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“THE FUTURE HAS LONG ARRIVED: NEW VISTAS OF THE ROLE OF THEATRE IN A DEVELOPING NATION”

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**THE FUTURE HAS LONG ARRIVED:
New Vistas of the Role of Theatre in a Developing
Nation**

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Students of the University of Ilorin – Our Future,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. Introduction: Theatre and Commitment

Modern Nigerian Drama and its perceived socio-political role

It is the desire of every discipline or profession to be relevant to its society and contribute to its growth and development, and theatre is not an exception to this lofty concern. Theatre prides itself in being more than sheer entertainment, a piece of diversion to which we turn when we are tired of the serious challenges of our daily existence. Rather, theatre people want to convince us that theatre is an intimate part of that serious life, indeed, that it *is* life, because it flows from and at the same time tries to address the actual experiences of our daily life. To that extent, it is, therefore, a very important aspect of the life of any society.

The idea that drama can contribute to society's growth is bound to hold a special appeal to Africa, even without recourse to influences from outside. In traditional Africa, the oral artist was always a revered member of society, transmitting its mores and values, and thereby helping to ensure its social, political and spiritual well-being. No matter how aesthetically pleasing his compositions were, he had a responsibility to inject into them a moralistic and didactic concern for the edification of his audience. And if there were contemporary matters that bothered society or the state at large, he was looked upon as one of the means by which danger could be averted and normalcy restored.

Hubert Ogunde, regarded as the doyen of Nigerian theatre, lived up to this expectation. He was highly respected because he identified with the political and cultural aspirations of the day and promoted them through his drama. In the colonial days, two plays that he staged in 1946 demonstrated this concern. *Tiger's Empire* was an attack on colonial rule, while *Strike and Hunger* dramatised the general strike of 1945. In both plays, Ogunde was expressing Nigerians' resentment against colonial rule and their desire for self-rule.¹ Soon after independence, he staged his most popular play, *Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba, Think)*, which reflected on the political crisis in Western Nigeria and its implications for the unity and well-being of the Yoruba people. The impact was so great that the regional government banned the play and the record song that was made from it throughout the then Western Region.²

Modern-day Nigerian dramatists were expected to continue in that tradition, even though they employed the English language and explored theatre traditions beyond

the popular and well-known African ones. Indeed, much more was expected of them because they were members of the intelligentsia. When Wole Soyinka was invited to write and stage a play as part of Nigeria's independence celebrations in 1960, the gesture was an acknowledgement of the fact that drama and literature in general had an important role to play in the life of the emerging nation.³

The early days of independence gave signs of danger ahead. Within the first six years, two bloody military coups and upheavals confirmed the worst fears of a nation not standing on firm footing and threatening to break apart. A long military interregnum (lasting fourteen years) and a disputed general election in 1979 only seemed to place the nation further on edge. The military returned to government in 1983 after a break of only four years, and it was to remain in charge for another sixteen long years. Yet, that period only recorded many more military coups, ethnic and religious conflicts, a staggering economy, and further bloodshed nationwide.

It was impossible to remain passive or indifferent to Nigeria's huge socio-political crises. Therefore, it is no surprise that the first three decades of the new drama showed an overwhelming preference on the playwrights' part for highlighting the disturbing social and political trends observable in the new nation. More and more, the theatre that was emerging dealt with socio-political issues that affected the nation as a whole.

Various labels have been fashioned to capture the essence of the new drama, but we prefer to group them all under the generic term 'committed drama'. That label deserves a little explanation.

The notion of ‘commitment’ in art may not be so new or peculiar to any culture. However, in the West, literature of commitment (*littérature engagée*) became popular in the post-World War II era. Simply explained, ‘engaged’ or ‘committed’ literature was a revival of the idea of the artist’s serious responsibility to society, as different from the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, which obligated the artist to his craft rather than to his audience.⁴ As espoused by the French existentialists, particularly Jean Paul Sartre, the artist had a moral challenge to adapt his art to socially useful ends. This meant that aesthetic considerations could not be the sole or overriding concern of his creation. There had to be a utilitarian value to it.

2. Nigerian Theatre of Social Commitment: A Bird’s-Eye View

We can discern four broad categories of committed theatre in Nigeria.

The Satirical Approach

Almost invariably, the new dramatist’s concern for his society takes the form of a confrontation with those things perceived to be threatening the well-being of the society: corruption, an unjust social and political order, selfishness and greed on the part of leaders, resulting in inordinate and undeserved wealth by a few on one hand, and the impoverishment of the majority of the people on the other. Such a confrontation often necessitates the use of satire as a weapon for depicting the ills of the society in the hope that that method can bring about a process of regeneration and renewal.

Wole Soyinka is one dramatist who has a penchant for biting satire. His early comedies, *The Lion and the Jewel*⁵ and *The Trials of Brother Jero*⁶, gave signs of his fascination with that genre. But his satire is most poignant in the plays in which he draws attention to national issues of a social or political import such as *A Dance of the Forests*, *Kongi's Harvest*⁷, *The Road*⁸, *Madmen and Specialists*⁹, and *Jero's Metamorphosis*¹⁰, the sequel to his earlier Jero play.

As Nigeria's socio-political crisis deepened in the mid-sixties, he went beyond the regular play and devised short, satirical skits that addressed various aspects of the nation's growing crisis, which were later collected under the ominous title, *Before the Blackout*.¹¹ The series are important as examples of popular art designed to reach out to and influence a much wider audience than the middle class that normally constitutes the majority of regular theatregoers. He continued the same strategy in the early eighties when he started the 'guerrilla theatre' at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). At the same time, his satire intensified through his full-length plays, *Opera Wonyosi*¹², *A Play of Giants*¹³, *Requiem for a Futurologist*¹⁴, and *The Beatification of Area Boy*¹⁵.

The satirical approach became a favourite genre of many dramatists who turned their mirrors on the developing Nigerian state, and it is still prominent in the works of many younger, modern-day playwrights. Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*¹⁶, *Who's Afraid of Tai Solarin*¹⁷, and *Midnight Hotel*¹⁸ are among the best of the plays manifesting this preference for satire in dealing with the ills of the nation.

Satire holds human vices and follies up to ridicule with the intent of shaming individuals and society itself into improvement. Although it is usually meant to be funny, its greater purpose is often constructive social criticism, using wit as a weapon. However, as we tried to show in a study¹⁹, the methods of satire could result in a contradiction of this very laudable objective. Exaggeration being a familiar technique of the genre, the satirist spends a great deal of energy painting an elaborate picture of, on one hand, vile and despicable characters, and, on the other, a great number of fools and gulls without whom the former could never have succeeded. The saving grace in the action, if it ever comes at all, arrives only after the audience has been greatly entertained by the tricks, schemes and escapades of the very undesirable characters that the playwright satirises. Sometimes, however, the satirist leaves the same characters unscathed at the end of the play, as Soyinka does in the Jero plays and *Kongi's Harvest*, *Opera Wonyosi*, and *A Play of Giants*. *Madmen and Specialists* closes with the disturbing impression that Bero, the perverted medical specialist, is so far gone that it will take a supernatural force to remove him and thus put an end to his atrocities.

The satirist goes to work on the assumption that the world is going bad because of the preponderance of the evil elements within it. To remove such evil elements is his goal, but they seem to multiply at a rate faster than his surgical instruments can excise. Therefore, after an initial satire, the satirist finds it necessary to create more and more pieces, each subsequent piece always surpassing the previous one in its pungency. The satirist seems to be fighting a battle that he cannot win but from which he cannot retreat or retire. That stalemate, in a large measure,

constitutes the pessimism that critics detect in satire and the satirist.

The French satirist, Moliere, assumed that the fear of ridicule is a deterrent to bad behaviour, and that satire is, for that reason, an effective way of correcting men's folly, since people do not wish to be laughed at.²⁰ What that thesis ignores is that the subject of satire can react differently, fighting back at the satirist rather than turning over a new leaf. The ones Moliere satirised in *Tartuffe* succeeded in getting the play banned in spite of its popularity, and it took two petitions from the dramatist to persuade the King of France to lift the ban after five years. We have seen how Hubert Ogunde had a similar experience here in Nigeria with his play, *Yoruba Ronu*. In both instances, satire may have pleased the majority of the members of the society, but it has neither solved the problems it highlighted nor dislodged the persons the satirist ridiculed.

The Expository Approach

Other Nigerian dramatists of the first generation adopted a different approach to depict the social and political problems besetting the new nation. J. P. Clark's *The Raft*²¹ and *Ozidi*²² are viewed as parables of the Nigerian situation, and, therefore, subtle warnings to Nigerians to avoid the dangers looming in the horizon.

Ola Rotimi's early populist plays, *The Gods Are Not to Blame*²³, *Kurunmi*²⁴ and *Ovoramwen Nogbaisi*²⁵, all depict central characters of a messianic mould. His heroes almost single-handedly take upon themselves the redemption of a world they perceive as being threatened by internal, external or even supernatural forces, which they resolve to

battle in order to restore normalcy. With time, however, Rotimi's plays transformed into strong expressions of rage against an unjust and immoral system, with the playwright's sympathy being clearly on the side of the ordinary, downtrodden citizenry. In *If...*²⁶ and *Hopes of the Living Dead*²⁷, the central characters may be distinguished on account of their status and learning, but they identify very strongly with the many unfortunate members of society, working to inspire and mobilise them to salvage their lives from the pits of despair and despondency to which many of them have sunk.

The 'Radical' Approach

From the early seventies, a younger generation of dramatists became more forceful in its criticism of the existing order and unequivocal in its demand for a fundamental transformation of the Nigerian society. The playwrights' goal is to sensitise the overwhelming majority of the people to the fundamental causes of their sorry plight. The common man, rather than kings, princes and war lords, now becomes the subject of many plays such as Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon*²⁸, Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song*²⁹, *Once Upon Four Robbers*³⁰ and *Morountodun*, and Rasheed Gbadamosi's *Echoes from the Lagoon*³¹ and *Trees Grow in the Desert*³². A central objective in most of these plays is to convince the ordinary man that he need not be a willing victim of or an unwitting collaborator with the blatant power that exploits and grinds him into the dust. A favourite device at the end of many plays is the so-called 'demystification' technique. A character (the playwright's voice) addresses the audience directly and reminds them that what they have seen is a

play, but that they can write the happy conclusion to the problems and situations they have just seen enacted on stage.

Various appellations like ‘radical’ and ‘revolutionary’ were coined by critics (and the dramatists themselves often doubled as critics) to describe the new approach to theatre. We remain sceptical of these claims and have had to challenge critics as well as the playwrights themselves to go beyond obfuscatory coinages in their appraisal of these new works. In a contribution to a discussion on ‘Revolutionary Aesthetics’, we challenged critics to go beyond ‘jargons and clichés’ in their assessment of the new drama in order to help to establish what is truly novel and groundbreaking.³³ Similarly, we warned against the fallacy that ‘the hood makes the monk.’ In other words, merely basing a play on some prevailing social or political situation does not necessarily guarantee that the resulting work is good drama.³⁴

Community Theatre and Theatre for Development

About the same period, the idea of ‘community theatre’ began to gain ground in the teaching and practice of theatre in Nigeria. Credit for the pioneering effort in this direction goes to the Drama Unit of the Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University (of which this speaker was a member in the late seventies), under the headship of Michael Etherton. The overall goal was to lead the peasant community of Samaru, the immediate neighbouring community of the University, to make use of theatre to discuss its problems and work out solutions to them.

The process revealed much to the participating students and their lecturers, especially regarding the very objective

of the project. On the long run, the peasants would love to have fertilizers instead of plays explaining to them why they did not have the precious commodities they needed for their farming; they would rather have land than discussions of how they were denied land by the wealthy members of the community.³⁵

The ABU community theatre experiment still goes on, albeit with constant modifications necessitated by the experiences gained in the field by the student participants and their lecturers. More importantly, community theatre has become a regular course on the curricula of most theatre and performing arts departments all over the nation, each department interpreting it according to the convictions and preferences of the handlers.

Outside the university, a number of Nigerian university-trained dramatists and groups have made efforts to take the theatre beyond the walls of the university. Some of them were based in particular communities, like the Ayota Theatre founded by Segun Taiwo in 1985, which operated in Ajegunle, a suburb of Lagos. Taiwo's productions relied on the popular music and dance of the people to communicate with them. Funsho Alabi, another university-trained dramatist who once taught at the University of Lagos, went on to specialise in one-man acts that addressed problems like AIDS and drug abuse. With support from the United States Information Service (USIS), he toured university campuses with the objective of using theatre to sensitise Nigerian youths to the growing problems and encourage them to live a healthy and responsible lifestyle. Sadly, both dramatists passed away in their prime.

General Evaluation

Even from our cursory examination given above, we can see the limitations of theatre in terms of its ability to ‘develop’ a community, a society, a people or a nation. Our predilection for quick and easy solutions to complex and long-accumulated problems makes us look up to something or someone to rescue us. For a while, we may accept the make-believe world created by the artist because it holds out to us a desirable ideal. Eventually, hard reality sets in, and we cannot see any concrete results arising from the artist’s honest effort to change society. That realisation must make us examine what theatre really is and what it can do in any society.

3. Can Theatre Change Society?

To deal with this question, let us examine very briefly a number of works that we have chosen randomly.

In 1935, a left-wing outfit by the name Group Theatre in New York, USA, staged a one-act play, *Waiting for Lefty*³⁶, written by a young dramatist, Clifford Odets. Inspired by a taxi drivers’ strike that took place the previous year, Odets’ play borrows heavily from Communist ideology. Its submission is that taxi drivers (and, by extension, the entire oppressed working class) should unionise in order to shift power from the hands of big business and tilt it towards the worker. At the end of the play, one of the radical members of the drivers union confronts the others with the question what choice to make in light of the revelations that have been made to them in the play. The resounding answer is “Strike! Strike!” At the performance of the play, that response was taken up by the audience. The following morning, the entire city of New

York was paralysed by a strike action embarked upon by the city's taxi drivers. This was one instance in which theatre had moulded public opinion and been responsible for a particular line of action.

But the impact of the play did not end there.

By 1938, *Waiting for Lefty* . . . was being produced all over the world as, in Odets' report, 'a kind of light-machine-gun that you wheeled in *to use whenever there was any kind of strike trouble*.'³⁷ (Emphasis mine)

The playwright's own metaphor is illuminating in terms of the power of theatre. It is no longer just an activity; it has become synonymous with activism. The stage has become an engine room that motivates the rest of society into necessary and desirable action.

Of course, we know that was only one battle won in the never-ending war between capital and labour. In other words, the impact of *Waiting for Lefty* did not go beyond that particular episode and time. Furthermore, we do not see that kind of spontaneous impact on society always being achieved by committed theatre worldwide.

Let us now consider *Mother Courage and Her Children*³⁸ by the German playwright, Bertolt Brecht. The subtitle of the play says that it is 'a chronicle of the Thirty Years' War,' (which was fought mainly in Germany from 1618-1648, but which involved most of the countries of Western Europe). The contemporary audience of *Mother Courage* could not have missed the connection between the historical war and the nascent World War II, and it can be deduced that Brecht's motive in this recourse to history is

to warn his audience about the evils of war and its undesirability. There is a telling scene in the play in which Mother Courage announces that the war is over. The response of her companion is a masterpiece of irony and satire:

Well, there have always been people going around saying someday the war will end. I say, you can't be sure the war will *ever* end. Of course it may have to pause occasionally – for breath, as it were – it can even meet with an accident – nothing on this earth is perfect...A war can come to a sudden halt – from unforeseen causes – you can't think of everything – a little oversight, and the war's in the hole, and someone's got to pull it out again! The someone is the Emperor or the King or the Pope. They're such friends in need, the war has really nothing to worry about, it can look forward to a prosperous future. ... War is like love, it always finds a way. Why *should* it end?³⁹

World War II lasted five gruelling years, and many more wars have been and are still being fought all over the world since then. Brecht's warning in his play changed nothing: men still prefer to relinquish dialogue and persuasion in favour of bullets and bombs.

For our last example, we shall return to our grand master of satire, Wole Soyinka, in a work where he employs a different artistic medium from his accustomed one. In *Unlimited Liability Company*⁴⁰, a long-playing record, Soyinka uses the medium of song to create an elaborate satirical work that captures the many

ramifications of the sordidness displayed by the ruling political class during Nigeria's Second Republic. The style of the work relies on a mixture of anecdotes interlaced with short refrains that are easily remembered by the listener, and which have the potential to be retained for a very long time, thus ensuring that the message of the piece endures. The most notable of such refrains is the one with which he opens the first side of the album:

I love my country I no go lie
Na inside am I go live and die
I know my country I no go lie
Na him and me go yap till I die

I love my country I no go lie
Na inside am I go live and die
When e turn me so I twist am so
E push me I push am I no go go⁴¹

If a work of art could start a revolution, *Limited Liability Company* would be a good candidate because of its popularity. However, what it did to the Nigerian society is a different matter. It provided good entertainment, no doubt, but not a sense of outrage that provoked any kind of social action. Rather, the excesses of the political class it satirised only mounted daily, showing no evidence of a conscience in any way affected by the ridicule.

These three examples and many more remind us that there may not always be a direct path from art to real life that is imagined by many practitioners and lovers of art. Wole Soyinka warns us in his Foreword to *Opera Wonyosi* that a play 'is not an ultimate thesis on the condition of

man,’ and that the dramatist is no more than a person using the medium of the stage to address the same concerns as other members of society like the politician, the sociologist, etc. do in other ways and through other mediums.⁴² Michael Etherton similarly cautions us that a term like ‘revolutionary theatre’ may have become catch phrase that is loosely employed to imply a transformation of society when, in fact, what is being referred to is no more than a transformation of art:

In fact, no theatre can actually make the revolution. It is even doubtful if ‘revolutionary theatre’ can be construed as the ‘rehearsal’ for the revolution. A revolutionary theatre may in fact never mean anything more than the rhetoric of revolution.⁴³

Change in various forms and by various means

Yet, there is a sense in which theatre, in whatever form it is manifested or described, *is an important part of the process of change*. It is easy for us to misconstrue the building blocks of society and its advancement. But by and large, it is not only great events and personalities that bring about change. Change is made as much by elections and coups d’états as the seasonal cultivation of crops by farmers, by the crowning of monarchs as much as the singing of communal songs at annual festivals, by an epoch-making scientific discovery as much as a brilliant turn of phrase by an artist. What says that a moving story acted out in a theatre or a satirical song waxed on a record cannot be the seed that falls on a fertile piece of soil that goes on to yield hundreds and thousands?

Today, the world is witnessing great changes in countries and regions where repressive and authoritarian rulers once held sway and notions of ‘human rights’ and ‘freedom of speech’ were only whispered in fear. Today, people who were demigods are answering for crimes they committed with impunity decades back. Only in recent memory, glasnost and perestroika became new words absorbed into the English dictionary, and the great Berlin Wall came down. It is hard to compile a comprehensive list of activists, dissidents, writers and artists whose actions and pronouncements constituted the groundswell that constantly eroded the foundations of great edifices before they eventually erupted into those momentous events. Because of its unique form, theatre has always lent its force to those developments, and it is to that extent that it can be considered as, we repeat, part of the agent of change in any given society.

But how do we know for sure that change has occurred? What are the indices that we can rely upon that tell us that the artist’s message has yielded fruit?

The truthful answer is: None. Medicine can offer statistics to show that the incidence of AIDS or polio has been reduced in some countries or zones of the world, or that small pox and guinea worm were eradicated from the surface of the earth so many years back. The impact a work of art makes on its immediate society or the rest of the world is impossible to gauge in such absolute terms. A dramatist deludes himself if he makes claims of ‘revolutionising’ society because he has staged a play to great applause, and the critic who indulges him by hailing him as ‘radical’ ought to be urged to re-examine his critical tools.

For one thing, clear symptoms of the same ills still abound, sometimes in greater numbers and more frightening proportions. In Nigerian, graft is now perpetrated to the tune of billions. Armed robbery used to be committed with knives and guns, now robbers bomb their way into banks and vaults. Foreign courts may have convicted the powerful and influential persons that defied our own judicial system for years, but the few who could not escape our porous system have come out of prison to be celebrated as heroes. On the surface, therefore, it may seem as if nothing is changing, and that the committed artist's effort is yielding no fruit.

Here, we must repeat the biblical metaphor of the sower. The committed artist can only go to work in the hope that some of the seeds that he scatters must come up somewhere, sometime. The proportion that succeeds may be grossly small compared to the ones that fall on rocky soil, are choked by thorns, or are devoured by fowls of the air. Still, in that small number lies the hope of propagation of the species and the eventual abundance that it may yield. The artist's very commitment makes him an incurable optimist, a person whose hope in a better society never dims, regardless of the disappointments he feels and the setbacks he encounters as he goes about his self-appointed mission to improve his society.

4. Minding the Not-So-Little Things of Life: Lessons I Learnt From my Personal Contributions

In essence, many dramatists' notion of commitment amounts to creating a 'big bang' effect on society or finding an elixir that cures society of all ills. In that kind of situation, they are bound to keep looking for the big,

national issues to address: corruption in public life, prolonged military dictatorship, a new ideological basis for ordering society, etc. Their ambition will always be, speaking literally, to sweep the entire nation off its feet.

Earlier in this lecture, we referred to the building blocks of society and emphasised that the seemingly little things of life are important components that all contribute to the total well-being that we seek as individuals or a society. Those seemingly little things keep staring at us, pleading for attention, while we go searching for the often elusive ultimate. Indeed, taking care of those little things could save society a great deal of the bigger problems it has to confront.

All this may sound like abstract talk. It is my intention in this section to discuss actual examples of those little things in which I have been involved, and what implications they have for a theatre of commitment.

Theatre for Schools and Theatre in Education

Theatre for Schools is not a subject one may find on the curriculum of any Drama, Theatre Arts or Performing Arts department in Nigeria. The National Universities Council (NUC) does not stipulate it as a component of its Approved Minimum Accreditation Standards (AMAS) either. But many secondary students offer Literature as one of their subjects in the examinations conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) or the National Examination Council (NECO). Drama being one of the three areas of literature, the students could benefit from seeing the set plays performed on stage, or even staging such plays themselves.

In the past, virtually every school had a drama club that endeavoured to stage at least one play in any given academic year. School authorities always encouraged such dramatic activity by sponsoring the productions put up by the groups. Apart from their usefulness to students of literature, the by-products from them would include significant improvement in the students' written and spoken English, more responsible use of their leisure time, a generally healthy school atmosphere, and a good public image for the institution.

Today, many school authorities still maintain that tradition. They include drama in their list of activities to mark the end of each academic year. For very special occasions such as important anniversaries and Founders' Days, they organise more elaborate stage performances, sometimes seeking the help of lecturers and specialists in theatre to ensure a good standard.

In 1996, I was invited by Queen Elizabeth School, Ilorin, to write and direct a play to be staged as part of the school's 40th anniversary celebrations. I gave the play the title, 'Rise and Shine'. My burden was to let the young students know and believe that they could attain whatever lofty intellectual and professional heights they dared to imagine. To drive that lesson home, there was a theme song that was rendered at key moments in the play:

You can, you can,
You can achieve most anything,
You can, you can,
If you put your heart to the task.

In that scene, I allowed the students to take turns to say what things they hoped to become in future, to which the others would respond, “Yes, you can!” and then sing the theme song. Their contributions were revealing: “I want to be a doctor!” “I want to be an engineer!” “I want to be a pilot!” Then came a contribution that made the chorus swell the loudest: “I want to be Nigeria’s first female President!” At the command performance, the audience, made up of dignitaries from the state and beyond, spontaneously rose on its feet to cheer the students. I interpreted that to mean its gesture of approval to impress it on the performers that their sentiments could become realities if they continued to pursue them with courage and determination.

Theatre to Promote Health Awareness

As my own contribution to the subject of theatre and community development, which was the focus of a conference of the Society of Theatre Artists (SONTA) held at the University of Ilorin in 1988, I submitted that health is one area where theatre can make tangible contributions to society without getting into trouble with any government, be it military or civilian, and without compromising its ideals.⁴⁴

The most ambitious effort of my career was my involvement in the Prevention of Maternal Mortality Project (PMMP), a worldwide Carnegie-sponsored project in which the Health Sciences Faculty of the University of Ilorin participated in the early nineties. It provided me the opportunity to pursue in practical terms the conviction I expressed at that academic forum.

Early in 1991, I was invited to stage a play for the 6th Operations Workshop of the PMMP by Prof O. O. Adetoro of the University of Ilorin Health Sciences Faculty. The invitation came with what had become a familiar caveat – to make it ‘an entertaining play’. On this occasion, the project group simply wanted something that would entertain delegates and dignitaries at a dinner which was to round off the weeklong international workshop that the Faculty was hosting. I accepted the invitation but persuaded the professor to stage a play that would intimate the wider public of the gains of the workshop.

Reading many medical journal articles and proceedings of similar workshops that had been held in other parts of the world, I was fascinated by the complex relationship of health, medical personnel, and the wider public. In particular, I could see how attitudes by non-medical people could prevent the best of medical discoveries and innovations from reaching the very people who stood the greatest chances of gaining from them. (Only recently, we saw how misguided religious motives made some persons reject polio vaccination for their communities, even going to the point of killing innocent health workers, Nigerian as well as foreign.) In the case of safe motherhood, I saw a whole lot of situations that needed to be addressed. Major among them are:

- poverty, ignorance, prevailing social and political prejudice, and unreasonable suspicion of medical science as factors preventing millions of people from benefitting from modern health facilities;
- governments’ unwillingness to adequately fund health programmes, especially in the areas of training and research, provision of facilities and drugs, and general

infrastructure that ensures that patients have access to health care promptly;

- the need to upgrade the practice of traditional birth attendants (TBA), integrate them into modern child delivery efforts, and thus supplement the number of trained medical personnel available for child delivery, which still remains too few for Nigeria's population.

The great challenge was to write a 75-minute play that would bring out all these issues.

When the workshop finally held late in 1991 (the Gulf War that year delayed it for more than nine months), the play that my private group, Innovation Theatre, staged was *Let's Find an Answer*. Such was the impact it made on the audience that the organizers requested me to provide a copy of the play script to be taken away by each of the zones of the world (Europe, Asia, America, Africa, etc.) taking part in the workshop.

But that was only the beginning of my involvement in the project. First, a video recording of the initial play was commissioned. Next, the group wanted me to stage another play in Yoruba in Oro area, where it had a Rural Health Centre as one of its bases of operation.

Here again, I persuaded the project leader to modify his approach in line with my own suggestions, namely:

- To address safe motherhood in all its ramifications, we would stage three related plays on three successive market days. In addition to breaking the messages down into small, easily digestible pieces, we would also thereby establish a longer and more continuous relationship with the community than we would have done if we had staged a play once and for all.

- A cardinal principle of communication is that a man with a message is a man in search of an audience. The subject of safe motherhood primarily affects women, therefore we would stage the play at a venue where they could be found in great numbers. That was how we chose market places rather than schools and hotels.
- A medical team of doctors, nurses and other health workers would accompany us at every performance. We would set up each play in such a way that the audience would be encouraged to ask questions and make remarks about what it had seen. We would then withdraw, and the medical personnel would take the stage to address the matters arising from the questions and contributions from the audience.

The three Yoruba plays I wrote (with English translations provided for the sponsors) are “Alatise” (“Who Feels it Knows it”), “Ohun to wa lehin Ofa” (“What Lies Beyond Six”), and “Ajosee Wa Ni” (“Through Our Joint Effort”). Each play was performed in five market places in the Oro area in April 1992.

It is important to make one point here. We were under no delusion that the plays would teach the audience anything they had not known before. Messages on safe motherhood had come their way via the radio, television and posters before. Our own theatre method would be different because we were going to exploit the psychological potential that lies in an audience’s ‘willing suspension of disbelief’⁴⁵. If we could make the audience feel that this was not drama but real life, it could make them take the messages more seriously than they were wont to do.

We were going to try three things towards achieving that objective. First, we would weave into the basic

dramatic situation of each play indirect references to particular events and episodes in the different communities. Secondly, we would, as much as possible, make use of the local dialect, Igbomina, in our presentations. Thirdly, and most importantly, we would incorporate people from the community into our plays in a variety of ways. At the very least, the Bard/Narrator would address the audience directly, asking them questions, and make them sing short refrains in the course of the play. If we could, we intended to invite people from the audience to participate in some of the action.

In this last regard, a rather fortuitous development helped us to succeed far beyond our expectations. The chief nursing officer of the health centre mentioned casually that she loved acting in her school days, and we then offered to include her in the cast. In no time, we had added to our cast another nurse, a community health worker, a ward attendant and the driver of the centre's ambulance. That meant extra remunerations to the new members of our cast, but the gains more than compensated for the cost. The support we got from the centre enabled us to make use of virtually all its equipment and facilities, including even the centre's ambulance!

The effect of all that on the audience was electrifying. As members of the community watched the same workers at the health centre playing their normal roles and in their normal uniforms, the barrier between fiction and reality seemed to break down. The climax came at a point when 'the doctor' in the play directed that a patient be rushed to the University Teaching Hospital (in the state capital, some 75 kilometres away). The audience had to make way for the centre's ambulance, siren blaring, to be driven into the

arena. There was a hush as people watched ‘the patient’ being helped into the vehicle by the same nurses and attendants that the community knew very well, all in a very professional manner. Finally, the ambulance drove out, its siren blaring until it faded away into the distance. The full effect of it all registered when, before the performance of the next play the following week, an old woman approached the director and inquired if the patient survived! It was clear that something unique had happened to members of that community who saw the play. Our hope was that such an experience would translate into a new level of awareness for them, and that they would begin to take much more seriously all the health messages they had always received on the subject of safe motherhood.

Another profound development occurred after a performance at Ijomu Oro. A middle-aged woman promptly came on stage and spoke as the voice of the people to the health workers, expressing their resentment of some of the developments at the community health centre. In particular, the people were not happy that, whereas they had a resident doctor in the past, they now had to make do with one who resided elsewhere and came to the centre only a number of days in the week. That made them feel slighted, especially as they knew that a neighbouring Oro community had its own resident doctor. The development led to their wilful boycott of the government health centre in favour of privately-owned clinics in the town and elsewhere.

It was now the turn of the matron who headed the government health centre to explain what really happened. In the past, she explained, government deployed Youth Corps doctors to the centre and paid them housing and

other allowances. However, for economic reasons, those allowances were reduced and eventually stopped altogether. The neighbouring community enjoyed the luxury of a resident doctor because, on its own, it arranged accommodation for the Youth Corps doctor and paid him some allowance. The discussion ended on a positive note with members of the community accepting to write a formal letter of request for a resident doctor, pledging to do the same thing as their neighbours were doing. The play had spurred the people to adopt a self-help measure for the improvement of their own health.

To be effective, projects such as the PMMP have to maintain long and continuous contact with the target audience so as to ensure that the messages are being internalised and utilised by the people for the desired changes in their lives. Adequate funding is a key factor in the sustenance of such programmes, and that can only be guaranteed by governments and NGOs rather than individuals or university departments. Sadly, that PMMP project did not last long.

Here again, we see one of the hindrances to the laudable roles that theatre may want to play in society. Without strong financial backing from very dependable sources, many good ideas may not be translated into concrete action at all, or they may end up as nine days' wonders that are forgotten long before they make the desired impact on society.

Theatre for Religious and Moral Instruction

Religious and moral instructions constitute a very important part of the means by which every society ensures its own well-being. Although religion deals with higher

spiritual issues, it is almost inextricably linked with morality. The tenets of every religion contain issues of right and wrong as they pertain to the individual's conscience as well as his relationship to the larger society, even as he strives to ensure a good existence beyond the earthly one.

Today, there is a large and impressive body of Christian drama on video. A great number of the works are produced by groups that have attained a professional status and turned drama into a unique form of evangelisation. On a more modest note, many Christian denominations encourage a strong drama ministry for the benefit of their congregations. Their annual calendars feature drama, especially at seasons like Easter and Christmas, and to mark important anniversaries. Many fellowship groups also put up playlets as part of their anniversary programmes. Even Islam, traditionally reputed to be opposed to any form of artistic representation, has begun to explore drama on video, and plays espousing Islamic tenets now feature on some cable network channels. Clearly, the academic study of theatre in Nigeria can no longer ignore the fast-growing body of works of a religious persuasion.

Here in Ilorin, I have written and directed a number of plays for my congregation, the Chapel of Redemption, Gaa Akanbi. They include "The Dream, the Vision" and "Unto Greater Heights", which I wrote and directed for the Chapel's 7th and 10th anniversary celebrations in 2004 and 2007 respectively. I also wrote "Heirs of a Great Heritage" for the Centenary celebrations of the United Missions Church for Africa (UMCA) in 2005. For my Chapel's 15th anniversary celebrations in 2012, the drama group made its first exploration into video production with a play titled after the church's theme for the year, "Arise and Shine".

Working with people who are drama enthusiasts can produce startling results for theatre professionals. Such people are often derogatively tagged ‘amateurs’. If we only knew the true meaning of the word, such an appellation is a great compliment rather than criticism or condemnation. One dictionary meaning of the word is ‘somebody who does something for pleasure rather than payment.’ It comes from a late 18th century French word that derives from the Latin *amator* (lover) and *amare* (to love).⁴⁶

Such love has done wonderful things for the individuals concerned, providing them a healthy avenue for the exploration of their God-given talents. In the process, their social life improves as they learn to work with people of diverse talents and temperaments on a project that cannot succeed without the collaboration of all the elements involved. That kind of involvement in theatre has led some people to discover a pastime that became materially rewarding; some have, in fact, been led to change their calling as a result of it. Of course, the larger society benefits from the products of their endeavours.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, sir, permit me to state here that, indeed, such love of theatre by amateurs is behind the birth of the University of Ilorin’s Department of Performing Arts.

Amateur Theatre at Unilorin and the Birth of the Department of Performing Arts

Up until late 1981, there was no department of theatre at the University of Ilorin. However, the Department of Modern European Languages, under the headship of the experienced and dynamic Professor David Cook, had courses on dramatic literature and play production as part

of its English programme. The university also boasted of a few vibrant amateur theatre groups, one of which went by the name, Unilorin Theatre, although it was not an official university organ. The credit for this pioneering theatre effort at Unilorin goes to two lecturers, Dr. (now Professor) Sheu Jimoh of the Faculty of Education, and Dr. (now Professor) Ropo Sekoni of the Faculty of Arts. Soon after my appointment into the Department of Modern European Languages in April 1979, and with my head of department's encouragement, I took charge of the amateur theatre group and tried to give it a new impetus.

Unilorin Theatre was a group made up of lecturers and students from diverse disciplines, technologists, administrative staff, and other personnel from units like Works and Unilorin Press. What they all had in common was a keen interest in acting and play production. Today, many of them are distinguished academics in this and other institutions, top professionals and administrators in the Nigerian public sectors, and successful private practitioners. They include Professor Clement Bewaji, current Dean of Unilorin's Postgraduate School, who was at that time a Graduate Assistant in the Department of Biochemistry; Professor Francis Oyejade, then a student of Linguistics, now Dean of the Postgraduate School of Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko; Dr. Wole Ameyan, then a lecturer in the Department of Geography, now of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, Abuja; Reverend Jacob Abimbola, then a student of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, now a retired Bishop of the Methodist Church; and His Royal Highness Ayo Irukera the Baale of Egbe, who was then a Deputy Registrar of the University.

By a fortuitous rather than planned development, my own play, *Our Survival*⁴⁷, was the first one I did with Unilorin Theatre in November 1979. It was well received on campus and at the College of Education next door. The group's morale got a boost when the University of Ibadan Theatre Arts Department hosted the production in June 1980, and the Oyo State Arts Council invited it to its Festival of Arts and Culture in December of the same year. The play went on to win the maiden edition of the International Competition of Third World Playwrights organised by the International Theatre Institute based in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1981.

The birth of the Department of Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, was in part consequent upon the laudable activities of the Unilorin Theatre. There had always been talk about the desirability of a theatre department for the institution, but the idea gathered momentum when evidence of competent work was seen through productions of the theatre group. Following the group's successful staging of *The Marriage of Anansewa* for Unilorin's 1980 Convocation, the Chairman of Council praised Unilorin Theatre for its effort and declared that Unilorin was ripe for a department of theatre. One year later, the promised department took off with some thirty students as its first intake.

Departments of Performing Arts are fast becoming the vogue in Nigerian universities, but this is probably the right time to state that the University of Ilorin was the first in Nigeria to propose and start a programme of that nomenclature. Unilorin's programme was fundamentally different from the others, based on the principle of an integrated rather than compartmentalised notion of the arts.

As time went on and our members interacted with colleagues at conferences and seminars, better understanding of our programme was gained, and it is gratifying to note that many new departments of theatre after us followed the Unilorin example.

The programme that subsequently took off in October 1981 was the product of a submission that was put together by a high-powered committee in the Faculty of Arts. Instituted by the foundation dean, Professor Oladele Awobuluyi, that committee comprised eminent scholars of international repute from diverse disciplines. It was chaired by Professor David Cook, head of the then Department of Modern European Languages, a man who had been involved in theatre in East Africa, and who had actively encouraged amateur theatre productions at Unilorin. Also on the committee were other scholars in the Faculty of Arts who had a keen interest in theatre and were involved in amateur theatre productions at Unilorin: Dr. (now Professor) Beban Chumbow of the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages; Dr. (now Professor) Ropo Sekoni of the Department of Modern European Languages; Mr. (later Professor) Ade Obayemi of the Department of History, and Dr. (now Professor) Akanji Nasiru of Modern European Languages.

The programme that was proposed by the committee and later approved by the Faculty and Senate went by the name “Department of Performing and Fine Arts”. The latter component was seen as a discipline complementary to theatre, and which would grow into an autonomous department, same as the other components of the programme: Theatre, Music and Dance. In reality, the hopes were high that the new department would eventually

grow into a Faculty or School of Performing Arts where students could undergo an integrated programme while being given the opportunity to major in any one of those disciplines in the last two years of their study. Unfortunately, the economic downturn witnessed by the nation from the mid-eighties affected university funding, thus forcing the institution to drop the Fine Arts component of the programme. It is possible that the envisaged growth of Theatre, Music and Dance into autonomous disciplines may yet materialise.

The objective of the Unilorin programme was and still remains to train and produce graduates who could competently handle (and create their own) scripts that blend the complementary areas of theatre, music and dance, no matter their individual specialisations. Significantly, the first head appointed for the new department was Professor Atta Mensah, a Ghanaian musicologist of international repute. He began the department together with Dr. Akanji Nasiru, who was appointed along with Mr. Yulisa Amadu Maddy, a Sierra Leonean playwright. Dr. (Mrs.) (later Professor) Zulu Sofola joined the department in 1983, to be followed by Mrs. Bunmi Babarinde-Hall (Dance) in 1984, and Mr. (now Professor) Ayo Akinwale (Drama) in 1985.

A Future Unrecognised

Our objective in this lecture has been to draw attention to some of the new possibilities and challenges that our modern age has presented to theatre, all of which have implications for growth and development at the personal and national level. They are not alternatives to the conventional approaches to theatre; rather, they complement and therefore advance our experience of the

theatre. A couple of decades back, they would not have been given serious thought by practitioners and teachers of theatre. However, they are now veritable areas that can expand and revitalise our practice and study of the phenomenon of theatre.

What more, they have implications for theatre's commitment to the evolution of our society and nation. They constitute a vital part of the all-round advancement that we seek, especially in our bid to shed the odious label of 'underdevelopment' that has been our lot since our emergence as an independent nation more than half a century ago.

Going back that far into our history, it is useful to ask ourselves what future we envisaged for our nascent nation. Whether we sang "Nigeria, we hail thee" or "Arise oh compatriots", what was the picture running through our minds? How does that picture compare with our present state and experience?

The submission of this lecture is that, with regard to the theatre, the reality we are now experiencing differs in many respects from the future we envisaged half a century ago. From social, political, ideological, artistic, and technological perspectives, a future has long been taking shape that is significantly different from what we imagined at that time. Because we persistently carried in our minds our own image of the future, we failed to recognise the actual future that was unfolding and taking shape before our very eyes.

The academic world in particular has been slow, almost reluctant, to apprehend the future that has for long been emerging, especially in the area of theatre. While our syllabus has been emphasising the same contents and

approaches that we inherited so long ago, active practitioners in the field have been learning new lessons and gaining new insights into the nature and effect of a very complex art. Because they have to exist by what they do, they have made bold forays into areas we either did not deem important or relevant to theatre, or that we almost considered out of bounds to it. Technology offers us a singular instance here. While we treated theatre almost as a distinct area that brooks no interference from science and technology, they have explored film and video as natural extensions of the theatre. While many theatre programmes have only been paying lip service to ‘media drama’, they have married live theatre with the screen in a continuum that has made their art accessible to a much wider audience than we have been able to reach with ours. What more, they have recorded huge financial benefits from that bold experimentation, while we cannot survive without teaching and research grants.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, our submission is that a different future has long arrived for theatre. What we need to do is to embrace it with a boldness that is bound to yield great dividends for us as theatre practitioners, benefit our society, and thereby be part of the ways by which the nation as a whole advance.

5. Conclusion

Mr. Vice Chancellor, sir, I began this lecture by showing the uniqueness of theatre and its potential as an art form for addressing issues of importance to society. But, like other art forms, it cannot *on its own* bring about the

immediate and significant change that we would all love to see taking place in our national life. Yet, we must give credit to the dramatist whose work demonstrates his commitment to positive change, knowing that he keeps faith with our common ideal, and that he is an important part of a complex process by which society keeps moving forward and renewing itself. All we ask of him is to be clear in his vision, competent in the artistic medium in which he expresses it, and sincere in the cause that he espouses.

We arrived at the realisation that change and development do not come only in the form of the momentous social and political events of a nation's history, but equally through the seemingly little issues that permeate every aspect of its daily life. To that extent, committed theatre has a challenge to include in its compass those issues that are the very foundation upon which our total well-being as a nation rests. Even as the dramatist expresses himself on those issues about which he feels very deeply, he must see the need to lend his art to the pursuit of the common ideal in other areas where like-minded workers are labouring to bring about change.

The dramatist himself has to be open to change, even in the practice of his art, to be receptive to new ideas and theories, and to take advantage of developments in other sectors for the improvement of his art and the effective dissemination of his message.

6. Suggestions and Recommendations

There is so much opportunity in this country! In fact, if a challenge were issued today, we might well discover that most of the fundamental research has been conducted already and is just sitting in drawers in our universities.⁴⁸

It only remains for me to state more precisely those areas that I think can be of benefit to theatre as it strives to be an effective tool of change in our present age. I shall put them under three categories.

University Theatre Programmes

There is a need to review existing university programmes in theatre and performing arts to meet the challenges that await our products. It is good that we expose our students to leading theories and approaches to theatre from different ages and cultures, but we must also prepare them for the peculiarities of the Nigerian terrain in which they will work. In particular, we suggest the following:

- Community and Children's Theatre courses ought to challenge students to actually work with the relevant sectors, instead of being classroom-bound discussion of theories and examples of works elsewhere. In particular, schools ought to be a major focus in the training of our students, seeing that teaching will absorb many of them when they leave the university.

- Alongside the big productions that they mount as class or departmental projects, students need to be challenged to do short, inexpensive plays and sketches that are intended to speak to specific situations and audiences. Improvisation should be encouraged, and this applies to the pieces they create as well as the manner in which they realise them. The actor's major tool being his body, students need to do a lot more of the exercises and work more on the projects that emphasise their mastery of their voices, faces and bodies to communicate profound feelings to an audience.
- In our highly technological age, it makes sense to expand our curriculum in order to expose students to the use of computers, video cameras, desktop editing facilities, etc.
- Creative writing should be encouraged but not limited to the conventional play script. Students who have the flair should be encouraged to write scripts for radio and television, as well as creative pieces for advertising and marketing products and services.

Innovative Research Work

A great deal of postgraduate work in theatre nowadays concentrates on well-worn areas like festivals in different Nigerian communities, analyses of plays, and studies in theatre and arts administration in particular places. In addition to those familiar areas, there is the need to challenge students to look into other areas like theatre history, criticism, production styles of leading Nigerian dramatists, and applied theatre.

At the higher levels of scholarship, theatre can benefit from multi-disciplinary projects, especially in the area of

applied theatre. Research work in conjunction with Medicine, Sociology, and Education can help us to jointly address issues of public concern.

Funding of Arts

The arts need financial support, especially when they are goal- rather than commercial-oriented. In Nigeria, a great deal of government funding of the arts goes into bureaucratic setups like Arts Councils. Sadly, those organisations often peddle nothing more than mindless entertainment of dignitaries at state occasions. Sometimes, they are brazen machineries for political ends. Given the personnel, material resources and funds at their disposal, Arts Councils can, among other things, be laboratories available to university departments of theatre to pursue innovative projects. Their halls can be regular venues for the staging of university theatre productions, so that theatre can be taken beyond the ivory tower and into the larger community.

Corporate bodies like banks, national and multinational companies have the means to fund projects that are designed to improve lives in a variety of ways. They should be reminded that it is their duty and responsibility to do so. In addition to well-known older Foundations like Ford and Carnegie, newer ones like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (funded by the giant Microsoft Company) have emerged that are supporting worthy causes. Nigeria has entrepreneurs who are successful enough to add their names to the growing list. They should also know that supporting committed theatre is one way that they can make significant marks that help to improve lives and develop Nigeria.

7. Acknowledgments

Mr. Vice Chancellor, sir, I owe my career to wonderful mentors who went beyond the call of duty to offer me useful advice, based on their knowledge of me as one of their students. Please permit me to recognise them by name.

At the University of Ibadan, I was taught in the English Department by great scholars like Professors Dan Izevbaye, Oyin Ogunba and Ayo Banjo. I did not see what they saw then, but I am glad I followed their suggestion to cross over to Theatre Arts for my postgraduate work.

Professor Dapo Adelugba began my Ph.D. supervision in the Department of Theatre Arts, and Professor J. A. Adedeji piloted me through the writing and defence of my thesis. In the process, they exposed me to the magic of theatre. I remain eternally grateful to them.

I studied alongside outstanding students who motivated me to dream big dreams. Among them are two people who have become my lifelong friends: the celebrated poet and literary giant, Professor Niyi Osundare, and the political scientist, Professor Alex Gboyega, whose wonderful support helped me to persevere and overcome at moments of crisis and need.

My two-year stint in the Drama Unit of the English Department at Ahmadu Bello University exposed me to new dimensions to theatre, thanks to my head of department, Michael Etherton, and to my other colleagues, Brian Crow, Tony Humphries and Yakubu Nasidi. Even as I was growing academically in their company, I was maturing socially through my friendship with Segun Osinowo of Animal Science (my Best Man), and Ayo

Abatan of Civil Engineering, both of them now professors in their different disciplines.

I can confidently say that my 34-year stay at the University of Ilorin gave me all the opportunity to blossom in my career. The late Professor David Cook (he insisted on being called David by everyone) was a wonderful head of department and a great supporter of my creative efforts. The Performing Arts Department could not have had a better foundation head than the late Professor Atta Mensah, an amiable man who was interested in my academic progress and related to me like an uncle. Over the years, other colleagues like the late Professor (Mrs.) Zulu Sofola, Professor Ayo Akinwale, Dr. Bode Omojola, and the current head of department, Dr. Rasheed Adeoye, as well as all the current academic staff of the department, came in to enrich the programme and contribute to the family spirit that is typical of most theatre departments. I cannot forget the many students, past and present, who have helped to raise the name of the department in their different ways.

The Performing Arts Department also benefited tremendously from the three successive Vice Chancellors that saw it through its periods of gestation, infancy and childhood: Professors Akin Adesola, Afolabi Toyé, and Adeoye Adeniyi. That medical and natural scientists could demonstrate such great love and support for theatre speaks volumes for their great scholarship and wonderful personalities. I want to specially mention my personal debt of gratitude to Professor Adeniyi, Unilorin's first Professor Emeritus and our Baba Agba, and his amiable wife, our Mama Agba.

In between my career at Unilorin, I have had the privilege of working in some institutions abroad, all of

them in the United States - Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana; Columbia University and City College, New York City; and University of Maryland Baltimore County, Baltimore. As a Visiting Senior Fulbright Scholar, I was honoured to give special lectures at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, Knoxville Community College, both in the state of Tennessee, and the University of California at Los Angeles. In Nigeria, I also spent some time at Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State; Niger Delta University, Amassoma, Bayelsa State; and Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State. I am grateful to the many colleagues who enriched my academic and personal life in those institutions.

I am grateful to Dr. Bayo Afolabi (currently on sabbatical at Unilorin from Obafemi Awolowo University), and Dr. Femi Dunmade of the Department of English, who volunteered to proof-read the draft of this lecture, and gave me useful advice that helped to improve it. I hope to be around to listen to you deliver your own inaugurals!

The Chapel of Redemption UMCA, Gaa Akanbi, Ilorin, provides a spiritual anchor that has buoyed me through many moments of personal trials and crises. The trio of Reverends Sunday Oladejo, Ayo Okeowo and (Professor) J. A. Omotosho, who have led the Chapel at various times, all proved wonderful to me personally. My membership of the Choir, the caring arm of the church (Christian Faith in Action Team), and the COR Drama Group, all presented me opportunities to use my talents for higher callings. Among the wonderful persons I met in God's house, Mrs. Joyce Ayinmodu has identified with and supported my many ideas and projects.

It would be the joy of every person presenting an Inaugural Lecture to have his parents physically present at the occasion. My father passed away when I was still too young to remember his face, but he left me in the hands of the most wonderful mother, Alhaja Sadiat Abeje Nasiru, who spared nothing to bring me up and give me a sound education. She, too, departed the world nearly thirty years ago, but not until she had seen me acquire a Ph.D., become a Senior Lecturer, and given her two granddaughters. I have the most loving memories of her.

I want to mention another special mother, Mrs. Edith Agbeke Akinlotan, a much older college mate who adopted me as her son, and who, at 82, still has as much love for me as she did when we first met some fifty years ago.

Outside the university and my career, I have been blessed with genuine friends too numerous to list here. God knows you all and will reward your various contributions to my life and career.

My wife, Grace Dupe Nasiru (Dupsy), came into my life at a time when, but for her love and companionship, an ailment would have put an end to my existence when I was barely thirty. My children, Olubunmi Ifonlaja (Bum-Bum), Omotayo Akanmode (Tay-o), and Olumayowa Nasiru (Medium Mayor), gave me a reason to work hard. Between them, my two daughters have given me two wonderful sons-in-law, Chris and Mayowa (Big Mayor), three beautiful granddaughters, Gloria, Victoria, and Joy, and a miracle grandson, AnjolaOluwa. I bless the name of the Lord on account of you all.

Finally, but most importantly, I give glory to God Almighty. It pleased Him to bestow on me His special grace and favour, take me to heights I could never have

dreamt of, and, most of all, show me the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, His Son and my Saviour. Certainly, all the glory must be to Him alone.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, I thank you all.

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