice, and truth as the hallmarks of his pontificate. He urged humanity to "build bridges through dialogue, encounter, and love," echoing both the Leonine spirit and Augustinian spirituality.

Through the Igwebuike lens, this emphasis reflects the African communitarian worldview where peace is not the absence of conflict but the harmony of relationships. Pope Leo XIV embodies the Igwebuike Pope because he recognizes that the Church must be a family of diverse peoples united under Christ. His stress on synodality resonates with Igwebuike's insistence on collective participation: no one is left behind in the mission of the Church. The Pope's ecclesiology of communion thus represents the global relevance of this African philosophical thought.

Relevance for a Missionary Church Today

The book also engages contemporary challenges facing the Church: secularism, war, inequality, and the decline of faith in certain regions. Pope Leo XIV's answer is not institutional rigidity but a recovery of the Church's essential identity as a community of disciples sent in mission. Here again, the authors stress the Augustinian emphasis on apostolicity—living the Gospel as a community of love and truth-seekers.

This missionary orientation finds grounding in Igwebuike philosophy, which insists on unity as strength for collective action. In the African worldview, crises are not solved by isolated individuals but by the community acting together. Similarly, Pope Leo XIV calls on the entire



Church to work hand-in-hand to heal a fractured world. His insistence on dialogue with other faiths, cultures, and political communities is deeply Igwebuike, affirming that unity does not erase difference but draws strength from it.

Evaluation

Kanu and Obiezu's book succeeds in presenting Pope Leo XIV not only as a religious leader but as a philosopher-theologian of unity and peace. Their scholarship combines history, theology, and Augustinian spirituality with deep philosophical insight. The work is particularly relevant for African theology and philosophy, including the area of missiology, showing how Igwebuike can enrich global Catholicism by highlighting the communitarian, reconciliatory, and peace-oriented aspects of Pope Leo XIV's papacy, as it unfolds.

The book is also timely, as it speaks to a world divided by conflict and mistrust and how the Papacy of Pope Leo XIV will navigate it. Based on the way Pope Leo XIV was described and presented in the book, he can be summed as an Igwebuike Pope (at least, this is how the reviewer sees it) and by this, it can be implied that the authors invite both Africans and non-Africans to appreciate the relevance of employing African philosophical traditions analogous in shaping universal Church leadership.

Critique

Like in every good effort, there has to be a critical relook in order to arrive at an epistemic stronghold and unbiased assessment. In *Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine*, Kanu and Obiezu thoughtfully examine the new Pope's identity, vision, and historical context. They depict Leo XIV as a Pope advocating for balance, peace, and dialogue, whose Augustinian roots and choice of the Leonine name enable him to serve as a mediator in a divided Church. While the narrative is uplifting, it also presents several issues that warrant critical examination, particularly regarding the nature of papal authority, internal theological conflicts, and the practical difficulties in implementing ideals in governance.

(a) Philosophical Issues: Unity and Division

The authors point to Pope Leo XIV's dedication to unity, dialogue, and continuity with his predecessors. While striving for unity is crucial in ecclesial contexts, achieving it becomes increasingly challenging in a polarized Church. One must critically consider whether calls for balance and dialogue are sufficient to address the deep divisions between progressive and traditional factions. Theological disagreements surrounding liturgy, gender roles, clerical celibacy, and lay participation in governance cannot be resolved merely through appeals for fraternity. Critics of synodality warn that dialogue lacking clear doctrinal foundations may lead to confusion instead of consensus (Weigel, 2023). The book would strengthen its optimistic portrayal of Leo XIV's unifying role by directly confronting these divisions.

(b) Theological Examination: Tradition, Reform, and Papal Leadership

The authors depict Leo XIV as a Pope navigating the terrain between tradition and reform, sustaining the faith heritage while addressing contemporary issues. This balance is an attractive



proposition, but history demonstrates that papal leadership often necessitates bold and sometimes contentious decisions. Pope Leo I directly addressed heresies, Leo X's confrontation with Luther ignited the Reformation, and Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum* with clear directives on labor rights. In contrast, Leo XIV is characterized more as a mediator than a doctrinal authority.

This brings forth an essential theological question: can the Church uphold the essence of faith while embracing modern trends like secular pluralism, gender inclusiveness, or interfaith dialogue? Critics caution that attempts to blend these elements may weaken the Church's prophetic stance (Faggioli, 2021). The portrayal of Leo XIV may underestimate the struggle between maintaining orthodoxy and engaging with contemporary society. Recent discussions at the Synod on Synodality illustrate this dilemma, as bishops and laity remain divided on topics such as the women's diaconate, LGBTQ+ rights, and clerical accountability (O'Connell, 2023).

(c) Practical Assessment: Peace and Mission in a Globalized Context

The authors underscore peace, justice, and truth as core priorities of Leo XIV's papacy. While admirable, this vision faces practical challenges. The Vatican, despite being a moral authority, has limited political influence in conflicts like the war in Ukraine, regional instability in the Middle East, or the rise of authoritarianism. Appeals for dialogue and reconciliation may fall on deaf ears among global powers more concerned with interests than principles.

Moreover, within the Church, issues such as clerical abuse scandals, declining vocations in Europe, and financial scandals within the Vatican curia diminish the credibility of papal calls for peace and justice. As Reese (2020) points out, the papacy often struggles to reform internal Church structures while asserting moral authority on the global stage. While the book effectively locates Leo XIV within the Leonine tradition of bravery and justice, it underestimates the institutional challenges he will encounter.

Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine effectively portrays the Pope as a symbol of continuity, balance, and pastoral vision, successfully linking Augustinian spirituality to relevant ecclesiastical issues. However, the book tends to idealize its subject, lacking engagement with the entrenched divisions within the Church, the tensions between tradition and reform, and the limitations of papal authority in confronting global crises.

Theologically, the papacy has historically been tested during crises, necessitating both clarity and conciliation. Philosophically, the pursuit of unity must address genuine pluralism without assuming a false sense of harmony amidst deep conflicts. Practically, Pope Leo XIV will require more than inspiring rhetoric; he must effectively navigate institutional reluctance, ideological divides, and global uncertainties. Therefore, while the book serves as a valuable introduction, the true evaluation of Leo XIV's papacy will depend on his ability to exemplify not only Augustinian humility and Leonine courage but also the practical leadership needed for a Church navigating the tension between tradition and modernity.



Conclusion

Pope Leo XIV: Son of Saint Augustine is a landmark contribution to Augustinian studies, papal history, Church history and African Christian philosophy. Rev. Fr. Prof. Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony OSA and Rev. Fr. Emeka Xris Obiezu OSA demonstrate that Pope Leo XIV is not simply another Pope but an embodiment of continuity, balance, and unity. Through Igwebuike philosophy, he can be understood as a Pope who blends the ancient past with the modern present, unites tradition with reform, and insists that all hands must be on deck to achieve the missionary mandate of the Church. This book is not only a historical or theological text—it is a manifesto for a Church united in Christ, for peace, justice, and love.

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