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### **REPOSITIONING NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PARADIGMS FOR INNOVATION AND CHANGE**

**By**

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## Citation

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# **REPOSITIONING NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: PARADIGMS FOR INNOVATION AND CHANGE**

The subject of this lecture requires us to set up a framework or a paradigm by which the Nigerian University system can deliver innovation and change to the Nation it was created to serve.

It will of course be arrogant if not foolhardy to purport to be able to achieve that enormous objective singlehandedly, let alone within the space of a lecture. Yet it is crucial that one should never pass up on any opportunity one has to be involved in the conversations on National Transformation - especially where that discourse is at a gathering of academics and tomorrow's agents of change, in an institution which within less than 10 years of existence has by sheer vision and innovation, for almost 3 years consistently been declared the best private University by the National University Commission (NUC).

I will therefore share my thoughts on the subject with a view at least to making some hopefully useful contributions to the important issue of bringing positive change to our society.

There is no question that universities stand in a unique position to shape and order the trajectory of the societies within which they exist. It is probably true to say that the greatest challenge that humankind faces in this and subsequent centuries is the provision of sustenance for its ever-growing population. For Africa, which remains the poorest continent, that challenge is greatly magnified by the constant failure of many of its nations to meet the minimum human development indices even as its population bludgeons. Fortunately, there is broad consensus of the leveraging role of education and especially higher education in providing the sustainable economic growth and development that bears the answer to the challenge.

The World Bank in its recent Africa Competitiveness Report (2013) observed that education remained one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality, and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth. Indeed, there is credible and

consistent empirical justification of the exponential effect of higher education on economic development.

A study by Lin (2004) of Taiwan found that a 1% rise in the number of those who completed higher education grew industrial output by 0.15%. Significantly, Lin found that the study of natural sciences and engineering of all the disciplines had the largest effect on output.

It would seem self-evident, then, that for Nigeria to effectively confront the challenges of meaningful growth, i.e. one which translates to job opportunities, a highly trained workforce and consistently increasing capacity to innovate, she must urgently increase the size of her higher education system, but more importantly its content.

Today, with a population in excess of 150 million, Nigeria has 40 Federal Universities, 39 State Universities and 50 private universities. This is sub-Saharan Africa's largest higher education system. But that is where the good news ends. The entire university system is now only able to offer admission to 20% of successful JAMB candidates. Public spending on education is very poor. In recent years, Federal spending

on education has consistently been below 8%. South Africa by comparison spends at least 18% of its budget. One of the key fallouts of poor funding is the degraded capacity for research. Between 2009 and 2013, Nigeria had only 439 scientific and engineering articles published in physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics, clinical medicine, bio-medical research, engineering and technology, earth and space sciences. Australia in the same period had 20,603 publications, Germany-46,259, India -22,481, South Africa- 3,125, South Korea- 25,593, Malaysia – 2,092, Saudi- Arabia – 1,491, Singapore – 4,543, Brazil – 13,148, and UK-46,035. It is quite apparent from the figures that if commitment to research in science and technology is any indication of commitment to innovation and change, then Africa's largest economy is far from demonstrating serious commitment. Nigeria is currently ranked 115 out of 144 countries in the Global Competitive Index (World Bank) behind Zambia, Ghana, Kenya, and Egypt. The index takes into account performance in investment in higher education and training and technology and innovation readiness.

An important indicator of a nation's capacity for

innovation is the number of patent applications made annually. Patents are the exclusive rights granted to an inventor over the commercial use of his invention. Although no official records were available for Nigeria for the period 2009-2013, South Africa recorded 608 applications, Singapore, 1,081, and South Korea 148,136. These figures show a positive correlation with the numbers of publication in science and technology. The more research done, the larger the number of patentable inventions.

The features of the new paradigm for change and innovation would seem quite apparent from the present deficiencies of the system. Our higher education system must be deliberately envisioned, planned and funded to be the engine of innovation and change. Education for its own sake is a luxury our Nation cannot with the current levels of poverty and unemployment afford. Governments must award universities, either public or private that show academic commitment to relevant research and innovation by giving research subventions to such institutions. Ratings of universities should be largely



based on their relevance to solving the scientific, technological and governance challenges of the nation. The interaction of industry and commerce with universities, especially with a view to finding research relevant to specific industrial needs, is one that must be deliberately nurtured and encouraged.

Again government must provide incentives for businesses that fund universities or partner in other ways for research and innovation. Tax deductions for such funds and open recognition by awards and mention by government will greatly encourage businesses to actively collaborate with universities. Federal and State governments must dedicate funds managed by independent professionals, for research and innovation. Such independent professionals will vet and recommend research proposals (not just from academics) for funding.

Governments should also encourage universities and individuals to endow research grants and professional chairs in areas relevant to government's development agenda. Research funds endowed by universities, should then be matched naira for naira by the Federal Government. The establishment of specialized

universities focused in key areas identified as being critical to national development is also important. The phenomenal rise of several developing countries such as Chile, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, underscores the imperative of innovation in the adaptation and use of available technology, and by creating an enabling government-driven environment for creative and innovative adaptation of technology. As we have seen, these nations prioritized research and intervention. This is the lesson that late starter economies such as Nigeria must learn. First, there is the advantage of available technology and no new investments need to be made to create such a gain. However, mere copying will not be sufficient; accelerated development will require adaptation and creative innovation.

Innovation and entrepreneurship driven by university communities is no longer news. Colleges and universities in developing countries, especially in the United States, are investing in creative programmes for faculty and students promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. Indeed, the dream of many students, especially those in technology -related disciplines is to create the next social media mega success, following on

the successes of the student start-ups like Facebook and Twitter. Those dreams and the energy they generate must be harnessed by the universities of today. Faculties of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, research endowments for students and Faculty are urgently required. A 21<sup>st</sup> century university must invest in systematic development of research and useable knowledge and innovation and entrepreneurship. Studies show that in the past twenty years, most jobs created in the U. S. were from young start-up companies (Hatiwanger & Miranda (2010), see <http://www.nber.org./papers/w.1630/pdf>).

This trend is bound to continue. This is why universities are becoming increasingly creative in developing programmes and projects around innovation and entrepreneurship. The University of Colorado has an inter- disciplinary systems Innovation and Entrepreneur Degree Programme , Rice University runs a business plans contest and the University of Florida has the INSPIREation Hall, a first of its kind entrepreneurship and innovation residential community where students, leading researchers, industry actors and professionals interact.

A discernible pattern in the development of technology-driven entrepreneurship today is the creative energy of many young people outside the walls of formal educational institutions - following on the well-publicized stories of the technology heroes like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs who were university drop-outs. There are now thousands of computer application developers, working from their bedrooms and living rooms all over the world. Our universities must be flexible enough to attract such students into some academic programme or the other. This serves several purposes. It offers the young inventor /entrepreneur an environment where they may synergise with like minds and access material or leading researchers in their fields. Second, the university benefits in terms of reputation and possibly financially from the successes of their innovations.

As we had noted registering of patents for inventions is hardly done in Nigeria. Yet this is crucial to ensure that inventors benefit maximally from their intellectual property. While registration infrastructure already exists, its use is very limited. This is a possible area of

intervention for universities. A comprehensive hand-holding guide for innovators to register their patents and creating awareness even if only on social media, of the need for this may be a low cost – but crucial intervention in the innovation and entrepreneurship value chain.

However, while we join the rest of the world chasing economic advancement through harnessing the knowledge economy and its digital foundations, Nigeria must steer higher education to redress a more fundamental crisis. It is the crisis of our “corrupted society”. The World Bank, in its 2012 Africa Competitiveness Report notes that, aside from access to finance, corruption is rated the second most problematic factor for doing business in Sub-Saharan Africa. Previous studies have confirmed the correlation between official corruption and poverty. While 110 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty we are daily fed with reports of corruption on a scale that one time U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton described as 'unbelievable'. Indeed it would appear that with corruption in Nigeria--the truth is stranger than fiction. One uses the expression “corrupted society”

deliberately to describe the phenomenon which is birthed when a society endures and accommodates corruption to the point where the virus transforms the ethos and the essence of the society to itself. In other words - while corruption suggests a “vice” which bedevils a system or society, being “corrupted” suggests that the evil has become the system or the society itself. The aberration has become the norm.

The “corrupted society” manifests itself in the way that the vision and objectives of almost every institution, political, administrative, judicial and social— are warped , and contorted to fit the brand of corrupt practice(s) which best suits it. Consequently, whole institutions are defined by corruption.

In the “corrupted society”, high values, nobility of action, selflessness, patriotism, service to others and society, and the higher ideals are rare. There is a quick retreat of virtue. The prevailing ethos and culture is one of cheating, dishonesty, undeserved elevation, mediocrity in place of merit.

Consequently, our institutions, civil and military, are deeply affected by the virus. This state of being explains why public office is perceived by public

officers and much of the public as God-given opportunities for self-enrichment which is, these days, of a mind boggling variety. One of the characteristic features of the “corrupted society” is the way that the system quickly makes villains of whistle blowers or mavericks in our midst. The former CBN governor, now Emir of Kano, raised the alarm over \$20.8 billion funds unaccounted for by the NNPC. The Federal Government's eventual response was to suspend him for alleged “financial recklessness”. His passport was seized and in defence to his allegation that his right to freedom of movement had been violated, the SSS claimed that his passport was seized for “sponsoring terrorism”, an allegation which, as we speak, is not substantiated by a shred of evidence.

In 2007-8, Nuhu Ribadu, the man who gave the EFC its now largely diminished image as a “take-no-prisoners” police of financial crimes, was hounded out of the nation. Nuhu Ribadu was offered a bribe of \$15Million USD by James Ibori who was being investigated for pillaging the resources of his State. Nuhu Ribadu took the money from him and returned it to the CBN under the then CBN Governor, Professor Chukwuma Soludo.

Later, one of the criminal charges drawn up against James Ibori was giving a bribe of \$15million US dollars to the chairman of the EFCC. But by 2007, this same Nigerian who resisted an offer of \$15million in cash was not only hounded out of the office of EFCC Chairman, he was hounded out of the police and had to flee into exile. Meanwhile, James Ibori loomed large, a special friend of the President. The then Attorney-General of the Federation refused to cooperate with the British Government to bring him to book on money laundering charges. The bribe charge of \$15Million was quashed by Justice Awukelehin of the Federal High Court. It took a fortuitous turn of events leading to the trial of Ibori in London; with no help whatsoever from the Nigerian government to reveal the truth. I have given these two examples to show how a “corrupted society” operates. Any attempt to fight corruption leads to such a fierce fight back from the system, and the society itself. All forces are deployed against the crusader – ethnic and or religious sentiments are quickly deployed to obscure the main issues. In the end, the hero becomes the villain; he will be taught a hard lesson on how not to fight. The examples above show



how, in a “corrupted society”, all institutions behave in much the same way. The executive and the judiciary in this example all found their own peculiar ways of defending or sustaining corruption and its manifestations.

The same virus afflicts the system of law and order, the police security agencies and even the armed forces. The sheer number of unresolved homicides in Nigeria just from 1999 alone shows a system of law enforcement that is incapable of keeping even the most influential citizens safe; let alone humbler members of society.

In December 2001 the former Attorney-General of the federation, Chief Bola Ige, SAN, was assassinated. The same fate befell Chief Marshall Harry, National Vice-Chair of the PDP (before switching to the ANPP where he was also National Vice Chairman). Harry Dokubo, Chief Funso Williams, and so on were prominent citizens killed in cold blood and to date no one has been held to account for these homicides. A survey of these assassinations which I conducted three years ago as part of the foundation lecture for the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies showed that most were probably officially compromised. Across the country over the

years, at least hundreds of homicides for which no one has been held responsible have been reported. FOUNDATION NATIONAL CRIME SURVEY (2006) did not report crimes to the police. Reasons given by the victims for not reporting (aside from where the victims thought the offences were minor) include “self-help”, the “police would not do anything”, “did not want any police involvement”, “fear of reprisals”, “did not have any money to give police”, and “police would inform the offender”. Of those who reported, a total of 56% were either “not at all satisfied”, “not satisfied” or “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”.

In a CLEEN FOUNDATION National Crime Survey - 79.7% of victims of crimes who did not report to the police, when asked why they would not report to the police (aside from where the victims thought the offence was minor) gave reasons ranging from “self-help” to “the police would not do anything”, or “did not want any police involvement”, to “fear of reprisals”, or “did not have any money to give Police” and “police would inform the offender”.

Clearly again, on account of the poor perception of the

integrity of the Police force, most Nigerians will probably not expect the police to do the duty of maintaining law and order and keeping them and their neighbourhoods safe, faithfully.

There is no question that the legal process or system of administration of justice is in retreat. What most have come to expect is that the coercive powers of the state can be bought and privatised. Those who cannot afford to pay the price of staying out of jail, awaiting trial or convicted are the few who occupy the prisons today. Consequently, despite the high rates of crime, the numbers of persons in Nigerian prisons make interesting comparisons with other countries.

The USA has about 300 million people with 2.1 million convicted and in jail, Russia has about 143 million people and has 871,693 people currently in jail, South Africa has 47.7 million people and 160,196 in jail, Nigeria has a population of 150 million but with only 15,000 people convicted and in jail. It is either we are incredibly well behaved people or the criminal justice system has a problem.

But perhaps worse is the terribly low morale of law enforcement personnel and the military, where the rank and

file are convinced, and perhaps rightly, that funds meant for their operational convenience and welfare are simply embezzled by their superiors. The scandal surrounding the battle readiness or unreadiness of soldiers fighting the terrible Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East is a case in point. The newspapers recently reported a mutiny of troops deployed to fight the insurgency, apparently over these issues. It is incredible indeed that with a security budget of over 1.3 trillion naira, almost a quarter of the entire federal budget, there can still be complaints that national troops are not as well equipped as the insurgents. No matter how much assistance the insurgents are getting, it cannot come anywhere near the federal budget, the question is where is the money? The truth is that in the “corrupted society”, corruption and embezzlement come before the safety and well-being of the citizens, or territorial integrity of the nation. The corrupted society is self-immolating. Very few will deny that the perception of Nigeria and Nigerians is of a place and people with whom integrity, trustworthiness are in short supply. That perception affects all aspects of life. It affects local and international investment decisions.

The frequent issue is how to find the Nigerian of integrity to do business with. The thousands of so called 419 e-mails which emanate daily from Nigeria and the huge daily scandals of official corruption conduce to this perception of Nigerians as frauds. Certificates and other documentation emanating from Nigeria today come under close scrutiny at home and abroad. Obtaining practically any kind of fake documentation, whether degree certificate or diplomas , bank statements or licences, is so commonplace that most institutions now devote considerable resources to verifying documents presented to them. The culture of cheating and pilfering is so widespread that this has become a major disincentive to establishing small businesses, especially retail which may require assistants and sales persons. Businesses where the owners are not hands-on almost always suffer the same fate; eventually staff pilfering and cheating will destroy the business.

The solution to most national crises must begin with an elite consensus to deal with the issue. The Nigerian elite, constituting political, business, academic, religious actors, must decide that the nation's core values must be repaired. The elite must accept, regardless of political, religious, or ethnic affiliation that a corrupted society has no future and it

already contains the seed of its own destruction. It is my submission that the arrowhead of that renaissance- is the nation's system of higher education.

The system of higher education must begin by presenting the empirical correlation between the poverty and dysfunction of institutions and the absence of values that conduce to development and progress. The scale of that empirical inquiry will be enormous. Its findings and recommendations will inform the content of not just tertiary education, but also especially, primary and secondary education.

Christian universities have the special privilege and duty to take the lead in developing this paradigm. Why? First, we must appreciate that, Christianity is the only faith where the scriptures clearly say that believers or adherents are responsible for the destiny of their communities and nations. (Matt 5:13-14). "You are the salt of the earth; .You are the light of the world.."

Before the fall of man, God charged man who carried His Spirit within him to

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every

living thing that moves on the earth.'

The command to be fruitful was not just for the bearing of physical children, after all the animals did not need a command to procreate, but to be creative, solving problems and innovatively building on the foundations of creation.

Before Jesus left the earth, He instructed His disciples in words now described as the Great Commission. He said: Matt 28:18-20

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The call to disciple the nations is a call to permeate the world's institutions, educational, political, business, and entertainment with Gospel principles and worldview. The establishment of universities - like Covenant University and Landmark University by the great visionary, and Chancellor of this citadel, Bishop David Oyedepo is an obedient response to the call to disciple the nation. Second, few can reasonably contest the position that Christianity and Christian intellectual frameworks have been largely

responsible for the industrial and economic revolution which began in Europe and North America and is the superstructure of all modern economies.

Earl Grinols, in a review of the seminal work of the agnostic Rodney Stark; *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity led to Freedom, Capitalism and Western success*, said :

it is difficult to imagine what the world today might be had Christianity not arrived when it did, but it is easy to imagine that the fruitless, repetitive and destructive cycles of despots greedy for power, government confiscation, and expropriation of private wealth, oppression of the people, suppression of individual initiative, slavery and aggression without the intellectual checks of Christianity would have formed a world that was conceptually unchanged from the world as it was before the birth of Christ. Had capitalism and western science not gained a toehold protected by Christian intellectual structures, we might be in a much worse place.

For Rodney Stark's thesis on this aspect of the sociology of religion is compelling. He argues, with evidence, that



Christianity is the source of the capitalist transformation and industrial revolution. He took the view that "while the other world religions emphasised mystery and intuition, Christianity alone embraced reason and logic as the primary guide to religious truth."

Stark quotes a leading Chinese scholar, who sought to understand what accounted for the success of the West:

At first, we thought it was because you had more powerful guns than we had. Next we focused on your economic system...(Stark)...But in the past twenty years, we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. That is why the West is so powerful. The Christian moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of Capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about this.

As important as the physical and scientific innovations in the West were, the moral and social ramparts on which they were built are perhaps more important. What causes economies and systems to survive is an underlying moral framework. In Scripture, it is captured in the words "Righteousness exalts a nation".

To quote Earl Grinols again:

Moral innovations are no less important than Physical. It is well known to constitutional scholars that the American Constitution sprang from the Christian worldview held by its primary authors. Influenced by moral Philosophers such as John Locke, who in turn were influenced by Christian thinkers, Adams and Jefferson wrote that men were "endowed by their creator" with inalienable rights. Likewise, the concept of limited government, the need for separation of powers and the need for checks and balances arose from Christianity's understanding that man is naturally sinful and tends towards self-descent. The Subsequent tangible consequences are immense. Founded with Christian doctrine, the U.S Constitution is the longest standing constitution in the world.

Indeed it is crucial to understand that 'Reason' or 'Rationality' that the Gospel encouraged, being as we were, created in the image of an all-wise God, was probably the most powerful force for the innovation and creativity of western civilization.

Vishal Mangalwadi notes that given the early starts of civilizations of India and China – they should have been eons ahead of the West in developing technology and economy. These great Asian cultures fell behind because their cultures were shaped by world views that taught that intellect was the human problem and that salvation depended on deliverance from intellect, not from sin. (Truth and Transformation : A manifest to ailing Nations, 2009, pg. 43).

Comparing Christian works from whose monasteries the earliest universities developed in Europe (including Oxford and Cambridge) to Hindu and Buddhist monks, Mangalwadi noted some fundamental differences. Permit me to paraphrase him in extenso: Christian monks be observed, shared a common problem with Buddhist monks; neither of them had wives to haul water, grind wheat or find fuel for cooking bread. One difference was that Buddha required his monks to beg for food while the New Testament said that

whoever would not work should not eat. Christian monks thus invented machines because they had to fetch their own water, clean their own dairies, grind their wheat and bake their own bread.

He notes further that Christian monasteries developed technologies because their religious requirement to work was coupled with a spiritual quest for salvation from sin and its consequences including toil, a theological commitment to the dignity of every human being – male or female, high or low-and a religious obligation to cultivate the human mind.

The commitment to cultivation of the mind required the monks to study logic, philosophy, rhetoric, languages, literature, law, mathematics, music, agriculture and metallurgic in addition to the Bible (page 42). Founded upon Augustinian exposition of the Bible, which taught that the human mind, unlike the animal mind, was made in the image of God, capable of understanding truth, distinguishing it from myth and a rational systematic consideration of issues and phenomena, these schools created a uniquely rational religious man who became capable of developing complex theories and rational

disciplines. The former were the theories which created the capitalist economy and institutions, the rule of law, etc., which produced civil societies, and exercise of power was subject to pre-agreed principles.

By the latter, systematic bodies of knowledge and instruction were developed in medicine, music, law, technology, astronomy, botany, capitalism, constitutionalism and morality (page 42).

It is crucial not to forget that Jesus Christ preached the most radical Gospel that had ever been heard in those times and will ever be heard. He announced His mission as being one which was aimed at preaching the good news to the poor. He emphasized that His true disciples on the last day would have to account for what they did to improve the lot of the “least of these”. The underprivileged and dispossessed by society. He cultivated the dregs of society, the ostracised, tax collectors, prostitutes and others marked as sinners by the Judaic establishment.

Indeed, he emphasized that His Gospel was to redeem the sinners and the lost not to save the “righteous”. He spoke the truth to the powers that be as He regularly sharply criticised pharisaical hypocrisy and religious observance which imposed strictures on men and shielded them from the love

and mercy of God. In the new testament, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the egalitarian message of the Gospel is expounded to defeat and deconstruct ethnicity, gender – discrimination and class systems within the Faith. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ”(Gal 3.28) In emphasising justice over legalism, Jesus established the basis for social justice and the solid foundation for Christians to fight for justice for the poor and condemn and oppose its roots in corruption.

Many of the fundamental principles undergirding the development of modern societies and economies were derived from or influenced by the Bible in Western societies.

These principles include:

- Hard work/planning and innovation- the puritanic work ethic - Proverbs 14:2, Luke 14:28
- Education – Proverbs 8:10 & 11
- Time consciousness – Ephesians 5:6, Ecclesiastes 3: 1 and payment of tithes which notes the time value of life.
- Integrity – Matthew 5:37, 1 John 3: 10
- Respect for credit & obligation- Psalm 37: 21
- Savings and investment – Matthew 25:14-30

- The Rule of Law – Romans 13:1
- Payment of taxes and dues to governments- Mark 12: 17
- Fair pay – Colossians 4:1 – Romans 13, 6 & 7
- The equality and dignity of man –Galatians 3:28

## **Conclusion**

Chancellor Sir, may I conclude by emphasizing that the Christian worldview is as relevant today as it has always been, especially in confronting Nigeria's serious developmental challenges and especially the tragic phenomenon of the “corrupted society”. The principles of Scripture which undergirded the industrial revolution and the phenomenal development and expansion of the wealth and influence of the West are perhaps even more relevant to us today. History and contemporary knowledge demonstrate that no nation, not even the wealthiest in natural resources, has managed to attain and sustain its development without adherence to those Scriptural principles. It is my respectful submission that the burdens that history lays upon Christian Universities in particular as we seek to shape a paradigm for the Universities of the

21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond are clear; they include the following:

1. To systematically develop and aggregate a body of literature and knowledge on the contributions of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to development in its broadest terms.
2. To seek to understand by comprehensive research and study, why the Gospel which shaped and grounded development in the West and by imitation Asia, has not yet achieved that in many parts of Africa.
3. To establish a faculty and programmes that focus on these issues.
4. To develop materials which exegete the principles of the Christian worldview for use in teaching at all levels of education.