

## **This is our chance: Godfrey Okoye University**

(A Speech on the First Matriculation Ceremony of the University, February 13, 2010)

Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Christian Anieke

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, the Governing Council, the Senate, the academic and administrative staff of Godfrey Okoye University, I would like to welcome you to the matriculation of die pioneer students of the University. I welcome particularly the parents, guardians, relations and friends of the matriculating students who have come from far and wide to be part of this milestone in the history of education in our country. I would like to welcome and thank in a special way all those, known and unknown, who prayed fervently and passionately for the safe delivery of this robust baby: Godfrey Okoye University (GO University or God's Own University, as some fondly call it).

It all happened on 21.10. 2,009. The midwives were the Federal Executive Council. Tagging it no.36, they ratified the existence of Godfrey Okoye University as one of the 41 private universities in Nigeria. The spontaneous reaction of anxious waiters outside the delivery room was thunderous. Even those who were normally most unsusceptible to emotional outbursts and passionate body expressions turned acrobatic dancers. Spoons, plates, chairs, broken legs of tables, even human flesh, became musical instruments producing harmoniously discordant tunes. The movement of lumpy indistinguishable human flesh would remind a German immediately of "die ungläubliche afrikanische Beweglichkeit". Amid this beautiful emotional chaos, I, on the wings of poetic drunkenness, heard a voice. Its words were as clear as crystal: This is our chance!

But then our chance to do what? Relishing my poetic landscape and not having the least desire to depart, being a little Petrine by nature, I wandered like a troubadour through the forest of our Academic Brief, reading patiently the engraved objectives of the university, the philosophy, mission, vision, and academic programmes. I saw the tall budget plans and the whole labyrinth of organigram. I saw the monstrous Master Plan of the University, where every creature, living and dead, is encased in a generous space of 165 hectares. I also recalled the faces of Prof. Okeke and Prof. Eze, tight-lipped, sweaty faces partially hidden behind eyeglasses, poring over the University Law designed to ensure that no human action at Godfrey Okoye University eludes the creased fingers of law.

In this rare poetic ecstasy, one question kept tugging at the cassock of my mind like a motif in a novel: where is the evidence? I made several fruitless attempts to chase this question away, but each attempt only appeared to renew its willingness to wrestle down my mind and press its strange body on it. When I became a normal mortal again, I realised that my mind had been transformed into one big question: where is the evidence? Suddenly I realised that

this is our chance to ask this question. Certainly, Godfrey Okoye University is our chance to ask this question.

One thing has become very clear to me in the course of my introspection: the question “Where is the evidence?” is the one question that can carry the burden of our objectives, philosophy, mission and vision without wobbling like Meka after a visit to Mama Titi’s to drink the strong local gin. It is also a question that will keep the university focused on its primary role in society: research. One thing has to be clear: where is the evidence? does not dissolve into types of philosophical soups of our generation: empiricism, positivism, rationalism, Kantianism, idealism, realism, naturalism, existentialism, utilitarianism, pragmatism, nihilism, transcendentalism, etc. This question is also not a resonance of the utilitarian philosophy of Gradgrind and Bounderby in Dickens’s Hard Times with the fanatical insistence on “facts and nothing but facts”. It is simply a question about rational foundations for verification and verifiability; It is the establishment of common grounds for an objective discourse. Only the establishment of rational foundations for dialogue will wrestle knowledge away from fanaticism and cultism. And this is what a university does...

A university is certainly not a place where cheap, plagiarised handouts are sold; nor is it a place where a lecturer’s claim of authorship is no more than a clever, roguish act of removing the name of the rightful author, replacing it with his own, and selling it at barbarous prices. It is also not a place for the so-called odious”sorting.” the horrendous mortal sin of using cash or flesh to buy marks or grades. Nor can a university be a place where pseudo-science is promoted and promulgated on the craggy altar of cultism. A university has one major role: research. Since the meat of research is experimentation and verifiability, the question “where is the evidence?” should be like the biblical pillar of fire guiding students and lecturers to the promised land of solid research and knowledge.

Evidence of being guided on the wings of our question is that a university lecturer brings live plants to lecture rather drawing plants that can easily be shown, touched and analysed. Where is the evidence? forbids drawing computers to teach computer hardware rather using one of the old computers lying in every nook and cranny of our country. Where is the evidence? as a guide will make it impossible for someone who cannot change a little electric bulb to graduate as an electrical engineer. Where is the evidence? as a programme will make it impossible for someone to become a graduate of computer science without being able to install simple programmes on a computer. In fact, what I think the university can do is to bring our people back to scientific thinking rooted in the question “where is the evidence?”

Godfrey Okoye University, you are our chance to ask and make people ask this question. My dear matriculating students, your university will make you ask this one fundamental question and lead you to appreciate all the colours and contours of this question in the pursuit of your

studies, researches and projects. This University will keep you focused on its trilogy of dialogues: epistemic, cultural and religious dialogues.

As the pioneer students of the university, you will be the unmistakable embodiment of the philosophy and vision of the founding founders of this university so that our people will understand through your life and action the full semantic implication of our central question “where is the evidence?” Furthermore, since the university is aware that to raise and answer this question we need such a social, moral and spiritual atmosphere that can be a fertile ground for asking and answering this type of question, we have written the words “tolerance”, “discipline” and “prayer” very boldly in our students’ handbook. Students of the university are made to say their morning, afternoon and evening prayers collectively since we believe that without God we cannot even understand the meaning of the words “discipline” and “tolerance”. In addition, the university intends to involve your parents in its effort to help you to understand that great achievements are possible only in an atmosphere of discipline. Therefore, we are going to have GO-University Parents Forum, a forum that will bring the university and your parents together to share our views on discipline, moral life, wellbeing and the progress of students.

In addition, since our fundamental question will require erudite scholars who can motivate students to appreciate its meaning, the university is on a hunt for the best heads we have in this country. Besides, we are pushing the boundaries of our hunting beyond this country. Already in the first year, the university has 10 fulltime professors and 20 adjunct professors. This university has three former vice chancellors involved in teaching and research. This is the only University in this country whose registrar is a professor (once proclaimed the best registrar in Nigeria). Besides, your university knows that you need to go beyond the authority of the “egg-heads” and bespectacled professors to get knowledge. You need the internet and your laptops or personal computers. This explains why Godfrey Okoye University (with the assistance of Umuchinemere Pro-Credit Micro Finance Bank) has given each of you an HP laptop and provided you with internet facilities. As we thank your parents and friends who are here today to witness the making of history, we ask God to bless you and all those who have contributed to your studies. Godfrey Okoye University hopes that through you every Tom, Dick and Harry in this country will see that this is our chance to shape and reshape the epistemic landscape of our country. This is our chance indeed!