

Issues in Positive Nationhood: A Reappraisal of Values

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Appreciation

It is good to be home. It is good to be at the cradle of tertiary education in the Igbo heartland, the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri. It is good to feel welcomed. Thank you very much.

Congratulation to the recently appointed provost, Dr. Dan C. Anyanwu. I wish him a fruitful tenure. Our prayer is that God will continue to grant him the grace of health, discernment and wisdom, and bless him and his family.

I also thank the organizers of this conference, especially for the honour of being invited as keynote speaker. I hope what little I have to contribute serves towards positive nationhood.

I apologize that I was unable to prepare this in time to make your publication. As penalty I produced copies of the lecture at my own cost. I hope I am forgiven.

Introduction

The theme of this conference – **Issues in Positive Nationhood: A Reappraisal of Values** - is one that is challenging. A number of things occurred to me and, I hope to you as well, in trying to interpret it. One is NATIONHOOD, the second is VALUES. Exactly ten years ago (a decade now, that is 2008), we were invited by the National Orientation Agency (NAO) to deal with the issue of CORE NATIONAL VALUES FOR NIGERIA. That meeting lasted a whole week in Minna, Niger state, and we (thirty-seven Professors, one from each state and the Federal Capital, Abuja, from diverse backgrounds and vocations, were asked to articulate and produce for publication a compendium of NIGERIA’S NATIONAL VALUES. That publication was achieved, but I am not sure what benefit accrued to the Nigeria state and society.

We shall return to the issue of VALUES, but let’s reflect a bit on NATIONHOOD. By NATIONHOOD you must be implying Nigeria. Considering that this institution has cherished having the word “FEDERAL” added to her name, your meaning of nationhood is not likely to be focused on a sub-set of the country, Nigeria. We shall therefore focus on Nigeria and not any of the sub-sets of Nigeria.

We may however need to be reminded that not everyone is in agreement that Nigeria is a nation. To many persons, Nigeria is a country with many nations. To certain persons who hold this view,

Nigeria is hopefully “work-in-progress” (just as all countries are works-in-progress, as development is a continuing engagement), and would someday, hopefully, evolve into a nation.

Two friends – one a Cameroonian and the other a Sierra Leonian have at different times and different places told me that Nigeria is perhaps the most discussed country on earth by her citizens. They said that the most likely discussion among Nigerians when they meet is the state of their country. We should regard this as something positive about Nigeria – our freedom of expression, and opportunity to freely discuss our country; freedom that may not be available to many persons in many parts of world. While we have a tendency to see and talk about many things wrong about our country, I advise we be very conscious of this positive thing about Nigeria.

Everyday Nigerians at various fora discuss her nationhood or otherwise, and Nigerians reappraise issues of values, and without their stating it as this, ponder on the future of the country, and seem not so sure if we are better today than we were a generation ago, say thirty years ago. I have had to pose these questions, and I can well do it here: Are we better today than thirty years ago, and do you see us better thirty years in the future than we are today? What are the values we hold dear and are prepared to defend, and how do these fare today compared to thirty years ago, and in the next thirty years. From my experience, it could turn to one of those vibrant Nigeria debates, and we are likely to have different views about this. Once again, that is a positive aspect of Nigeria.

What we are doing here is to further these debates. If in the process we are able to add value to our society, even in a small way, then we would have done the work. Towards this, we focus first on Nigeria and NATIONHOOD, and then on the issue of VALUES.

One small but serious thing the modern state would usually have is an ANTHEM. Recently in the United States, there have been protests by some persons expressed by their not standing for the anthem. Anthems are serious matters. Nigeria has had two anthems in her history. One (*Nigeria we hail thee*), from 1970 to 1978, and the second (*Arise O' Compatriots*), since 1978. At the 2014 National Conference of which I was a delegate, the issue came up again, and the conference recommended going back to the old *Nigeria we hail Thee*. By the perspective of the 2014 conference, the old anthem is more reflective of Nigeria's true situation, especially the line that states “Though tribe and tongue may differ”, and better reflects our values and what we should sincerely be aspiring to, “In brotherhood we stand”.

Wikipedia describes a national anthem (also state anthem, national hymn, national song, etc.) as generally a patriotic musical composition that evokes and eulogizes the history, traditions, and struggles of its people, recognized either by a nation's government as the official national song, or by convention through use by the people. It is therefore a thing a people respect and cherish as reflecting them and their state, and nation and, most importantly, addresses their collective and deepest shared values, aspirations, and patriotism about them. We shall reflect on Nigeria and her anthems at various times as we deal with the subject of Nigeria's nationhood and values.

Nigeria and Nationhood

Some of us may have heard discussions as to whether Nigeria is a country or a nation. There are many contentious issues about Nigeria, but I want to discuss a bit on the seeming contention or confusion as to its assumed nationhood. To address this, we go back to our anthems. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has had two anthems, and we actually called them national anthems. Which must mean we are a nation, or is it still aspiring nation?

At Independence in 1960 we started with *Nigeria we hail thee*. In that anthem, Nigeria was referred to as **motherland**. In the new anthem which we started using from 1978, we refer to Nigeria as **fatherland**. Does it mean we were **female** before, but now **male**? I am not sure what the implications are, and would sincerely wish to be educated on this.

Related to this is that countries have flags. I have been told that in the Green-White-Green of our flag, the first Green represents agriculture/food security; and the white in the middle (therefore central to us), stands for peace. What then does the second Green represent? Still more Agriculture/food security? We once had a debate on this at the Nigerian Environment Study Action Team (NEST) in Ibadan about 2010 on whether the second Green represents more agriculture/food security or simply a sign of lack of rigour and intellectual weakness. Someone observed that from the weak symbology, Nigeria did not seem to have a well thought-out idea of her future, unlike Ghana for instance with the black star, indicating an aspiration to be the star from the black world; or the Japanese which communicated the rising sun from the East.

One other debate I recall from the Ibadan days was the Nigeria Coat of arms. To some people the coat of arms seem to reflect more rigour and aspirations or, if you wish, values. According to Wikipedia, the coat of arms of Nigeria consists of a black shield with a wavy white pall, symbolizing the meeting of the Niger and Benue Rivers at Lokoja. The black shield represents Nigeria's fertile soil, while the two supporting horses or chargers on each side represent dignity. The eagle represents strength, while the green and white bands on the top of the shield represent the rich soil. The red flowers at the base are *Costus spectabilis*, Nigeria's national flower. This flower was chosen for inclusion in the coat of arms as it is found all over Nigeria and also stand for the beauty of the nation. On the banderole around the base is Nigeria's national motto since 1978: "Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress" (formerly "Peace, Unity, Freedom").

Until the period of these discussions in Ibadan in 2010, I never knew that we had a national flower, talk less of knowing the name. This flower is reported to be found all over Nigeria, but I am not sure how many educated Nigerians, have noticed this or can identify it. We are not the only country with such a symbol. A similar representation is Canada's Maple leaf which is reflected in their national flag; another is Austria's national flower, the Edelweiss. Those who are conversant with the movie, *Sounds of Music*, may be familiar with the song *Edelweiss*.

Back to the issue of Nigeria and nationhood as reflected in the Anthems. The third stanza of the first anthem contains a prayer, "**Help us to build a nation**". The debate is still on as to whether we already have a nation which we aspire to build, or we do not yet have a nation, but we aspire to build one.

Nigeria we hail thee,
Our own dear native land,
Though tribe and tongue may differ,

In brotherhood we stand,
Nigerians all, are proud to serve
Our sovereign **Motherland**.

Our flag shall be a symbol
That truth and justice reign,
In peace or battle honour'd,
And this we count as gain,
To hand on to our children
A banner without stain.

O God of all creation,
Grant this our one request,
Help us to build a nation
Where no man is oppressed,
And so with peace and plenty
Nigeria may be blessed.

We started using the second anthem in 1978. In its second stanza, one finds the line, “**one nation bound in freedom**”, from which one may be inclined to conclude that there actually exists a nation which we have to serve with heart and mind.

Arise, O compatriots
Nigeria's call obey
to serve our **fatherland**
with love and strength and faith.
The labour of our heroes past
shall never be in vain,
to serve with heart and might
one nation bound in freedom
Peace and unity.

O God of creation,
direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace
And justice reign

This second anthem, may have been sufficient to end this discussion, were it not for something interesting that happened along with our movement to the new national anthem in 1978: A National Pledge was introduced. Usually, the National Pledge is recited immediately after the singing of the National Anthem. Interestingly, in moving from singing the National Anthem to

reciting the National Pledge, one finds oneself moving, in one breadth, from an important document that posits Nigeria as a nation to one that suggests that it is a country. The Pledge pointedly states: **“I pledge to Nigeria my country”**

I pledge to Nigeria my country.

To be faithful, loyal and honest.

To serve Nigeria with all my strength.

To defend her unity, and uphold her honour and glory.

So help me God.

Now I leave it to you. Are we dealing with a nation or a country?

Nigeria and her Values

We fall back to each of these national symbols for what constitutes Nigeria’s core national values. From the first anthem we encounter such ennobling values as:

1. Appreciation of our country - **Nigeria we hail thee**
2. Patriotism and Love of our country - **Our own dear native land**
3. Sincerity of our situation and challenges, and the need for understanding, accommodation, and compromise - **Though tribe and tongue may differ**
4. Willingness to stand for each other, our neighbours and our country, empathy for the weak, supporting each other, a compassionate people and country - **In brotherhood we stand**
5. Preparedness to serve and for the common good of all, dignity in labour - **Nigerians all, are proud to serve**
6. Ownership by us and not for sale to foreign interests - **Our sovereign Motherland.**
7. Proud of who we are - **Our flag shall be a symbol**
8. Ennobling values of truth and justice - **That truth and justice reign**
9. No matter the circumstance and condition, these values we shall uphold - **In peace or battle honour’d,**
10. Not self and not my pocket - **And this we count as gain,**
11. We shall leave our society better than we met it - **To hand on to our children**
12. Honour and dignity, good name better than riches that our children shall be proud of us, and they shall have life, and not a country treated with scorn globally, as a land scammers, and fraudsters - **A banner without stain**
13. We truly believe in God and not mammon/money, emergency and fake pastors, magicians and sorcerers who now masquerade as Church men, and our people gullibly follow traders of the gospel - **O God of all creation,**
14. God, by your might not the might of man, and you truly answer prayers - **Grant this our one request,**
15. We are not yet there but we genuinely aspire, and we have a vision of our country which we must work for, and not merely wish or talk about, or simply call for miracles, and only gather to share money from Oil companies which we do not know how to extract,

how much is extracted, what volume is sold, and what is earned, and of a people truly evolved into one of shared values, of rule of law, respecting our common humanity, and respect for human life and family, of common citizenship and right to reside, work and invest anywhere within the country, and not one in which human life can be taken without consequence and peoples properties destroyed because they are seen as wanting to take over by aggressive hard work and investment, committed to building a modern state, and not one that romances a distant past in which communities outside the geography of Nigeria are perceives as closer brethren than sections within Nigeria, of equity and fairness, and equal opportunities, and not of discriminating standards depending on ancestry - **Help us to build a nation**

16. We have a vision and willing to work for a society with fair reward systems, and not *monkey dey work baboon dey chop*, where the reward system is not truncated such that those who work hardest get the most, and not the opposite; and the weak is protected; *not sweet without sweat*, wealth without work, degrees that are not earned, thieves being honoured by the communities and churches, people openly flaunting wealth that cannot be explained, a preponderance of young men aspiring to be overnight millionaires, and all ladies pretending to be beauty queens and celebrities, and those who offend the laws are punished according to the weight of their offences - **Where no man is oppressed**
17. That with hard work and discipline, the right attitude, competence and knowledge we shall be productive, and not a country of consumers, and so live together in peace, and perpetual fear of robbers, kidnappers, and assassins - **And so with peace and plenty**
18. Our country will excel and be respected all over the world; people of other countries will want to come to us, and not our young men trekking across the Sahara and dying in the Mediterranean, and our young women (and even not so young women) standing in the cold winter streets of Italy - **Nigeria may be blessed.**

From the second anthem which we started using in 1978, there are lessons for values. These include:

1. We just have to stand up for what we believe and not watch and wait that things will get better. If we do not fight for the society we want, it will not happen. Prayer is not enough - **Arise, O compatriots**
2. Hear the voice, obey the call - **Nigeria's call obey**
3. Serve the common good not self - **to serve our fatherland**
4. Show some love and not destroy what we have. Do not despair. Do not lose hope. Do not say if you can't beat them join them. Use your Voters' Card well. Vote for those who will work for the common good not for self - **with love and strength and faith.**
5. Let us be sure who our heroes are. Those who truly believed in Nigeria and her future and worked for her future, and not those who destroyed the country and are being put up as heroes. Pan-Nigeria heroes and not ethnic champions. Follow their examples - **The labour of our heroes past, shall never be in vain,**
6. Serve, serve, and serve!!! Leadership is service, of the common good. Leave a place better than you met it, serve as if development cannot wait. Serve with passion. Serve

with eyes on history and posterity. Plant trees that other will eat - **to serve with heart and might**

7. We will achieve that nation that all of humanity will queue to come to, and one in which human freedom, sensibilities, and dignity will be typified - **one nation bound in freedom, Peace and unity.**
8. God we still trust and believe in you despite our misusing of your grace - **O God of creation,**
9. God direct our dreams aright - away from foolish ways of leaders and the led; away from selfishness, immorality and corruption that we have foolishly chosen; away from stealing things we do not need, properties we no longer remember where they are, children we do not care for and who end up in the streets; away from miseducation of our children and turning them into robbers, kidnappers, and prostitutes - **direct our noble cause**
10. God we truly want leaders and not rulers. Men and women who have deep insights, conscious of our history, where we are coming from, where we are and where we should be headed to. People who have far and long vision, conscious of our place in the globe, and clear passion and understanding on how to get us better life and living, whose concern is about our wellbeing - **Guide our leaders right**
11. Merciful God it is obvious that we have foolishly eaten the seeds we ought to have planted and the harvests of tomorrow are compromised. Save us from children who will sell their mothers for money, make babies for sale; from children who do not respect elders or offer them seats, young men and even young ladies who will seat while an elderly woman or a pregnant woman is standing. Save us from sub-cultures of *Malaysia, Yahoo yahoo and yahoo plus*; a lifestyle of Naija Bet, Tramadol, and all such that have stolen our children, including the internet and other ICT devices that ought to be blessings but have become sorrows, save us from the new information technologies that have captured and manipulate the minds of our youth and female gender especially - **Help our youth the truth to know.**
12. Extinguish alien values. Eliminate hatred from family members, associates and colleagues often for no reason other than pettiness, jealousies and envy, yet our churches and other places of worship are filled up - **In love and honesty to grow, And living just and true**
13. Save us from a culture of inferiority and lowering of standards, of men who have forgotten what it means to be a man but have become lazy and suffer from crime-filled minds, and a generation of “It does not matter”, where we counterfeit everything from school results to NYSC certificates, to just about faking of everything possible - **Great lofty heights attain**
14. We still aspire to build despite everything. Hope is needed in the midst of mass despair, poverty, hunger, unemployment, new and emerging illnesses, and other parameters of low quality life and living - **To build a nation where peace and justice reign**

From the pledge we find lessons of values to be learnt. These include:

1. Commitment, sincerity of purpose - **I pledge to Nigeria my country.**

2. In private and public, being able to do things in secret that I can live with in public - **To be faithful, loyal and honest.**
3. To serve and not to beg for a job, and when employed not to become a truant - **To serve Nigeria with all my strength.**
4. To defend what I believe in and not make promises I never intend keeping - **To defend her unity, and uphold her honour and glory.**
5. I still hope in God despite all my shortcomings, but will back my hope in God by doing my part, working hard with character - **So help me God.**

Winding Down

Something I have had to learn is try not to do everything at the same time. When I was asked to do this Keynote, and not having the benefit of a concept note I had to refer to the poster and handbills with which this conference was publicized. I took a look at the subthemes, and in all counted twenty-five (25) of them. These subthemes seem chosen in a manner to carry along every unit of the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, and perhaps all areas of learning in the in our tertiary institutions. Then, it occurred to me that this is a General Studies conference. One lesson I have learnt from this is that the organizers seem to genuinely have - and also practically strive to exhibit - one positive value necessary for nationhood which Nigeria may not have an abundance of, and that is *being inclusive*, or being all-embracing.

I resolved recently that when invited to this kind of role, I will try not to speak for long. I try not to take on every possible matter and I try to make it practical, in the hope that some actions could emanate from the events, ultimately contributing to our lives and society in positive ways. I try not to make it a talking matter. My expectation is for at least 10 percent of the audience to get value and practical use that bring about positive change or, if we may say, positive nationhood, as the conference seems to want to achieve. But, of course, that is far from reality here. Reality here is that as a tertiary institution of leaning, many persons who will be subscribing to this conference will be here to have at least a paper published. That serves our core interests as academics as it helps in our annual appraisals for the purpose of promotion.

I therefore find this presentation at the cross roads, hoping as Kwesi Brew would write in the Mesh, for the lamp of love to show the way that I should follow; reflecting on options, one of which is do what I have resolved to do - short, possibly simple/single/few items. Be practical - hoping that at least one percent of my audience makes a choice to see the need for change. Another choice is to try to go the way of the academic paper, promotion-targeting, and therefore try to have volumes that try to address everything and everybody.

The later kept playing up in my mind the **theory of everything**. We should not bother with the technicalities of the theory of everything. We leave that to our tribe of Physicists, who hopefully understand that debate of centuries in their discipline, which you may of course take interest in. Let us briefly say that the theory of everything (TOE or ToE), final theory, ultimate theory, or master theory is a hypothetical single, all-encompassing, coherent theoretical framework of physics that fully explains and links together all physical aspects of the universe. Not many persons in the physical sciences agree that there could be such a theory; and so, among the

counter arguments is the idea of **the impossibility of being "of everything"** as well as the fundamental limits in accuracy as some physicists acknowledge that it is a mistake to confuse theoretical models with the true nature of reality, and hold that the series of approximations will never terminate in the "truth".

Now do not be lost, as I too have tried not to be. The much I have explored is my everything for now. As I wind down and restrain myself from exploring the endless vista of everything and something for everyone, let me borrow from the often most enthusiastic assembly we have in our land these days – a religious gathering, crusade, or by another name: Let us have an *alter call* for those who would want to repent. In essence, is there something you have learnt that can be put to practical use by you? The power of personal example. Are you of the 10 % that I hope can resolve to change something as a result of things encountered today?

I will not ask you to come to the Alter. Just THINK!

Conclusion

The very people who have made wrong choices in life appear to be the very ones that turn round to complain that things are not going well at every level in the society. There is evidence of this in families, communities, our children, our schools, our churches, our governments, in sports, judiciary, markets, and everywhere. We look back at our yesterday and despite access to modern tools and technologies we cannot say with certainty that our today is better than our yesterday and our tomorrow shall be better than our today.

We have products of our schools right up to university graduates who cannot articulate correct sentences and we wonder how we came to this point. We thus seem to forget that there are consequences when, for the love of their children, parents and teachers collude in examination malpractices. Furthermore, we have evolved a new model of Christianity that differentiates what is preached from how we live even for pastors of our pseudo-Christian groups. We have teachers who cannot read and who themselves fail primary school tests and yet we cannot throw them away because, amongst other reasons, we have a teachers' union that cannot stand for that. We have a University union that has no interest in the immorality that has destroyed our reputation and regard as lecturers and teachers.

We have PhD holders who wake up every morning get into their offices to sell books and count money while recording and awarding marks to students as if that job require skills beyond primary school attendance.

We have produced graduates with degrees who can do nothing but be KEKE drivers, and recharge cards sellers as if you need to spend thousand and millions of Naira over 4 years to develop skills for that kind of job.

I will end with two things. The first is this:

God, give us men!

GOD, give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands;
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;
Men whom the spoils of office can not buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honor; men who will not lie;
Men who can stand before a demagogue
And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking!
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty, and in private thinking;
For while the rabble, with their thumb-worn creeds,
Their large professions and their little deeds,
Mingle in selfish strife, lo! Freedom weeps,
Wrong rules the land and waiting Justice sleeps.

- **Josiah Gilbert Holland**

The second is a poem by Chioma Toni-Duruaka, who said this was inspired by something I wrote which she read: (Inspired by Prof. Chinedum Nwajiuba's article - A QUIZ FOR NDI IMO),

We are a people but with no people
We roar and rage but we have no teeth
A band with leaders without finesse
A group of dancers without choreography

I weep and wail for our heroes past
Who turn and twist in solitude in their graves
Weeping and wailing for legacies destroyed
By successors of whom they had thought so much

A time for a rethink
A time for new dance steps
A time to remove the raffia from these self-serving masquerades
Snatch the carpet from under their feet
Their fall a worse sound than Humpty Dumpty would make
A time for the truth amidst this chaos
For then and only then shall we truly be free

Teach the young the truth at all times
Sell our true culture at the Eke, Orié, Afor and Nkwo market days of our lands
E ji e shi uyo mara nma fu a ma
Like our Owerri brethren say
So back to the basics Ndi Imo
Back to the essence of our being
People of truth
People with a heart of gold

People of compassion
For whom the bell of truth, freedom and greatness shall toll!

God bless you.