

Good Governance and Economic Bliss

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Protocol

I thank God for this day and thank the leadership of the Church of God Mission for this invitation. I congratulate our mother Bishop Margaret Idahosa for continuing the great legacies of our departed Papa Archbishop Benson Idahosa. May his good soul rest in very perfect peace.

It is indeed a pleasure to be amongst you today. Under normal circumstances, the tone and content of this lecture would be different. But I have a lot of respect for the house of God. A man that cannot differentiate between his father's house and the market place is a fool.

Let me not waste your time with intellectual gymnastics, definitions and unnecessary grammar. The issue before us is economic bliss and good governance. I have changed it to good governance and economic bliss because it is good governance that makes economic bliss possible. Contrary to the thinking of many intellectuals and policy makers, just as we all know the difference between good health and illness, ordinary people know the difference between development and underdevelopment. Today, some nations like to make themselves feel good by saying they are *developing nations*: we shall not argue with that.

Saying that our country Nigeria is blessed in every respect is saying the obvious. What is it that we do not have in this country? Well, we do not have terrorists, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, Tsunamis, and other devastating natural disasters that make other nations around the world feel jinxed or cursed. Maybe this is also why we have tended to take things for granted. We just believe that things will be alright if we keep quiet, and don't rock the boat. It is best to be patient; your time to *chop* will come. Others have gone as far as drawing up a philosophical road map to what they call "you chop I chop." Yet, others go to the extent of leaving everything in the hands of God; they bother God with everything, while they sit down and do very little or nothing. They do not reflect, organise, think, mobilise, or act on anything. They forget that heaven only helps those that help themselves. But you and I know that no country has ever made progress without discipline, focus, responsible and creative leadership, planning, investment, savings, productivity, stability, and good governance.

Today, we are all shouting Obama! Obama!! Obama!! We even claim that a black man has taken over the most powerful country in the world. Someone on TV said that visas would now be available to all Nigerians to go to America: what a silly dream. They fail to look at who Obama is, his antecedents, networks, investment in the people and community, fund raising strategy,

organisational strategy, courage, vision and the environment in which he operated. If Obama were a Nigerian would he win a Councillorship seat? How many God fathers did you notice? How many Ghana must go bags full of dollars did you see? How many thugs did you see? How many political clashes did you see? How many policemen did you see going about with Obama during the campaign? Did you see electoral officers announcing results? Can you tell me the equivalent of their INEC in America? Was there a broadcast by the Police Chief warning people on how to behave? The questions are endless... but let us leave that matter for now. America was not always like this and Nigeria is not America. But, can we draw lessons? We do not need to reinvent the wheel!

It is true: We were Colonised, how Long Ago?

There are those that blame our national predicament on our colonial experience. They claim that because of that experience we can never make progress. Well, they are right, and very wrong. True, the Nigerian state is still one in formation. The State is still non-hegemonic and remains unsteady, unstable, ineffective, inefficient and a tool for primitive accumulation in the hands of the powerful. It is quite easy to worry about the rather unfortunate state of the nation today. But a proper historical understanding of the Nigerian reality can enable any analyst to place our conditions and predicaments in proper context. Our experience with *informal* empire, colonialism and neo-colonialism has been responsible for the contemporary recycling of inherited distortions and disarticulations. Yet, we must admit that while the global divisions of labour, power and opportunities have been hostile to Nigeria, we have failed to initiate structures, institutions and processes to contain or respond adequately to our extant challenges. We have also failed, like most African states, to take advantage of openings in the global economy to restructure, reform, recompose and redirect the character of state, class and production in Nigeria. Even well-intended policies and programmes, have been easily undermined by prevailing contradictions, limitations, and conflicts in the system.

Is it not amazing that virtually all the problems and challenges discussed in the 1960s, ranging from agriculture, infrastructure and economy, through unemployment, corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency, to rural backwardness and industrialisation, are still being discussed today. In many instances, the problems have more than quadrupled in complexity even if we have made some progress in such as area as telecommunications. This is rather unfortunate in spite of socio-economic and political experimentations. From indigenization through commercialization to privatization; parliamentary through military to presidential forms of governments; and state and local government creation; various joint venture and public-private-partnership agreements; Nigeria is yet to find an answer to any of its numerous challenges. I recognise the debilitating constraints of the colonial experience but I doubt that we can use this excuse for ever.

Oh Yes, We Have Made Progress, can't you see?

It is true that we can point at new local governments, new states, new infrastructure, a new national anthem, new federal capital, wider, but not necessarily stronger economy, deeper involvement in the global market due mainly to oil exports, and new discourses on politics and economy. But they have, in large measure, and in spite of the civil war, several military juntas, and transitions, been no more than motion in a barber's chair: a lot of motion but very little movement or progress. Countless opportunities to move forward, give our people hope, restructure and reposition the political economy and improve the living conditions of the people have been carelessly squandered without apologies by the governing elite. Can we truly say that Nigerians are happier? Inflation is

lower? Poverty and unemployment are lower? In the Niger Delta, the Creeks remain as they were in 1958 when the Willinks Commission warned that they could become bastions of protest and resistance. Where are we today?

The Nigeria state on the other hand remains non-hegemonic. Yet, a degree of hegemony is required to maintain the sovereignty of a country, keep the bourgeois classes under control, maintain an environment that promotes accumulation and define a nation's location and role in the global divisions of labour and power. To be sure, part of the reasons for this, aside from the limited hegemony of the state is the lack of cohesion amongst the ruling or power elite, the distortions in the economy, the vulnerability of the political economy to external interests, and the general condition of poverty in which the majority of Nigerians live. The way the Nigerian elite breaks into factions and fractions, ethnic and religious enclaves, and engage in very dangerous and irrational fights is simply amazing.

The Leadership Challenge

For President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the Nigerian predicament can be put squarely on the challenge of leadership. As he put it recently, the "concept of leadership has been bastardised in Nigeria, and people use leadership positions to show arrogance, oppress others and misappropriate resources meant for the generality of Nigerians instead of serving them as directed by God" (*Leadership* August 1, 2008, p. 3). While the President is absolutely correct, the fact remains that these leaders operate within a system that encourages impunity, the abuse of office, rascality and indiscipline. These same people work at very high and prestigious positions internationally and they never abuse their offices or misbehave. However, once they are given opportunities within Nigeria, they begin to do all that the President has outlined and worse. This means that we must look again at the structures and institutions of the state, the constitution, character of policy making, enforcement of laid down rules and regulations, political will, and the involvement of the people in politics and policy to fully appreciate why leadership is what it is or has turned out to be. Will you believe that all the numerous reports on the Niger Delta since 1956 have virtually recommended the same solutions and not one has been implemented? Is this just insensitivity, political rascality or plain wickedness: to leave communities and constituencies, fellow Nigerians whose land produce so much wealth in grinding poverty and environments that resemble worse than the Fourth World! How do we explain the existence of over 10,000 abandoned projects all over the country today? What is the explanation for thousands of dilapidated schools, hospitals and public institutions around Nigeria? Why do our so-called leaders measure their wealth, success and importance with the degree of poverty around them?

The Contradictions of Left, Right, Right, Left Turns at the Same Time

If in 2008, it is still possible to see regionalized or ethnic based agendas, statements challenging the unity of the nation, disregard for the constitution, uncertainty in the deployment and display of political power, and distrust between the public and private sphere, then the task for constructing a Nigeria hegemonic state is still gargantuan. Indeed, between and within economic, cultural, political and social communities and constituencies, the degree of distrust remains very heavy and deep. University graduates and HND holders are at war; NECO versus WAEC certificate holders are treated differently; so-called career and non-career officers are at war; north and south, Niger-delta versus the rest of the nation, and security and non-security personnel are not communicating. Within

Christendom, the competition and commercialisation has gone beyond rational understanding. Within universities, cultists and non-cultists are at war. Libraries are either empty or behind by over a decade in relevant literature and journals, and many academics are involved in general business and consulting as against serious research and teaching. In addition, rural and urban dwellers, the poor and the rich, landlords and tenants, employed and unemployed, and segments or sectors of the private sector strive to outdo and undo each other as opportunity permits. Nothing seems to go in an orderly or predictable manner. Recruitment into paramilitary forces results in the death of several applicants. Satellites get lost in space within a few years of purchase and launching while airplanes disappear for months only to be found by farmers, despite the billions invested in emergency rescue and satellites!

Legislators that are asked to probe corruption end up being probed. Trust, accommodation and cooperation hardly exist in any aspect of national life. As public institutions crumble or give the façade of a beautiful existence based on their architectural outlays, within the institutions exist an ocean of conflict, waste, manipulation, oppression, indiscipline, arrogance of power, ethnic jingoism and downright terrorization of the powerless and those with no godfathers or political connections. In the judiciary, while it has remained the longest undisturbed arm of government and in spite of numerous assaults especially the military juntas over the years, has also not escaped the rot in the system. Some judicial judgments leave many lawyers wondering if so-called non-learned persons have invaded the sector not to talk of countless allegations of bribery made against judges at all levels. Of course, these are all manifestations of the structural deformities in the system and the rather unsteady constitution of the State. It also reflects the weak and compromised legitimacy of the custodians of state power. When those that are leading us appear dishonest, confused, corrupt, unreliable, incapable, disloyal, unpatriotic, and pathologically fixated on the pursuit of narrow primordial as against national and collective interests, what do you expect from ordinary people?

Ladies and Gentlemen, why do we find it so difficult to move in one direction so that our people can conserve and deploy energy for productive purposes? How are we going to move forward in the midst of plan indiscipline, policy inconsistency, competitive as against complementary programs, duplication of services and functions, the re-awarding of the same contract over and over again even by the same government? How can we move forward with empty libraries, poor research culture, limited concern for futurology and visioning, and inability to identify and use the best brains and hands in the larger society? We must begin to think out of the box, break out of the barber's chair of motion without progress. Today, and right now, progress is what we need.

Political Parties and the Challenge of Liberties

In spite of the existence of a constitution, political parties and party rules and regulations, politics is war in Nigeria. You can now understand why many Nigerians wept and celebrated the victory of Obama on far away America. In fact, a former president of the country once described politics, elections in particular, as a "do or die" affair. It is costly, diabolical, unsteady, uncertain, and announced results hardly ever reflect what took place on election-day. Only in few cases are the best candidates presented for political office and aspirants are almost bankrupted before they get elected. This in itself lays the foundation for the arrogance of power, executive recklessness and unbridled corruption. Until our political parties become truly and fully reformed, Nigeria cannot move forward. Until the parties begin to respect their own rules, Nigeria cannot produce credible,

capable, courageous and visionary leaders that will build the political economy and consolidate democratic institutions and practices. The parties must begin to perform some of the basic functions of political parties- identify and train leaders, develop policy platforms, present the best aspirants and candidates for office, regulate office holders, conduct research on party and political development, encourage public discourses, and commit openly to the sustenance of democracy in every regards.

Office holders that emerge from a dubious and diabolical process cannot be expected to respect the constitution of liberties. They cannot be expected to distinguish between the public and private treasury. That is why we must never tire of the struggle for democratic practice and social justice. Political parties in Nigeria must be bastions of fair-play, justice and freedom. Unless this happens they would be contributing directly to the consolidation and reproduction of poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

Keeping some of the Best Minds Out of the Room

The crisis of the Nigerian state and society has displaced and expelled many productive and creative citizens into the Diaspora and we are only just beginning to understand that their talents and resources can be harnessed to aid the quest of development. The ruthless disposition of military juntas also forced many of the best minds, including the country's only Nobel Laureate into exile thus depriving the nation of their direct contributions to the political economy. Disillusionment bred by oppression, exploitation, human rights abuses and gross inequities and inequalities has culminated in further inefficiency and ineffectiveness. We are only just realizing that the lack of service delivery and low or non-existent maintenance culture are products of bad leadership, bad management and lack of conducive working conditions.

The private sector has done a lot to attract some of our best minds out of the public sector and being not better or only very marginally better, it too, is experiencing decay and dislocations. So, the private sector has resorted to all sorts of quack, opportunistic, emergency, underhand, superficial and downright fraudulent ways of making profits. These include cooking up the books to jack up profits and give a false impression of assets, capacity, and position at the echelon of industry. In this context the overall national economy suffers. Importation of sub-standard products at the expense of local producers. Charging customers all sorts of fees and levies at times for unsolicited services. And, doing everything possible to penetrate the government just to have an opportunity at the national cake. Some private sector executives are more visible in the newspapers and on television than state governors!

Even in academic institutions and the public sector, you will find all sorts of complex strategies and designs to keep out capable people. You will find very interesting and ingenuous rationalisations for mediocrity. At times, this is based on ethnicity or religion and region. When the beneficiaries of these dubious arrangements visit pain on society we find other scapegoats to blame. We hate theoreticians: *na so so theory dem sabi talk*; we dislike professors and call them *poorfessors*, and we don't like people that want to plan and build strategy because we believe we can actually put up a ten-storey building without a plan or the assistance of engineers! As society that does not value merit at all levels, that hardly rewards initiative and creativity, and one that derides intellectuals and philosophers is bound to end up in crisis and maybe disaster. It is not too late for Nigeria.

Federalism, Defederalisation and Refederalisation

The debates on fiscal federalism, true federalism, constitutional amendment, state police, revenue sharing formula, resource control, women in politics, electoral reforms, political appointments, the location of local of infrastructure, corruption, state and local government creation, and infrastructural rehabilitation are endless. It is good that such debates take place so we can have a better understanding of national priorities. As is typical, the debates are very narrowly focused; often looking at Nigeria with little or no comparative perspectives. If we draw any examples, it is from America. Yet, there are countless other examples from which we can learn good lessons from with Africa and the so-called third world. But in Nigeria, the debate is informed more by narrow primordial interests that often contradict or undermine national interests. At the end of the day, the national and local interests are compromised and contained if not totally undermined. The debates lack order and where there is some focus, the opposition or custodians of the state denigrate such efforts by insisting on absolutes as a starting point for engagement or participation.

So, Once again, we are into the business of constitution review. The very last effort was contaminated and destroyed by the narrow interests of a few at the expense of the common good. So, we threw the baby, the bathwater and the bath-basin out and we lost everything. Billions of naira went down the drain. Today, we are starting all over. This is not one man's show and it must not be an ego trip. It is not senators versus the representatives. It is not the National Assembly versus the rest of the nation. Rather, it is one more golden chance to give ourselves a living document, a true peoples covenant, a road map to show us how to organise and deploy power in the collective interests of our people. It is an opportunity to correct historical injustices against women, the youth, the poor, micro-minorities and minorities. It is an opportunity to stop oil theft, kidnapping, illegal-bunkering, arson, assassinations, money laundering, hostage taking and other forms of violence in the much neglected and exploited Niger Delta. It is an opportunity to produce the document that will engender peace, stability, dialogue, tolerance, diversity, unity, democracy and progress in Nigeria.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I doubt if this will happen if the process is opportunistic, elitist and complicated. We must draw lessons from Uganda, South Africa, Eritrea, Ghana and other parts of the world by adopting a truly open, consultative, transparent, accountable, process-driven and people-led approach to constitution-making. This is the only way to produce a constitution that we can all understand and all own and defend with our lives. This is the way to build the architecture to deepen, widen, promote, sustain and reproduce democracy and democratization. The process of refederalisation will be possible and much more viable with a true constitutional consultation and process that brings our people together and restructures our political compact. It is also the only way to build a culture of constitutionalism, the process publicises it, mobilises the people, and wins buy-in from the people. If we do not get the politics right, we can never get our development right. Political uncertainty, contradictions, distrust, violence and instability will continue to challenge well intentioned programmes and policies and thus reproduce underdevelopment.

The Retreat to Atavism, Hope and Ethnic Caves

The masses themselves live as if under a spell. Disappointed by regime after regime, government after government and leader after leader, they give obedience on the surface, more to avoid oppression and death than out of loyalty, love and patriotism. Their souls have been so mangled

and corrupted that they have nothing but cynicism and disregard for the state, the custodians of power and state policies. They have adopted coping and survival mechanisms to make it through the confusion and uncertainty in which they find themselves. To get any service from government agencies, they first prepare the bribe, then the required fee. They know that if they do not do so, there is no chance on earth that they would get any service: job applications, national passport, driver's licence, import licence, building permit, vehicle licence, tax clearance, national ID card, you name it. Many have retreated into community, ethnic, religious and other demonic and occultic enclaves as they hope endlessly for political rationality, sensitive leadership, and adequate democratic spaces in which to survive. In other instances, Nigerians abuse the name of God as the almighty is invoked at the slightest opportunity even while perpetrating evil against individuals, community and the entire nation. A few have designed ways to use religion, especially Christianity to get rich and further impoverish the already poor. It is no wonder that one can find twenty branches of the same church or denomination worshipping the same God on a single street in most of our major cities!

Public transportation, fire services, emergency services, roads, hospitals, prisons, detention cells, you name it, are not places to write home about in the 21st Century. Nigerians have become so terrified that even drivers on the highways dare not stop to assist stranded travellers or accident victims. The so-called stranded traveller may be a criminal and helping a victim could land the helper in police detention. Again, this is part of the distrust and the social and spiritual decay in our society. Every employee, from the gateman and house maid through the permanent secretary to the minister or governor often views their position as opportunity to engage in primitive accumulation. The reasoning is that in the absence of social security, a credit system or any guarantees about the future, with depressed wages, and a society with endless dependants, all steps, legal and illegal must be taken to assure and ensure the future. Citizens get angry at the slightest cause and excuse and quite often resort to violence to resolve simple misunderstandings. It is not an accident that what Nigerians call "two fighting" is common in our cities and towns and this could quickly and easily degenerate into "plenty or many people fighting" The list can go on endlessly. The "elasticity of hope" in Nigeria is just incredible. In spite of the rascality, corruption, arrogance, insensitivity and socio-economic violence unleashed on the majority by the minority power-elite, a revolution has not taken place even if anger and disillusionment often result to pockets of open resistance again and again. Hope is almost becoming the opium of the Nigeria: *e go beta, God dey*, "tomorrow will be better", "when my child grows up I will eat my share of the cake" are used to rationalise tolerance for bad leadership, corruption and bad governance!

Confusion is Good for Business: You can Make Lots of Money

In the midst of all these contradictions and uncertainties, a class of Nigerians in the public and private sectors are getting richer. They are purchasing houses all over the country and in other parts of the world as well as buying designer or customized vehicles. Designer houses in Dubai are being marketed in Nigeria and people are buying. Nigeria is one of the largest markets in the world for bullet-proof cars! Annoyingly, they buy mansions abroad that they hardly utilize. Local and foreign bank accounts are bursting with monies made through all sorts of deals especially from real estate, construction, fertiliser importation, banking, import-export and from the oil and gas sector. They pay taxes on all their transactions abroad but evade taxes, where possible in Nigeria. In the course of their primitive accumulation, they ignore the public sphere... public schools, hospitals, clinics,

airlines and other services. Rather they easily construct or patronize private alternatives and also encourage their families and friends to do the same. They pride themselves in their ability to behave or act foreign and do everything to show that their personalized designer products are superior to local alternatives. Foreign produced vehicles of all brands arrive Nigerian sea ports before they are made public in Europe and America. Such unpatriotic displays only serve to widen the gulf between the people and their leaders. Meanwhile, the local markets are flooded with dangerous and substandard products from all nooks and corners of the world in spite of the efforts of NAFDAC. How much can one agency of government do in the face of well organized conspiracy to undermine a domestic economy? No one is sure of government priorities, just as no one knows what products are banned or allowed into the country. This is because, everything is available here in Nigeria; the good, the bad, the ugly and the very bad.

OK, Let's Get on the Right Path

No nation can make progress unless there is a synergy between the various social classes at the barest level to ensure national *development*. The custodians of power and the people must also agree on the importance of peace and security as prerequisites for sustainable growth and development. In other words, the state and its custodians must have a reliable line of communication and a level of understanding on national priorities and challenges as well as how to respond to these challenges. The people must have some confidence in the state, its institutions and custodians. The leaders on the other hand must be able to carry the people along and build a respectable degree of confidence that can be deployed as necessary to promote mobilization. In addition, the leaders or elites or dominant classes must have confidence in the state, be committed to national growth, development and stability, and be willing to act in the primary interest of the nation and the people at all times. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Nigeria. The confidence is not there. The line of communication is not there. The consensus on a common future is not there. And certainly, the leaders and rulers are not carrying the people along though they like to think that they are doing just that.

Political parties throw up the wrong candidates quite often and make the quest for office a very expensive venture. This in itself mortgages office seekers before they get into office and compromises their commitment to public programmes and policies. When you impose a weak and unpopular candidate you have to rig that person into office else there is no way in the world that such a person can win an election. Rigging itself requires the use of violence, bribery, intimidation, falsification of results and other electoral malpractices. Even when the individual gets into office, he or she can only occupy that office through domination, intimidation and bribery. It takes just a little time for the false integrity to evaporate. If Nigeria fails to carry out a serious, focused and far-reaching electoral and constitutional reform, it would be courting disaster and the cost would be more than we can imagine at the moment. We must begin to punish electoral offences and persons that occupy offices for a period before being thrown out by the courts should be penalised and made to refund all monies earned while occupying such offices illegally. This will surely send the right signals. People decamping to other parties after elections should vacate the seats won on the tickets of other parties. Parties should not have the right to impose candidates and electoral offences by the Electoral Commission and the Police should not be left unpunished as is currently the case. This just encourages them to commit more havoc in the name of monitoring or conducting elections. It is the country and our people that suffer at the end.

Political appointments are informed largely by ethnic, regional and other considerations rather than merit and capacity to deliver. This compromises the efficacy of public programmes and further alienates the people. When someone that served as minister in the 1960s is exhumed and made a minister over 40 years later, is it that the state has not produced a younger, brighter, more technologically savvy, more connected and capable person in over forty years? How on earth can the country produce new leaders with new and original thinking? Something is wrong somewhere. We must begin to privilege merit, capacity, capability, service, commitment, and exposure in appointments.

When godfathers and evil fathers take over political parties and governments at other levels, the net result is distrust and distance between the people, their leaders and their government. The need for a social engineering with all its attendant implications for the generation of new values and morals, a service culture and new emphasis on dialogue, tolerance, mutual respect and reliance on public institutions for conflict resolution cannot be over emphasised. This is critical if economic and political programmes and policies are to find the appropriate foundation for growth.

The reform agenda of the Obasanjo Administration was not a revolutionary initiative by any definition. It was not a revolutionary epoch though the actors in the government, especially in the second term, were very dedicated to what they were doing within the context of the defined *reform agenda*. It was merely designed to stabilize the system, adjust the structures of the political economy, and cut waste where possible. It was not a *transformation* that had the capacity to radically alter the location and role of Nigeria in the global divisions of power. Rather, it was meant to redefine and reposition Nigeria in the periphery of global capitalism and thereby mediate the sharp edges of the steady slide into anarchy that the Abacha Administration had bequeathed. Therefore, rather than spend so much time and resources in fighting the Obasanjo administration and at times, throwing the baby, the bathwater and the bath away, we must prioritise, consolidate, restructure, and move forward as a nation. We cannot behave as if some foreign nation has taken over political power in Nigeria, we need clarity, sincerity, leadership, and strong will to make our country move ahead.

All of the above and more are possible if and only if, our people are respected and involved in the processes of governance and if our governance system and structures actually privilege social justice, equity, the rule of law, constitutionalism, democracy and popular participation in politics and decision-making.