
1. ***Good morning Prof. We are the members of the Editorial Board of Thinker's Magazine***

Thinkers? I think there is a **Thinkers Magazine** already in existence. Why not think of something different. I am looking at **The Sophia** and again I'm looking at **The Gong**. There may be **The Sophia** but I don't think there is a magazine called **The Gong**. **The Gong** will symbolize the news in the African traditional setting. You beat the gong and then give your news. Of course it is a symbol of togetherness in our social setting. It brings people together to discuss important things so **The Gong** appears to me quite attractive; I don't know about you. Sophia means wisdom. So think about the two names – **The Sophia** and **The Gong**, instead of **The Thinkers**. Because Thinkers is the name of a magazine, I think the Bigard magazine or so.

2. ***Prof, could you please tell us about yourself?***

Well, about myself, I am the Vice Chancellor of Godfrey Okoye University. I have been part of the university as one of its founding fathers. It has been quite an interesting experience, you know, over the years, being one of its founding fathers and the first Vice Chancellor.

I was born in Port Harcourt on the 1st of October 1965; so I am just fifty years old. During the war I was very tender. We came home and my parents did not have anything because all they had was lost during the war, so they started from scratch. But they were hard-working parents. I pretty well remember my mother who died in 2007, precisely on this day, 1 March. So they were very hardworking, both my father and my mother. They started everything from scratch and were able to send us to school. The most fascinating thing about my parents was their desire to see their children educated. My mother said to me that she did not have the opportunity of going to school. In fact, she was pulled out of elementary one because there was no money to continue. So she kept regretting it and vowed that she would ensure that her children got education. So they worked very hard, sent us to school and took care of us.

When I finished primary school at Umumba Ndiagu, I got admission at Comprehensive Secondary School Onitsha. At that time, you would be sent to good schools if you did well in the Common Entrance Examination. So those who did not do well were sent to village schools. That was the practice then and names of the students would be published in the newspaper, the **Daily Star Newspaper**, so you would see your name and the school. I was sent to Onitsha, to Comprehensive Secondary School, Onitsha.

I finished secondary school at Onitsha in 1981 and then was not quite sure what I wanted to do. I went to Abuja and visited my sister. I wanted to start working, but all effort I made to get work was not successful. I didn't know God prevented me from getting work there for whatever reason he had. But I think I see the reason now. So I came back and got a job in 1982 at a secondary school. At that time, if you did well in your WAEC examination, you got a job as an assistant teacher, what they called "auxiliary teacher". So I got a job as an auxiliary teacher. I taught from 1982 to 1983, and in 1984 I felt I should actually study, but I had a lot of things pulling me down. I had some friends who were businessmen and I wanted to have money like my friends. I remember I went to Benin to visit a friend of mine. He had a lot of money, and I came back and said: No, no way, I will not study. I have to go into business. So I said to my father: "Look, Papa, I am going into business." My father kept quiet. He didn't say a word to me. So in the morning, my father knocked on the door and said: "Please, wake up. I have something to discuss with you. Last night, you told me that you wanted to go into business. It is very good. But what I want to tell you is – that is not your line. (Using the words of my father, "that is not your line".) I feel that your line is in education. Do whatever you like. I have spoken my mind!" My father had never spoken to me that way, and early in the morning, you know. I then made up my mind not to go into business. So I decided to study. I took JAMB, passed, and got admission at the University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN). That was in 1985.

I was admitted to study English. When I was at UNN, my colleagues didn't quite understand me. Some of them thought that I was a seminarian because my life was Church, lecture hall, library and back to my hostel. I was not quite interested in social activities. They were asking me: "What are you going to do after your studies?" So I said: "After my studies I plan to do Philosophy." But they didn't know why I was interested in philosophy. Actually I was not telling them a lie, because I knew that if I became a seminarian, I would read philosophy, so I said to them "after my school I will do philosophy". So it was after my graduation that I entered the seminary. And how did it happen?

I had a friend, a priest that I met at the university. When I entered the university, I felt called to be a priest. I went to him, this friend of mine, and said, "I feel I should be a priest, and here I am in this particular university. I can't see any connection between a secular university and being a priest." And he smiled and said, "God doesn't make any mistake. If God wants you to be here, then here you will be. And if God wants you

to be a priest, you will be!” So when I finished with flying colours I went back to him and he shook my hand and took me to Bishop Eneja (I just want to cut the story short) and said to Bishop Eneja, “This young man will be a priest.” Bishop Eneja nodded his head and said: “Well, let’s put it in prayer.” After a week or two, I got a letter from the diocese that I should go to the Sacred Heart Seminary Nsude and help in the teaching of English because they lacked English teachers then. So that was the beginning of my journey as a priest. So I taught at the Sacred Heart Seminary Nsude. That was in 1990. I still remember the date, eleventh of January 1990 at eleven o’clock. That was the beginning of my journey as a priest. So I was accepted at Nsude. I taught and lived with the young seminarians, sleeping in their hostel. Imagine coming from the university and living with the young people who would be urinating on their beds and all that! So that was it. I enjoyed it. It was fun to me.

So the plan was that after Nsude, I should go to St. John’s Seminary at Nsukka for Latin and all that. When the Rector of the seminary (the late Fr. Simeon Ugwu) came and saw me, the way I was relating with the young seminarians, he said to Fr. Maduakor: “Don’t waste his time. Let him go on with his formation at the Spiritual Year Seminary.” So the idea of sending me to St. John’s was cancelled. After Nsude, I was sent to a spiritual year seminary and the journey started in earnest.

Yes, another quite interesting episode in my life was my working at Ugwuomu where the main campus of the university is now. I worked there in 1994 after my philosophy degree. I read philosophy at Seat of Wisdom Major Seminary Owerri and finished the programme in 1994. Actually I finished because I jumped a class. I started in 1991 and finished in 1994. How did it happen? After my first year, I said to the Dean of Studies: “The whole thing is not really challenging to me.” He said “What? Philosophy not challenging! Did you study it before?” I said “‘No.’ I studied English’.” But he asked me what I wanted to do and I said: “Well, if you permit me, I will like to move on to philosophy 3, jumping philosophy year 2”. They met and they sent me a letter, “You can move from first year to 3rd year on the condition that you do all the courses in the 2nd year on your own and all the courses in the 3rd year”. I accepted in writing. I knew it was time for God to glorify his name, so I worked assiduously.

Interestingly, in the seminary you would have first, second and third positions officially announced. And then there was this particular boy from Awka - Samuel. Samuel bragged that he would always take the first position, so it was taken for granted that Samuel would take the first

position. Well I looked at Samuel and said: “Well, we would see.” So after the third year, after the final examination, Obinna, the present Bishop of Owerri Diocese, came to the seminary to announce the results. He called the first person from Onitsha, the second person, and it was Samuel. The seminary was like a graveyard. What has happened? And the first person, Christian Anieke! So the whole seminary broke into a mixture of jubilation and agony because those from Awka couldn’t believe that. It was not just beating Samuel, but beating him from first year. That was actually the thing. I think God was preparing me for a big task, so because of that he brought a lot of attention to me. Everybody paid attention to me. So I finished in three years instead of four. I was sent to Ugwuomu in 1994 for a long apostolic work. Actually I didn’t know I would be sent to Ugwuomu. As a matter of fact, I thought I was going to be sent to the seminary to continue my theology. But I was sent to Ugwuomu. I cried. I remembered the day the bishop’s secretary announced that I was going to Ugwuomu, I could not believe that. I wanted to ask him: “Did you not know that I came from Nsukka and this and that. And then something closed my mouth, and said, ‘Shut up. Keep quiet’. So in my mind something was telling me ‘Just go. You will see.’ I still believe that my going to Ugwuomu in 1994 was providential. It was then that the Rector of the Jesuits Seminary in Austria visited our Bishop and gave him scholarship for two seminarians and the Bishop chose those who were doing apostolic work. That means if I had gone on I would not have got it, so God wanted me to get it and pulled me back with the apostolic work. Very important for you in your life - whatever happens , just keep quiet. God has a plan for you!

So immediately after this spiritual year in 1994, I went back to the seminary for my theology and a letter came from the Bishop. The content of the letter: “the diocese is considering sending you outside for further studies, come home.” I couldn’t believe it. The interesting thing about this is that I didn’t know anybody who could have spoken in my favour and I did not know a lot of priests. I was someone coming from the outside. So it’s just God’s own work! So I came back, and within a very short time, I got the visa with another seminarian from Udi, Venatus Onyia. So two of us were sent in 1996. On the 5th of July 1996, we left Nigeria and landed at Innsbruck in Austria on the 6th. We flew in the night and landed in the morning around 10.45am on 6 July.

So my journey started. Of course, we needed to learn German and I didn’t know anything in German. I was lost again. Another challenge! How do you cope with that? You are like a child now. You know where you were intellectually and now you were brought down again to the level of a

child. So, well, I took the challenge by working very hard again - my usual style of working very hard around the clock. And within a month or two, I got it and in the third month I registered for the examination and passed it well. And then proceeded for my theology because you must pass the language examination before getting admission to do theology. So I passed German, as a foreign language exam and went on to do theology. Again I said, the Austrian style is not like the Nigerian style where you must spend four years in a university. You finish when you are ready. So if you want to finish within one year you can do that if you are strong enough. So I finished the five year programme in three years. And then I was eyeing English again. I was visiting and making enquiries about the English Department in the University of Innsbruck, auditing some of the courses (I hope they told you sometimes to come and audit some GS courses as a way of preparing you for university?) So I was going from my theology class to audit some courses in English.

When I finished theology I was then ordained, first of all deacon on the 25th of March 2000. That was the happiest day in my life, I must say. Then after my ordination, I came back in July for my priestly ordination. I wanted to be ordained in Nigeria. I was ordained deacon in Austria so I came back in July same year and was ordained priest at Holy Ghost Cathedral Enugu on 22 July 2000. It was such a joyful thing because I was the first priest from my town. Nobody knew that somebody could become a priest from Umumba –Ndiagu. Before me, there was a superstition that if you wanted to be a priest from Umumba you would die. Some of them believed I would die before the ordination. So I broke that “jinx”. I was ordained! And on the 25 July I had my thanksgiving mass at Umumba Ndiagu, (what you call first mass, but the first mass is actually the ordination mass).

After that, I went back to Austria and started my master’s programme in English, that is English and Literary Studies. I was moving from Austria to the United Kingdom for some of the courses, because some of the courses involved translations, German into English, and English into German, the literary texts and all that. So I was shuttling between Innsbruck and the UK. Within two years I got my master’s degree. I quickly started and finished my PhD within one year – one of the fastest PhD programmes in the University of Innsbruck. So, when I finished I had an offer from my Professor (Prof. Wolfgang Zach) to stay and work, and I said to myself, “I don’t think it’s the right thing for me to do. I have to go back to Nigeria.” But then Bishop Gbuji visited and he knew about me and said to me, you must come home. Then I said, “Look at the offer I had. Can you convince those people that my rejection of the offer is not

malicious?” So Bishop said: “I am going to give you an appointment letter so that they will see that I mean every word of that.” So he gave me an appointment letter before my return, appointment to be the Provost of the College – the Institute of Ecumenical Education. So I came back on the 5 January 2006.

I saw the Institute in a mess. It was nothing to write home about, and some of my Austrian friends who came back with me could not believe that. So I said to myself, it is a matter of life and death. You decide to live or die. So I worked. At the beginning I would come here at 6.00am in the morning and continue to work until 7-8pm because there was nothing. Students did not have anything. No toilets, going everywhere around Thinker’s Corner to ease themselves. I began with a Chapel because there was none at that time. I also built hostels. After years of work, I said we have to move on. We cannot stop at the college of education. What about getting a university? I discussed the idea with my Bishop (Bishop Gbuji) and he gave his approval. So I applied for a university. When I was applying some were saying: “What sort of person is this? He thinks he has a whole lot of money to do this? Applying for a university, does he know what it means to have a university?” Well, I have this disposition that I am never afraid of anything. I don’t fear anything. Because of my faith, I applied. And we started on the train of Godfrey Okoye University and within a year and half we got the licence. I was at Babcock University, that was on the 21st of October 2009. I went to Babcock with Prof Chidobem and F.C. Eze, just to have a chat with the Vice Chancellor of Babcock University on how a private university is run. So we were in his office and at 11.00am when a call came from the Presidency. The president has just signed your university into existence. I jumped up, embraced the VC of Babcock, Prof. Makinde, and then we were in some sort of celebration. Within a year and a half to have a licence! The licence was officially given to us on the 3rd of November 2009. I still regard 21 October as the Foundation Day of the university for that was the day I received the call and that was the day the licence was signed, but was given on the 3rd of November 2009. So we started the university, Godfrey Okoye, and here you are. That’s it – my life in a nutshell!

3. *Thank you for the wonderful experience. But if I may ask, what year were you made the director of this noble school and how long have you been in the office?*

The Vice Chancellor, you mean? (they responded ‘yes’). I became the Vice Chancellor in 2009. With the foundation of the university in 2009 I became the Vice Chancellor. Yes I felt I should be deeply involved. Then I was already made a Professor at Enugu State University of Science and

Technology (ESUT) – a Visiting Professor in 2006 and a Full Professor in 2007. So as a professor, I was then qualified to be the Vice Chancellor of a university. So when we started in 2009, I became the Vice Chancellor.

4. *Please how have you been combining your apostolate as a priest and your position as a Vice Chancellor as well as Rector of Omnium Sanctorum Chaplaincy?*

Yes, these are different positions. First of all Director of your school Godfrey Okoye University Secondary School, Primary and Nursery Schools, and Provost of the College, Rector of the Omnium Sanctorum Chaplaincy and Vice Chancellor of the University, a lot of things. But these things are connected. I don't see any discrepancy because we have, first of all, a group of institutions. Godfrey Okoye University at the centre, and all these groups of institutions around it, beginning from the nursery school, primary school, secondary school, College of Education. So it makes for easier administration and you have somebody at the centre actually pulling the strings. So that's why we are moving so fast because we don't have a lot of bureaucracy in decision-making. You see things get done very fast. If we have all these institutions separate from one another, of course, we would not have the kind of collaboration and quality we have now. So it's quite easy to do this, of course, with the management, not myself alone. In a university you have the Senate. The Vice Chancellor is the chairman of the Senate. And then you have the Governing Council, the Pro Chancellor is the Chairman of the Governing Council, and then you have the Board of Trustees with the Chairman. All these people are involved in the decision-making. The Vice Chancellor is the executor of whatever policy has been agreed upon. He makes sure he executes what has been signed. And again I try to live my life. As a priest, basically, I don't see any disconnect between priesthood and teaching. A priest is basically a teacher. And the Vice Chancellor is the head teacher, if you like, so I don't see any disconnection at all. I am a priest; I am a teacher, teacher of the Catholic faith. In the Church, I talk about the faith, I talk about the faith of the Catholic Church. In the classroom I talk about English or other courses. So I don't see any disconnection. It's all about human beings. So you talk about God on the spiritual side and you talk about English on the material side. So it's like God has given me an opportunity to take care of all sides of the institution perhaps by being not just on the spiritual side but also the material side.

5. *What are the challenges you have encountered since you assumed office and what have you done to surmount them?*

Yes, the first challenge, I will say, is the environment. Our environment is so antagonistic to progress because you do a number of things to achieve

one thing. If you want to get light, for example, you buy a generator; you buy diesel; you buy solar energy; you pay your electricity bill – just to achieve one thing you do all these. If you want to get water, you dig a bore-hole; you pay your water bill and you also buy water from water retailers and all that; all to achieve one thing. In Europe it is not like that. If you pay your electricity bill, you get light 24 hours. If you pay your water bill, you get water. But here, you do a good number of things to get one thing.

Another challenge I had is the disposition of the young people. I just have the feeling that we have young people who want to succeed without work. Success without work? Our young people believe they will succeed without work. And they do not want to work. And that sounds so irritating to me. At your level it seems very easy to manage. When you come to the university you see somebody who does not want to do anything, someone who wants to stay in the hostel and sleep as much as he or she wants. There is nowhere one succeeds without actually working. Also ‘oil mentality’ means believing in getting money without people working for it and that has influenced our life a lot. So the great challenge I have is how I can actually tell young people that when they work hard they achieve success. They have to work hard. Many of them after SS2 would leave. They are going to soft spots where they can pass WAEC exams with ease and their parents encourage that. They pay for them to go to these special centres to pass WAEC exams. They don’t believe that their children can work hard to achieve success. So I was lucky to have a mother who believed in work. My mother worked assiduously and taught us to work. My mother could not have paid for me to pass my examination in a soft centre. And now you may see some mothers do this comfortably without any conscience. So my challenge is: How do you show these young people that if they work hard they will succeed?

And of course there is the challenge of funding. In Nigeria, cash doesn’t flow. Bankers are just there to collect your money but then you go through all sorts of bottlenecks to withdraw your money or to get a bank loan.

6. *Hitting the nail on the head, in your own view towards life and its components, what can you say about the term “change”?*

Well, change, what can I say about change? So many people have spoken about change. Sometimes I get confused whether they really know what it means. We see in the physical nature, rainy season comes and goes. You see that in life. There was a time when you were very small, your mother carried you, and now you are a big girl. You see that everywhere in the

university, you see one thing today and tomorrow you see a different thing. So change is actually what we experience every time.

We must ask ourselves what kind of change we want. It is not just change, change, change. The word “change” is not attractive if you don’t know its meaning. We want change for what, change into what, very very important. Change, change, change, change! Now in Nigeria we are a little skeptical about the word “change”. Is it actually what we wanted? The way our economy is going and the rise in exchange rate of dollar, is that the change we wanted? The word is becoming irritating to me. I’ve even come to the point of hating the word!

7. ***Change being on every one’s lips, how does this change in government affect the citizens and the poor masses politically, economically, academically and socially?***

Here, it seems, it is like a circle. You have a good leadership and it influences everything. But also leadership comes from a setting. The quality of the society shows the quality of its leadership. So it’s a case of who will bell the cat. Our leaders are what they are because of our environment that is bad and corrupt, that is filled with all forms of depravity. That is why you cannot imagine having the kind of leaders we have in Europe here. The environment is actually bringing the type of leaders we have. My prayer is that we begin to have the kind of environment that will breed good leaders. Despite all the things they all say about the national patriotism, we don’t have leaders who are ready to die for their country. It is not a matter of ‘follow your leader’. Leadership has tremendous influence on education. Good leadership defines the quantum, the momentum, the quality of education, defines it and ensures that things are actually moving well. The situation we have in our country, for example, is that we push those who are not brilliant down to the level where you ought to put brilliant people. In countries like Finland, you put your best in the nursery, primary and secondary schools because that is the foundation. Once the foundation is good you can do whatever you like at other levels. Somebody said to me that it is more difficult to teach at primary school in Finland than it is to be a medical doctor. The best brains are sent to the nursery, primary and secondary schools. And once the foundation is done you can do the study at university without fears. You know that there are many online courses you can do without any lecturer. In our set up the leadership has not succeeded in creating this kind of space, this kind of intellectual space, where the best brains are down at the foundation of education. They talk about recruiting 500,000 teachers. Why are you recruiting those graduates to teach? Where do you do that in the world? Why don’t you recruit them

to go and work in our hospitals? So you recruit graduates and put them in school, that is the dumping ground of society. So leadership can actually shape the educational sector. And the educational sector qualifies everything you do in society. The quality of the leader is defined by the educational sector. The quality of the industrialist is defined by the educational sector. The quality of the priest is also defined by the educational sector. Tell me the quality of your educational sector and I will tell you the quality of your society. It's the leadership that defines it. The leadership also defines quality of your security arrangement. The leadership also defines checks and balances we have in society, the quality of the courts and all the institutions responsible for checks and balances. The leadership determines the economy. If the leadership is not good, then the economy suffers. If it mismanages funds, doesn't create the opportunity for investments, or diversifies the economy, then the economy crumbles. Over the years we have seen it, taking money from the oil sector and failing to diversify. Go to Ebonyi State, what you have there will be enough to feed the whole Nigeria. The kind of mineral resources we have there, gold, silver, every imaginable thing is there, but nobody is interested in that. Our leaders are just taking money from the oil sector and putting it in their pockets and sending it to Switzerland or other countries. So leadership also shapes the economy by doing the right thing. So once we have good leadership it influences every other thing we have. But it takes the grace of God to get such leadership because the society from where these leaders are coming is already bad. So you don't expect a miracle from people coming from a bad society. Comparatively, if you have a bad school, how can you have good students? What you can do is to change the school as we are trying to do at GOUSS. The change makes you beautiful and you start getting new students.

8. *The school has both day students and boarders and it is also a co-educational school. Is this originally the structure of the school? How can one explain such changes to the present structure found in the school?*

Well, I don't know how to explain this, but I met the reality. Male and female! It was originally designed for boys, but somewhere along the line, girls started coming, may be to boost the number because I heard that there was a time the number was going down. So to boost the number girls too were allowed to enter. I think it's very good thing to have both boys and girls in the same school, after all they live in families made up of boys and girls. This isolating, I don't think is quite healthy. It is not good because if we have all girls school or all boys' school, there will be less distraction. But the earlier young people learn to overcome such distraction the better for them because distraction will certainly come.

They will leave school and then if they have not learnt to move with the opposite sex they are going to have problems. So that is actually the thing. I think it is quite good, quite challenging especially in your age, when some of you don't actually understand the issue at stake, when you think you know it all, and that we old people are useless. It can be quite challenging but then I think it's a very healthy thing to do because that is actually what life is. We human beings, any normal human setting is male and female.

9. *What are the major projects that are ongoing in the school and their level of completion?*

I don't know which school, secondary or university? (Yes secondary, GOUSS answered). The project going on is seen. The hall we are doing, chaplaincy hall, for big events. Another project is the hostel. We are working very hard to see that we get a befitting hostel. So hostel improvement is top priority now. Of course we are going to complete the tiling of your classrooms. We have almost finished two-thirds of that. We'll tidy up whatever remains so it would be quite exciting by the time you come back. Another project I want to pay attention to is: we want to put grass on the field because we think the field is not quite good. We want to make sure it is properly grassed. Some are suggesting the synthetic one, the one you put like a carpet. We are checking the two options for the field. It is our desire that the school, just like Godfrey Okoye, is actually one of the best. You have heard that our campus radio is the best we have in Nigeria. That is the kind of thing we should have. We did a good job, so that it becomes actually the best. Our school also must be the best. It is not any type of secondary school. It is a university secondary school, so it must be the best.

10. *What prospects does the school have for her students towards giving them integral form of education in a bid to make them best fitted to this present generation and their prospective homes?*

Yes, integral education! We have been doing that. We did that by bringing boys and girls. By leading you to spiritual dimension of life. Your prayer life and all that, and also emphasizing seriousness in the classroom. So what you are being given is not one-sided. There are some schools where nobody pays attention to their spiritual life. They are just giving intellectual knowledge without spiritual dimension and so have the spiritual wing lacking. You have the intellectual wing in your life, and also sporting activities. You see we try to encourage you to do sports. We think of the different sides of your life: social life, intellectual, spiritual or physical life. That is integral education.

11. *Seeing some of these aspects of change from different ramifications, what advice do you have for the school, the youth and Nigeria at large in order to adapt to positive changes?*

Let's learn to work hard and change the mentality of success without work. Changing that mindset means working very hard. Culture of work is what is lacking here. In the traditional setting we cultivated yam and did everything to achieve success, but western education and the oil that came in actually did not help us. So let us go back to work. Let us learn to work and then the change we are looking for will be a reality.

12. *Thank you very much. We are happy for the educational experience you shared with us. We hope to gain your attention whenever we need it because we learnt a lot. Thank you!*

Thank you. I am proud of you my young children from GOUSS. God bless you.