

ALL IN GRATITUDE: JOURNEY THROUGH MEMORY LANE  
Simon Mary Ahiokhai (May 12, 2021)

Yesterday evening, my university celebrated our faculty for all their excellent work. As is the tradition, the community comes together to celebrate who we each are and what we are as an intellectual community with a vocation to make a difference. I was one of the lucky ones this year. I was awarded the Outstanding Scholarship Award for 2021. Below, you will find the gracious comments read to the institution by our Provost, Dr. Herbert Medina. But before you read it, let me share a little memory.

University of Portland is a place where dreams are given a new life. In 2016, I had reached the dead end of my supposedly intellectual career. I could not secure a tenure-track position. I came to the University of Portland to interview for a position. I got the position. I also got an intellectual community where I settled in and allowed my mind to open up in a way God wanted it to be. I embraced my vocation as a scholar and scholarship also embraced me. In 2021, I received tenure and promotion to associate professor. Yesterday, I gave a keynote address to my prestigious university; to scholars I respect and admire a lot because of how solid each of my colleagues are in their respective disciplines. However, I never knew that something else was coming. I was in my office to follow the events of the evening and a colleague came to my office to share the evening events with me and caught me on camera weeping with tears of joy. Here I am, an ordinary boy from Benin City, Nigeria teaching at a very prestigious university and being awarded the very prestigious Outstanding Scholarship Award that the university gives to those who have made a difference through their scholarship.

University of Portland has given me new life and a purpose to keep doing what gives me true joy and life. I am deeply honored by them. I will cherish this award with a sense of deep gratitude. It has been a journey, one that has allowed me to find my voice as an intellectual. I am thankful to my colleagues for this gift. Kindly rejoice with me my dear friends. Enjoy!

THE 2021 OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

"This awardee is a transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary scholar whose scholarship and scholarly inquiry is the bedrock and foundation to classroom teaching. Repeatedly students comment, "you made me think"; "you stretched my mind"; "you changed my life." Exceedingly gifted with a nimble mind, a passionate spirit, an insatiable hunger "to know," and a true intellectual vocation, this scholar has made

contribution after contribution, chock full of novel ideas, and writes not for the sake of maintaining a “habit of scholarship” but because this scholar has something to say! This scholar’s works challenges the status quo, pushes the boundaries of cherished traditions, wakes up the imagination, and dares students and colleagues alike to think deeply and beyond the confines of one’s discipline, one’s faith, one’s region, and one’s country. Colleagues call this scholar’s work “remarkable,” “insightful,” “new,” “innovative,” and “transformative.” Perhaps, though, the one outstanding gift that this scholar possesses besides intellectual giftedness and curiosity is a profound humility. Forever welcoming students and colleagues into intellectual discourse and fun conversations, this scholar works to include others in the projects being pursued, always aiming to make others’ lights shine more brightly than this scholar’s own. The Committee on Teaching and Scholarship is proud to award the 2021 Outstanding Scholarship Award to globe trekker, international scholar, and respected theologian, Dr. Simon Ahiokhai, whose persistent, prophetic, and compelling commitment to justice, to interreligious dialogue, and to the eradication of racism and its intersectionalities in church and world, has made our students, our faculty, and all his world-wide colleagues and readers of his works more humble themselves because through his scholarly contributions, we come to realize how much healing and transformation is needed in our world. Simon’s irrepressible humor and passion makes those who know him want to “go the distance” with him, to create that new heavens and that new earth envisioned by the poet Isaiah and longed for by all creation. Congratulations, Dr. Simon Ahiokhai."