



The power of the cross, to the ends of the earth

An interview with Patrick Augustine, Missionary Bishop in Bor, South Sudan

November 2024

Wearing the courage of his convictions on his sleeve, Bishop Patrick has been a mover and shaker through decades of global ministry and mission.

During his sabbatical at Wycliffe Hall, we asked him to give an insight into his extraordinary journey of faith, revitalising the complacent and bringing hope to the persecuted:

I was raised in an Islamic majority country - Pakistan, ordained at the Cathedral Church of the Resurrection, Lahore and appointed as a parish priest in Islamabad, within the Anglican Communion.

My original visit to Oxford was in gratitude to a mentor. I'm indebted to Christopher Lamb, a Church Missionary Society Mission Partner in Lahore - he was trained as an ordinand at Wycliffe Hall (1960-63).

My international ministry began with a calling to re-energise the Church in the Western Hemisphere... to shake things up a bit! In 1983, my family uprooted from Pakistan to the USA - where I took up an Episcopal Church role as a priest to reach out to ethnic communities, build interfaith bridges and take the Gospel to unreached groups.

It took 6 years and 114 job rejections to get me there - there weren't many people of my skin colour - but God finally shattered that glass ceiling.

The Church in the West has lost the fire in its belly. Jesus said, 'I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.' This fire was carried by William Carey, David Livingstone and numerous others to Asia and Africa. It is Western society that has become affluent: things have become easy for us. This is why God brought me - as an evangelist, from a contrasting background - to speak and work in the West to reignite the missional flame and work with my brothers and sisters.

I am a re-igniter of the flame; a sower of seeds. Reaching the unreached has become my vital mission. Bringing the gospel to the unevangelized and building bridges to people of other faiths.

Four of us formed the Anglican Frontier Mission which, for 30 years, has gone around the world making disciples of those waiting to hear the Gospel for the very first time. We adopted 25 unevangelized people groups including the Qashqai (a nomadic tribe in Iran) among whom there was not a single Christian. This is not 'rapid growth' work; it requires commitment and patience.

A Bishop on a magazine cover sparked my passion for South Sudan. This man was walking hundreds of miles to baptise thousands asserting Christianity in defiance of Sharia Law. Bishop Nathaniel Garang is now 100 years old in Bor, South Sudan, and in 1992 his striking cover-story in the CMS Magazine spoke a directive to me about a persecuted population I wanted to work among; to serve.

Holding a Sudanese Dinka cross, I gave testimony to the US Congress. I said: "The living faith of the persecuted has grown from the Cross of Christ. Two million killed and four million dispersed as refugees. The cross has become their proud symbol of the strength to live and die for Jesus Christ." Congress knew what was going on in South Sudan, but needed impetus to address it. God miraculously opened a door and in 1996 I became chair of a partnership between the Episcopal Church in the USA and two dioceses in the UK. Together, we supported and strengthened the relationship with the Anglican Province of Sudan.

I learned, then prayed, then partnered, then finally entered South Sudan. There were 65,000 people in Kakuma refugee camp in the desert, on the Kenyan side of the border, as I prepared to cross into a war zone.

My guide was blunt with me about the risks: *If anything happens you might not return. If you die your body will be buried here: you will not be brought back. Are you willing to proceed?*

"If my Lord took the risk for my salvation, then I will take a risk for others", was my reply. I was thinking of the crucifixion - the jeopardy that God had faced to be in the world. So, although I felt fear, I set out boldly into this place of war and persecution to be eyewitness to their suffering and triumphant faith.

I saw Sudanese Christians holding crosses in affirmation of the living faith of the persecuted. It made vivid the power of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:17: *'For Christ did not send me to baptise but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.'*

I was appointed Missionary Bishop in Bor, in South Sudan, in June 2019. I live here for 3 months of each year: in a mud hut, eating frugally, walking everywhere in almost unbearable heat. It's a physically hard place. I return to the USA to visit churches to raise support for my work in the Diocese of Bor. I receive no financial benefit personally, but live on my pension and social security.

I am here to equip others. In practical terms, this may mean helping a local community to establish a sewing school, build classrooms, secure clean water or supply malaria medications - as well as training pastors.

I've become God's beggar - on behalf of my people. The oppressed; the persecuted; the people of Bor - they have become my people. In the USA, I was Rector of an endowed parish in an affluent community - yet I've been called to serve the poorest. Prophet Isaiah's words ring in my ears: *'God says: It is too small a thing for you to be my servant.... I shall make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.'* Wow! What a charge - what a privilege.

We must turn heartache into HOPE. Stand and pray in solidarity with those suffering - but also bring hope. Because of the resurrection. Because Jesus offers life not death. Because his rising again turns our darkness to light. Who in this world has that message of hope but only Jesus?

Public accolades should not be confused with self identity. I have many titles; I wear a Bishop's purple shirt and ring; I was awarded the Cross of St Augustine - one of the highest distinctions in the Anglican Communion. Yet the person I feel myself to be is a simple, lowly, 'poor and smelly' fisherman of Galilee. I am a bond servant of God. As Mahatma Gandhi said: *'You must be the change you wish to see in the world'*.

I have stood up, with my face up, and asked for the strength to give witness among suffering, death, starvation and imprisonment. For 35 years, this has been my journey of faith.

"How can I be the voice of the voiceless?" is my enduring prayer. This prayer accompanies me everywhere. From my roots in Pakistan, to my adoptive USA, to the streets of Oxford... to the ends of the earth.

FIND OUT MORE

The Right Reverend Dr Patrick P. Augustine is Missionary Bishop in Bor in South Sudan and previously served as Canon and Commissary to the Archbishop of Sudan who was in exile in Uganda.

In 2012 he was awarded the [Cross of St Augustine](#) by the Archbishop of Canterbury 'in recognition of his contribution at national and international level to the promotion of evangelism, ecumenism, advocate for persecuted church and the free exercise of faith'. Archbishop Rowan Williams in his citation calls Bishop Patrick 'Voice of the voiceless' and 'Ambassador of Peace'.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the USA gave him the Episcopal Peace Fellowship award.

Bishop Patrick holds Doctor of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees. He is Visiting Academic Scholar at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, during Michaelmas Term 2024.



Bishop Patrick Augustine



Bishop Patrick Augustine (right) with Bishop Nathaniel Garang (left)



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