

**REMINISCENCES OF 45 YEARS
AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN:**

**A BLEAK FUTURE FOR
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION
IN NIGERIA, IF...**

**BY
PROF. E. KAYODE ADESOGAN**



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PROF. E. KAYODE ADESOGAN

*The Valedictory Lecture delivered on
26th August, 2005 at the Lecture Theatre,
Department of Chemistry,
Faculty of Science,
University of Ibadan.*

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I count it a great privilege indeed to give a valedictory lecture at the end of my eventful forty-five years plus in this university. As far as I know, this is the first time the Department of Chemistry will have this type of ceremony. Many lecturers have left before me who were more famous, had done far more than myself to advance the cause of the department, but none had the privilege to work in the department till retiring age. I was officially 65 last October, and I bowed out of the system on 1 February 2005 which coincided with the end of last session.

Let me therefore without wasting time thank all staff of my department under the current headship of Professor Olusegun Ekundayo, and very specially a colleague, former student, and friend, Professor Akin Adesomoju and the Organizing team led by Dr. Louis Nwakocha for the great honour done to me in organizing this send-off. I also appreciate my students for the exhibition of Wednesday and, of course, the special lecture given in my honour by Professor Jide Alo, who gives me much joy and pride for bearing the good torch of this department.

I came to the then University College, Ibadan as a young man in September 1959 to read Chemistry. In 1965, I was invited to come back to the University to begin a Ph.D. programme in the department. On January 1, 1968, I was appointed a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, promoted Lecturer I in 1971, Senior Lecturer in 1974 and Professor in 1980.

I am particularly grateful to God for the privilege of giving this lecture because, I am giving it as a full Professor of this University, and by God's grace, I can call myself a Professor, anywhere in this world without shame. Yet, it pleased God that although He gave me the brains to come tops, I did not come out with a First Class degree. The second class (lower degree) I made was just by the grace of God, thanks to a blackout I had in the middle of my best paper in my Part I B.Sc. Special degree of the University of London. The blackout led to a serious illness, which kept me off reading for about 300 days. During the dark period, I was a regular visitor to Jaja. I took so much of *Librium* tablets that one day the doctor I was seeing refused to give me more. That I sat for the final exams at all was a miraculous intervention of God. When I was invited for postgraduate work in 1965, I accepted only because I knew I had an inner ability to complete the programme successfully. It took me some years before I recovered the losses in theoretical Chemistry that I had suffered during my last year as an undergraduate student.

My Early Days as a Student in the University College Ibadan

I entered the University College, Ibadan, in September 1959, after a miraculous success in the Concessional Entrance Examination for that year which, in my view, I did not deserve to pass! But, unlike present-day Nigeria, there was no question of buying marks or influencing admission then. In any case my parents who were illiterate would not have been able to cough out any extra money if it was demanded.

My secondary school education was at the once famous Government College Keffi, in the northern part of Nigeria. There, I was used to good dormitories, having meals cooked for students, and being given other luxuries, but never had I experienced the freedom I found in Ibadan, nor enjoyed the type of services and quality of food provided. It was, indeed, a totally different experience and exposure.

University College Ibadan, a college of the University of London, had two campuses in 1959 when I came in. One, a temporary set of buildings previously used by the Army during the Second World War as a barrack, was called the *Old Site* and the second, with its new buildings, was called the *Permanent Site*. Most of the new students, who came in with me, did not experience the life at the old site, though many of the stale students were still living there then. I was allocated to Kuti Hall and we were two in a room. It was the only year I shared a room with any other student.

The campus was a beautiful place to behold then. The lawns were well mowed, the entire campus was clean, with lush vegetation and beautiful landscape. It was evident that the authorities had taken great pains to ensure that there was a decent environment, which they intended would last and compare with the best university campus anywhere.

The halls were clean then; there was order and the facilities and utilities all worked. One could almost eat in the toilets, as they were invariably sparkingly maintained. The corridors were swept regularly, walls were painted at regular intervals, and you could not find piles of disused utensils clogging narrow pathways and disfiguring the surrounding.

Students were made as comfortable as was realistic. Each student was entitled to submit ten clothes for washing and ironing per week. You

merely put the clothes by the entrance to your door on a Monday, and on Saturday the clothes were brought to your room neatly ironed. The quality of food served in the dining halls was very good. Furthermore, the variety of those meals was enticing. We had three-course meals, in the afternoons and evenings – the first course being soup, which was followed by the main meal and rounded off with a dessert. Stewards who waited on us as if we were eating in hotels served all the meals. A student sat down and stewards came in with trolleys of different dishes and one was to make one's choice out of three or four alternatives. For example, at lunch or supper we might be served salad, *eba*, rice, *eko* or *agidi* with the choice of *egusi* or okra soup. Occasionally, the king of all foods, *iyam*, was among the foods served. Incidentally, the 'black stuff', which invariably became the favourite of many brethren from the eastern part of Nigeria was served frequently; I am referring of course to *amala* and *ewedu*. The third course could be any or a combination of the following: fruit, fruit salad, ice cream, cream caramel, pudding, pancake, etc. For supper, tea or coffee was always provided. When one finished eating, one merely walked away, leaving the stewards to pack up the dishes, clean and wash up. For me, I found the kingly treatment most fascinating and flattering.

We were given special treats at weekends. On Sunday afternoons, a quarter of a chicken was given to each student who wanted chicken, with stew or soup for his main meal. Later that same day, at 4 pm, cake and tea would be served. It was at such times that one could meet some senior friends. Many invariably looked forward to Wednesday evenings for the food was usually more sumptuous, as it was the day for High Table Dinner. The Hall Master, the Warden and Senior Friends of the hall would come to dine with students. Unlike all other meals, this was a formal affair. Students were to be properly dressed. After the meals, there was usually a short talk or remarks by the Hall Master. As students were expected to stay in the hall throughout the duration of the meal, delays invariably caused some form of mild protests, such as beating of plates with spoons and forks by disgruntled individuals – the tough ones.

Life in the hall was exciting. There were indoor games, and the Junior Common Rooms were usually busy with those who wanted to play games like ludo, chess, monopoly, scrabble, draft, *ayo*, etc. Television had just been introduced to Nigeria and it attracted many students, especially during the 9 pm news hour. There were those who patronized the tv more

than others. In particular, there was this gentleman who was always there, almost invariably the first to be there and the last to leave. People were surprised at the amount of time they thought he spent watching programmes. But, when his final result came, he was the best in his class. His secret? He was said to be asleep most of the time in the tv room, but as soon as the station shut down, he went to lock himself up in his room to do serious study. He became a famous Professor in this University.

Each Junior Common Room also had a big refrigerator for students' use. As no one, to my knowledge, did any private cooking, the only use to which the fridge was made was keeping cold water. It was an unwritten law that you could go to the fridge, drink cold water and refill the container immediately. One day, a student who went to drink from his container found it empty. Presumably in anger, he took the coloured container away but returned it shortly. The next person that came to drink from the container did not enjoy himself at all. After one or two sips, he ran out to spit what was in his mouth, which he had not gulped: it was urine!

The halls encouraged outdoor activities. For me my main activities were the *discus and shot put*. In both I represented my hall, but it was only in the discus I represented and won medals for the University, both within the country and when we went to Accra, Ghana, to have the inter-University sports with a sister University, Legon University. In my days, the most conspicuous athletics stars were A. K. Amu and Godwin Ogan.

University life was most exciting during my student days. There were all sorts of societies and clubs. I had never been a particularly sociable type, and never knew, for example, what went inside what was then possibly one of West Africa's most famous social events, the HAVANA, which was an annual dance festival organized, I believe, by the Sigma Club. I was very active in Christian circles, but will not discuss that here.

I recollect a sad event in my hall – a suicide by one I knew quite well from my secondary school days. He had the best School Certificate result in his class - *As all round* in 8 subjects. He came here to read Medicine. But before his second M.B., BS examination, he hung himself in his room. It was the stench of his body that alerted neighbours to the grim situation days after he had committed suicide!

Those were days of honesty. Vendors entertained no fears about their sales. Papers would be spread on the floor with no one attending to them. You bought your papers, put money down and if there was no change, you would go to the vendor the following morning, (if you did not see him before the end of the day), and collect your change, usually with no questions asked.

Although there were tough students around, certainly students were at a more advanced age than they are now, there was generally a cloud of good behaviour in most parts of the campus. There were no cultic groups then, even though there were rascally individuals. Groups such as the Sigma Club were never, as far as one knew, a threat to anyone and would certainly not be regarded as harmful.

There were campus newspapers and tabloids, some of which provided a welcome check on unbecoming behaviour. The most popular of these was *The BUG*. To be bugged was to be subjected to some costly jokes or ridicule in the paper, usually but not exclusively restricted to improper behaviour between the opposite sexes.

Most students took their academic work seriously. This was inevitable because the Institution was a college of London. The degrees awarded were initially in the Faculties of Arts and Science as Honours or General degrees. They were three-year courses after the A level. Most people in the Arts Faculty had only one main examination, and it came at the end of the third year. The Faculty of Science had two examinations, which came up at the end of the second and third years. The accumulation and pile up of notes of many months or years, plus the fact that one was not allowed to repeat any examination more than twice, made studying a major challenge for students. Those were the days of chewing kola and drinking intensely dark coffee. In our hall, we had a student called Makanjuola who was fond of drinking very black coffee, the thickness of black coffee was subsequently measured visually in *maks*, three *maks* would put anyone out of reach of sleep for a long time. It was no surprise, therefore, that many students had nervous breakdowns around examination periods. Serious cases were usually taken to Aro mental hospital in Abeokuta. Thus, it became a vogue for students to shout ARO when any of their colleagues behaved strangely, or showed some signs of mental imbalance in and outside the classroom.

Of course, there were students who appeared to take their studies with levity. There were those who would boast that they would not go to the examination hall until they were invited to do so. Such students could spend seven years doing a three-year course.

The main library, an imposing and elegant building, held a lot of attraction for students. In 1959, it did not have the current postgraduate extension. It had well trained staff who worked from morning till 10 pm. It served both as a major source of information and references for books and journals, as well as a reading room. Many students who wanted to read far into the night in the library dreaded the booming sound of the drum at about 9:45 p.m., which was a warning that the library was about to close. At the sound of the second and final drum, all had to leave the library. The main library was kept very clean and books were properly arranged on shelves. The lift worked then and, as to be expected, discipline in the library was such that one could almost literally hear a pin drop. Even in those early days, it appeared that the library authorities had a problem containing the antics of some students who either smuggled prized books out of the library or tore some sheets out of books or journals.

By and large, every student had one form of financial assistance or the other. Most were on Federal or Regional scholarships; others were on bursaries or had some form of loan or were bonded to teach in a school, which had agreed to sponsor them. All students had to pay stipulated charges to the Bursary. Without such payments, one was not allowed to write the examination. Even if the fees were not paid at the beginning of the session, it was assumed that they would have to be paid sooner or later. It was therefore unnecessary to exclude anyone from the meals or any general provisions for students.

Let me at this point thank Oro Grammar School, Oro, Kwara State for sponsoring me in my first year in the University. Although I went back to serve my bond, they graciously released me before I completed my term with them.

UCI (University College Ibadan)

It was obvious that being a student of UCI was a great privilege. It was the only university in the country in 1959 and the environment and the privileges were adequate indications that the institution was unique. The graduates of the college had no difficulty in securing jobs, the society had great respect for them and the city was a friendly host to the students.

Examinations were taken seriously by most students and also by the press; they were usually conducted in the month of May. The examination scripts were then sent for marking and/ or moderation in London. The results, which were usually released in August, would be published in the major dailies, especially the *Daily Times*.

UI (University of Ibadan)

UCI's link with London and the finding that UCI students had a comparable level of performance to those who were in the UK, accorded the College a reputable, international status. Before the College was transformed into a full-ledged University in 1962, it had established itself as a place with highly rated lecturers with good teaching and research materials adequate for a university. The change in status was, therefore, well-received internationally.

The change to a full university had a side benefit for some students who would have had to withdraw from their programmes under the University College. Such students might never have had the opportunity of having a university degree but for the change over. I know one such student who spent about seven years to complete a three-year course. I visited him once and he told me he was so old in the College and so ashamed of himself that he deliberately moved from the lecture room to the dining room and back to his class, allowing himself the barest minimum exposure to fellow students!

Ibadan as a Centre of Excellence

University of Ibadan, the premier university in Nigeria, has a slogan – *the first and the best*. There can be no doubt that it is the first. But whether it is the best, is another matter. Yet the nation has a duty to make Ibadan a showpiece at all times, for which all Nigerians can be proud. I think it is wrong for the nation to lump Ibadan with some other Nigerian universities as “first generation universities”. It is, in my view, a sign of political immaturity to class Ibadan with Nsukka, Ife, Zaria and Lagos. Ibadan must be a class on her own, and seen as a unique national treasure, treated in a special way that transcends ethnic sentiment. Every effort should be made to ensure that it is not starved of funds, but encouraged to retain the high values and standards for which it had been known, while newer universities were still struggling

for recognition. Needless to say that since reputation is easier lost than won, Ibadan now has to make extra efforts to ensure that she defends her reputation by diligent and persistent activities.

Ibadan has many things to commend it to the impartial observer. It is easily the most detribalised university in the country. While one cannot say that there is no element of tribalism here, it is true that anyone, whatever his/her ethnic affinity may be, can still aspire to any elective office with a good possibility of winning. Ibadan also has a strong tradition, which it strives to defend. It is pertinent to mention here a few of its institutions, such as the Senate. In spite of the large number of its members, Ibadan Senate still comes up with sane and mature decisions. Some of us will remember when a Vice-Chancellor had committed the University to awarding an honorary degree to a serving Secretary to the Federal Government. The idea was rejected in the Senate. Senators objectively evaluated the candidate, based on the criteria set up for the award of such a degree and found the individual unworthy. In spite of the plea made by the VC, Senate turned down the request. Incidentally, I went to ABU a few weeks after the incident as an External Examiner, and an alumnus of Ibadan lauded UI asserting proudly that it was only in UI that such a courageous defence of the best in academic traditions could be made. He was, of course, referring to our not giving our honorary degrees away cheaply. One only needs to go to other Nigerian universities and see that in many areas, Ibadan is still a beacon to admire. While not denying that there are many areas where our performance has been unacceptable, it is true that many things, which go unpunished in some other Nigerian universities, will earn very stiff penalties in Ibadan.

There is still some sanctity about examinations in many units in Ibadan. Buying results with cash or in kind is unthinkable in many departments. I have been privileged to move quite closely with many of our Vice-Chancellors, most of whom are wonderful people in their own right. I am particularly thankful for my happy memories of the late Professor Oritsejomi Thomas, under whom I had the privilege of working as Warden of Kuti Hall. He was, in my view, one of the most successful VCs Ibadan ever had. He appeared to know that the buck stopped on his table and behaved as such. He was in charge, knew that he was and had to continue to be in charge. I remember one day at a Student Welfare Board meeting, the President of the Students Union, when he was recognised to speak, began by

protesting his not being asked to speak much earlier. Professor Thomas interrupted him, saying something like: "Stop my friend, I am chairman of this meeting and I call people as I see fit. If you are not satisfied with that, get up and walk out". The Students Union President did not doubt any longer that he could not intimidate the VC and was sober throughout the remainder of the meeting. Professor John Beetlestone recalled one day when he and the same VC were at a meeting. He, as Dean of Science, tried to defend a cause vigorously and cited what he thought transpired at a particular meeting to buttress his argument. He said further that he was allowed to make his point after which the VC simply said, 'Thank you Mr. Dean; that is not my recollection. Can we move on to another matter?' Professor Beetlestone reflected that he simply accepted in his mind that he was under a superior authority.

Ibadan has, however, had its fair share of bad management. The worst areas are in finance and the use of University property. Financial mismanagement appears to be rampant not only in the Bursary, but also in virtually all segments of the University community. Some major contracts were not awarded with the best interest of the University at heart. In executing some grants, local or foreign, in some departments and units, substantial sums of money have gone to the wrong places and people. Many people have been careless with University property. Those of us who lived on campus can testify to many useful materials that were often left indefinitely in our yards until they rotted away. Worse still, many have enriched themselves by defrauding the institution of useful materials by diverting them from the campus to their own houses. Items stolen included vehicles, vehicle engines, assorted electrical appliances and all sorts of building materials, laboratory wares and the like.

All through my days as a student, and in the first fifteen or so years of being on the staff of the University of Ibadan, I had known or assumed there existed a very cordial relationship between the teaching and non-teaching staff. I know as a fact that in my department the relationship between the teaching staff and the non-teaching staff was consistently cordial. In the block of six flats that I first lived in with my family in the late 1960s, Flat 6 housed a lecturer who came from Akwa Ibom; Flat 5 was occupied by a lecturer who was German; Flat 4 belonged to an administrator from Calabar; a technologist from the then Bendel State stayed in Flat 3, while another technologist from the same Bendel State occupied Flat 2 and I

from Ekiti resided in Flat 1. We were all quite close as were our children. In those days the contribution of technologists to research work was generously acknowledged, and in some cases, technologists were made co-authors of research papers. I know of two technologists who are full Professors today as a result of being cited in important journals. It is good to see that many more who, crossed over from the technical to the academic line, are also aspiring to become Professors.

Unfortunately, things changed for the worse in the 1990s. It came to a point when members of staff were attacking one another physically on the basis of whether you were a teaching or non-teaching staff. An objective analysis will show that the fault was on both sides. It was alleged that some teaching staff looked down on their non-teaching colleagues, while some non-teaching staff were said to have refused to accept the reality of being support staff. Some lecturers were said to be anxious to use their technologists for intensive work, but if there was some monetary gains, only a pittance was given to the technologists. Some technologists were alleged to disrespect to their academic colleagues, saying they knew when they came in as freshers to the University.

Clearly teaching and non-teaching members of staff need to build bridges and respect one another. We obviously need one another. Our callings are different, and we must accept that; I repeat: we need one another. Even staffs need students and *vice-versa*. I used to use this true story to bring out the reality of our interdependence. The incident was before the advent of electricity. A famous organist and his bellow-man were performing at a concert. The first number was played and the crowd applauded rapturously. He acknowledged the cheer, curtsied and said, now I AM going to playHe repeated this routine about three times. About the fourth time, the unexpected happened. The bellow-man who was hidden from the public refused to blow the air, and so there was no audible music. The organist got the lesson quickly, corrected himself – WE shall now play..... The role of the bellow-man must be appropriately acknowledged! As the new vision of the University enjoins, we need to organize social interactions and seminars that seek to promote mutual respect and better interactions across all divides. Even among the trade unions, how wonderful it would be for all the unions – ASUU, SANU, NASU, ASUTON, etc, to work together to improve the lot of all staff, with ASUU selflessly leading them all and the rest accepting their

leadership, always with the overall interests of the University and its staff at heart.

I thank all staff in this University, especially the various trade union leaders, for accepting me as a fellow compatriot committed to making UI a better place to work in.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

The Department – General Overview

If the halls were pleasant and delightful places to be in, the departments were no less exciting. I met the same level of dedication by staff to their work as I was used to in Keffi where more than 90% of the staff was expatriate. When I entered UCI, there were only two or a maximum of three Nigerians on the teaching staff of Chemistry Department. Staff took their duties seriously, were friendly but business-like. You did not need to be told to be punctual to classes and to attend regular Practical classes; it happened naturally as one saw the commitment of the teachers and the assignment scheduled for each day.

The laboratories were well stocked; there were sophisticated instruments for serious research. The department had several workshops from where things were fabricated and or repaired: carpentry, metal works, glassblowing, electrical and electronics with well-trained technicians and technologists.

Our staff in the department were highly qualified and committed to their work. A number of them had their unique characteristics, and it may not be inappropriate to comment on a few of them.

Professor C. W. L. Bevan, formerly an officer of the British Army, was truly the father of our department. He was an architect and a builder per excellence. He mobilised his staff for maximum output, but was greatest in his meticulous plan for a thriving department. He had great a love for his Nigerian students. The department rose to great heights, largely due to the effort of this great and selfless man. He was a very eloquent and courageous man and was highly respected on campus. The story is told that once when he was both Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Head of our department, he acted as Vice-Chancellor. He needed to have the VC's approval for a particular thing for the department. He wrote the request and signed it in the department, got it despatched immediately and went to the VC's office a little later to approve it as the acting VC.

It is pertinent to say that this great man was very Nigerian at heart. I hope a conspicuous place can be named after him in the University. Even after leaving, he continued to think Nigeria, so much so that he almost got into trouble trying to help Nigerians to qualify from his University where he was Principal/Vice-Chancellor. I went to do some work and had a short training in Cardiff through his support. He came to meet me at the train station, and I spent the first night with him.

Father Arthur Foley was a Roman Catholic priest who majored in taking first year students in Practical Chemistry. He was very competent, and had that rare gift of cracking jaw-breaking jokes without him smiling. Sometimes you asked Father Foley how you were doing with your practicals, he might advise that you were wasting your time in the university, and would fare better by taking to another trade such as fishing, or joining the PWD – Public Works Department, the forebear of Ministry of Works! Or, you might show Father Foley the result of your titration and ask whether you were correct, and he might say that you were accurate to the nearest ten gallons or 50 litres, in an exercise that required an accuracy of a fraction of a millilitre! He was always alert, agile and most conscientious.

Professor David Taylor was very intelligent and unusually hardworking. Although he was big in stature, he was a shy man. He would not look into the eyes of his students in class and would speak in a tone that was barely audible from the back of the classroom, he seemed to be speaking mostly to the blackboard as it were. Sitting in front to take in most of what he said was a treasure as he packed so much Chemistry into his lectures. He was a great experimentalist. On some days, he would still be in the laboratory by 10 pm and, sometimes, he would go to the Sunday morning service from the laboratory still in his shorts/knickers and would go back to his laboratory straight from church. I had the honour of being supervised by him after Dr. John Powell, my first supervisor, finally left Nigeria for his country, the UK.

Professor Jack Hirst, a very brilliant scholar was a most pleasant gentleman. When I first knew him, he was a chain smoker and he smoked in class. When he married he quitted smoking altogether. Hirst and Foley were the longest serving expatriates.

The people behind the transformation of University College Ibadan into a full University obviously put a lot into ensuring that the new institution would continue to enjoy international recognition. They did not rest on their oars. They made sure that highly rated academics of international standing visited various departments from time to time to give lectures and interact with staff and students. In some cases, collaborative projects emerged. I know that we in Chemistry and Physics at various times had the honour to host distinguished Professors and experts from the UK and the USA. They were always an inspiration to us, especially if we happened to have known

them through the textbooks they had published or other works they had done. Whenever they gave seminars, we were always encouraged to ask questions.

I salute the Founding Fathers of this institution; I appreciate all my lecturers, and by extension, all my previous teachers at the primary and secondary schools; I thank all my successive heads of the Departments of Chemistry.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

Being a Postgraduate Student

As one grew older in the department, especially at the postgraduate level, one discovered that the department was becoming famous for its contributions to world knowledge. For example, one became aware of the healthy rivalry between the Natural Products group at Ibadan and another active group in the same field in Scotland.

The Department of Chemistry had what was, arguably, the best departmental library in the University. Most literature work was done in the department. *Chemical Abstracts*, chemical dictionaries, periodicals, monographs, etc, were available. There was a time you could consult these sources any time of the day and night as the department had its own library staff.

It was not all academics or bookwork in the department, however. Our students were often in the forefront during the famous rag days. We always had a float in which fascinating experiments, with flashes of dazzling light and assorted colours, smoke and attractive displays were presented to the watching public.

When I came back for my Ph.D. degree programme in March 1965, the department was waxing stronger in academic distinction, and gradually carving a name for itself in the world of science. There were particularly two emerging and budding disciplines, the woody group or Natural Products group under the leadership of the Head of Department, Professor Bill Bevan, the indefatigable and unsurpassable father of the department. Then there was the bloody group, otherwise known as the Haemoglobin group, under the leadership of Professor Denis Irvin assisted by Professor John Beetlestone.

Research was beautiful to conduct in UI in those days. Since electricity and water supplies were reliable, one could leave experiments that required light or electrical power for many hours unattended to without fearing any mishap. The streets were safe, and it was not uncommon for laboratories to still be alive with many researchers at 12 midnight. There was hardly any hour between midnight and dawn when you would not find someone working somewhere in the department; there were more than enough materials for researchers to work with. Research and teaching materials were replenished as soon as they were used up; indeed, owing to

the foresight of the authorities, one could hardly get to the store and not find what one needed. In the rare cases where this was not the case, orders were promptly placed and delivery was sure to come shortly afterwards. With the calibre of staff on ground as researchers and supervisors, highly sophisticated instruments, adequate solvents, chemicals, laboratory glass and metal wares, it is not surprising that research output was high. For example, after eighteen months of research, my supervisor who was retiring from Ibadan said I already had enough materials for my Ph.D. degree. The first paper in an international journal was published within a year of my starting research. And in 1968 I had the opportunity and privilege to go to Dakar to present my first academic paper at an international conference. All these indicate that the department was conducive for good research. Such feats are no longer feasible today!

My student days were eventful, and I was privileged to know myself better as I drew closer to my God through many trials and tests which I do not intend to share here. I also had an enormous opportunity to know more about human beings. God used some of my experiences in this area to prepare me for a better understanding of the afflictions and trials that men face in life. I know now as a result of my frequent interaction with fellow students:

- That one can be lonely in a crowd. I once paid a visit a student in his hall and he said that he had been looking for somebody to say 'hello' to him for some days;
- That one can hear strange voices; hear what has not been said; be sure of some people planning against one when in fact this is mere fantasy and a symptom of a sick mind. A friend once told me of ten people in his hall who were plotting his downfall. He mentioned the ringleader and gave the names of other members. To my dismay, I found out that none of them even knew my friend, and did not know one another. Certainly they never met! And finally;
- That students (males and females) can pretend and bite the very fingers feeding them and do so quite ferociously.

I have one regret from my student days though, the postgraduate days in particular. I did not know enough about practical economics and the wisdom in planning ahead for tomorrow. I am referring to the vast land that was available and uninhabited from which I could have bought plots of land, since my pocket money could very well have enabled me to do so. I am talking about what is present day Agbowo. I was also totally ignorant of

making practical use of that part of Arithmetic that I was quite good at in primary school. I mean *Shares and Stocks*. I had enough money at the postgraduate level to buy shares that could have made me financially much better off than I am today. But I did not know the value of buying shares then. This is one reason why I heartily endorse the wider exposure of students to areas beyond their disciplines.

Fond as I am of Chemistry, I am scared of chemicals. This is one reason why chemists rightly lead the fight against government's decision, of allowing pharmacists alone to authorise and advise on drugs and chemicals. The truth is that chemists know far more about the properties of chemicals in general than the narrow study of curative drugs would allow. Furthermore, more and more facts emerge daily about chemicals we use or produce. I shared a small room with a friend, Dr. Ayo Kola Fasina as we both worked for our Ph. D. degrees and one of our companions was benzene vapour, which came from the commonest solvent used in plant extraction. A few years later, I learnt that the researcher working on the bench that was assigned to me in Liverpool had to leave Chemistry altogether because of benzene poison! I was sure he inhaled far less of the substance than me!

I dare not forget: it was about midway through my Ph.D. programme that I wedded my beautiful and beloved wife. Before I finished my Ph.D. work, God gave us a son. I use this occasion to thank the wife of my youth, Doyinsola Abeke, for all she did to make my progress in life in general possible. She sacrificed much and I shall forever thank God for her.

My Joining the Staff

My appointment as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow took effect on 1st of January 1968, although I had helped with some teaching since the third quarter of 1967. My family and I (wife and an eight-month child) moved to the campus later that month. Obviously, it was quite easy for staff to have accommodation on campus then. You may partly understand why as Chairman of the University Housing Allocating Committee, I felt very bad towards colleagues who, after retiring from the system and collecting their entitlements, still held on to University accommodation, thereby depriving younger colleagues from benefiting from that aspect of University privileges.

It was, of course, a big honour to be on the staff of one's esteemed *alma mater*, for which I was deeply thankful to God. It might not have come that easily if the civil war were not on. That sad event sent some of our colleagues from the other side of the Niger home and so created some openings in the department.

One's take-home pay could certainly take one home in those days. Indeed, for our small family, we could afford to live on my salary as my wife most kindly agreed to stay home to look after the growing family. We had always been a family with visitors. We not only had the privilege of having a few people stay with us from time to time, especially after the civil war, we regularly hosted visitors on brief visits to Ibadan. Then we could afford to employ two house helps, and we would normally ask what drink a visitor wanted – soft drink of course, and served it with cake or assorted biscuits. In the mid-1980s; 'What drink would you have' gave way to 'We have this or that drink'. In the late 1980s and early 1990s when our take-home could no longer take us home, visitors were still given a warm welcome, but were no longer asked what they would like nor could we afford to give much anyway.

Although by nature, I have never been eloquent, I nevertheless chose the path of lectureship rather than take some administrative or managerial jobs. I had taken a cautious decision to make a career in academics in the hope that I would be able to influence students positively. I have never regretted that decision. Being in academics gave me the added opportunity of engaging myself in the fundamental research of my choice. I was committed to putting into practice the many things I had learnt from my expatriate teachers – their commitment and devotion to duty. I desired to add to that a

little injection of constructive nationalism, which in my case, merely meant trying to encourage my audience that we do not need to continue to accept that the black man cannot do well.

Whenever I faced a new class for the first time, I would normally introduce myself and tell them of two of my weaknesses: I would not tolerate lateness to my class, and I would not like noisemaking. Incidentally, I did not entertain anyone to interrupt my lectures either. I once refused a request from a colleague who wanted to call out from my on-going class, students from his department who were offering the course. He was not happy with me, but I know I was right.

As a young lecturer, I was exceedingly fast in the delivery of my lectures and tried to pack a lot into a lecture. I have met one student who told me to my face that I was a bad lecturer. As I matured in the work, I became more relaxed and often tried to bring in the common experiences of life to illustrate difficult concepts. In my last twenty years or so, after introducing myself to a class, I would try to encourage them that the course was within easy grasp of anyone who was good enough on his/her own to make the entrance examination to the University. I cautioned against allowing the fear of whatever negative things they had heard about the course to immobilize them against success. I normally told a story which would be adapted to the local situation in this manner.

Death was the purveyor of an epidemic. It travelled by railway from Lagos, but not before it had killed 10,000 people. In Abeokuta, it killed 5,000, in Ibadan, it killed 7,000. In Oshogbo it killed 3,000, the same number that it killed in Offa and Ilorin. Then, curiously, it disembarked from the train and decided to go by road to Abuja via Kabba where it killed 2,000 and to Lokoja where it also killed 2,000. In Abuja, it was accosted and asked why it had killed 4,000 in small Jebba. Death protested that it had not been to Jebba. What then killed them in Jebba? They would almost in unison shout FEAR!!

If the class was in Nigeria I would try to challenge them to imbibe some nationalism, try to paint some real picture of the black man and encourage them to make our future better by determining to do better than their forebears.

Although I was never eloquent, I enjoyed my teaching and as I grew older I enjoyed bringing my students reasonably up to date, endeavouring to make them gain in theory what they must have missed in experimental chemistry. I sometimes told them that I wanted them to be able to hold their heads high in theoretical knowledge if they found themselves in Harvard or any of the top universities of the world.

Although I took my faith seriously, and almost invariably prayed before going in to a classroom, I never openly prayed before my class, nor did I ever preach Christianity in class.

I avoided wasting time in the classroom with irrelevant jokes and stories. But I discovered that occasional jokes and short anecdotes could enliven a class. I would sometimes try to draw parallels between seemingly abstract ideas and familiar things or incidents. For almost forty years, I almost always wore a thick black beard, sometimes with a bushy hair. As I normally wore a serious face, I sometimes looked fearsome. Occasionally, I looked different when I shaved my beard and moustache. Appearing in class in that clean-shaven manner always drew all sorts of reactions, which invariably lightened the atmosphere in the class and paved the way for introducing difficult topics without fear of negative reactions.

There was one incident I cannot forget. During class, I went out to a tree behind the class to sever a stick with which I could point at things on the blackboard without disturbing the views of students. Unknown to me, there were many ants on the tree and as I was fetching the stick, many crawled on me, through my shirt and from there to other parts of my body. Hardly had I entered the room before I began to feel strange sensations all over me as the ants were biting and stinging me. I managed to keep my cool, but instantly and abruptly gave a strange reason for my immediate departure from class. Later I told the class my story!

Two separate incidents caused me to discover that I did not want to age. I was just 39 or so when one girl who was discussing me with another friend of hers unaware that I was walking right behind her, referred to me as *baba*. I resented that within me – me baba. I soon discovered that I was known and called by that appellation by many. It has since become my most popular nickname. The second incident was when I was at an international conference in Jamaica in 1976. I went to have a shower and had taken a look

in the mirror when I saw one strand of grey hair on my chin. I pulled it out quickly, hoping it was just a mistake. It did not take long before more and more came out. Shortly afterwards, hairs on my head started to turn grey.

Let me again recount one of God's kind actions in my life. Before my promotion as a Senior Lecturer, God had expanded the family by giving us three more children. They are all physically big now, and God has elevated them all beyond our wildest imagination. I appreciate each one of them and acknowledge the joy they give us. They have also given us wonderful grandchildren who have added more sparks to our lives.

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My Research

My research blossomed after I became a member of staff. Up till 1975, about good research could still be conducted in the department. During that period, the Natural Products group (the woody group) soared to a very great height and was known world-wide for contributing significantly to knowledge in the area. The other very well known group was the Haemoglobin group (the bloody group). Of course there were other groups in the department, which had made significant contribution to knowledge by working at the cutting edge of research. The Physical Organic group was one of such groups and, of course, our well-known Analytical Chemistry Unit.

I continued with research on the meliacins, the mahogany related plants, until 1970 when I decided that I would be more mission-oriented. I chose to work on the plants and herbs, which are used for curative purposes in traditional medicinal practices. Incidentally, this is a major privilege one enjoys in academics. Although my Ph.D. supervisor was still in the department, I chose a new path of research for myself without his raising an eyebrow. The first paper that I published in this area was on the extracts of the plant *Morinda lucida* (botanical name) or *oruwo* in Yoruba. It is a plant of many uses, but I do not intend to talk about some of these medicinal plants, which include plants that are reputed to have anticancer, anti-hypertensive, etc, activities as they have been covered in my inaugural lecture in 1987.

I must, however, mention one or two things, which were not mentioned in my inaugural lecture. The determination of the structure of a new compound, which led to my first published paper, did not come easily. I racked my brain intensely, but could not come up with a plausible solution. It was in the night as I was tossing on my bed that the solution to the structure came to me and I quickly put it down. Although that was the only time in which the solution to an unknown structure came this way, I learnt to appreciate the importance of quiet reflection on details gathered from data obtained from spectrophotometric and other sophisticated instruments and related degradative and synthetic experiments.

I veered into two other areas. I went for synthesis, which I regard as the king of experimental organic chemistry. It was the combination of synthetic and correct analytical studies that allowed a paper of ours to be

published. It reported a new structure, which, unknown to me, was also being worked on by a European team. Their paper reached the editor before ours and that fact would have disqualified ours, but for our providing additional synthetic confirmation. Consequently, both papers were published together in the same edition of the journal.

I also did some microbiological Chemistry. The history of my venturing in this area was told in my inaugural lecture. It is interesting that my first Ph.D student, then Mr., now Professor Babajide Alo, and former Dean of the Postgraduate School, University of Lagos was heavily involved in both synthetic and microbiological studies.

With the downturn of the Nigerian economy and the ascendancy of the military in governance, education suffered much neglect. We could no longer do meaningful research, except by linking up with friends from outside the country who would do the spectral runs for us. It is important to stress that though the hardship experienced in conducting high-level research was felt by all, the Natural Products group to which I belonged was the hardest hit. This was because we depended heavily on highly sophisticated spectrophotometers with which to interpret our results: they had all been grounded.

One major deficiency in the way we conducted our research in Ibadan became more evident to me when I was at the University of Auckland in Australia, where I did some intensive biotechnology work on some of my plant extracts and screened them for anti-cancer activity: there was insufficient integration of related disciplines. In Auckland, I worked at a place where several research groups worked in an integrated manner. The centre had a few identified goals, with each discipline working in their relevant areas of expertise and harmonising their efforts with those from other disciplines to further their specific objectives. Their lunch was always a working lunch. Informal sharing took place on their findings – solutions as well as problems. Of course, there were formal seminars where discussions were better articulated and sound conclusions arrived at.

It is not that we did not have any form of collaboration at Ibadan. We did. For example, in the early 1980s, we had the Multidisciplinary Research Group in Medicinal Chemistry, which involved medical clinicians, pharmacologists, pharmacists and botanists. I had the privilege of being the coordinator or chairman of that group. The group was to collaborate to

produce new drugs from traditional medicinal leads – targeting malaria, cancer and infectious diseases, all of which are common tropical ailments. But that kind of interaction was not quite the same as what I had experienced in Auckland. Incidentally, our medicinal research group wanted to start in a big way. The Postgraduate School promised a substantial grant, and even supported funding the Workshop of Traditional African Medicine that we organized in 1982 at which the University of Pennsylvania was ably represented by Professor Cava and Dr. Laksmikantham. The promised grant never materialized, and the Group, plus its intention to start a postgraduate course in Medicinal Chemistry, gradually died a natural death.

I am, of course, aware that many groups collaborate in research across disciplines without making it formal. As recently as about seven years ago, I collaborated with Professors Adetosoye, Itiola, and Moody to produce an ointment, which was very efficacious against some skin diseases. A lady who had some depigmentation of the skin and who was said to be developing a complex against going out in the open tried our ointment and was cured within a few days. You may not believe it, but our group did not move further with this interesting ointment. Now that I am on retirement with neither gratuity nor pensions, an unavoidable invitation may be staring me in the face!

In terms of research, I can affirm that in a systematic and progressive way, Ibadan wetted my appetite (1965-69), Liverpool opened my eyes (1969-70), I cut my teeth back here in Ibadan (1970-73), and came of age at Berkeley (1974). All other research centres of the Universities of Southampton, Auckland, Illinois at Chicago, Brown, etc, are all icing on the cake. The University of California at Berkeley is definitely one of the best Universities in the world with an outstanding research record at the cutting edge of knowledge. It was not only possible, but also tempting to work 24 hours a day at Berkeley. Sometimes when leaving the laboratory at 11 pm or midnight, I would see many coming in for work. The laboratories were always busy. It was truly fulfilling working there. Indeed, I knew that if I were not married before going to Berkeley, I would certainly have delayed marriage to give me more time for research. Incidentally, by the same token, when I came to my senses as it were, I knew that I could not give to Chemistry all it demanded of me if I continued to rank my faith above my profession. However, one major legacy of my stay at Berkeley was that I developed my sense of making valid and meaningful observations in

experimental Chemistry to a high pitch. One of them led to the discovery of an unusual reaction. The conclusion I made was resisted for quite some time by my host as it was an unusual and an unexpected reaction. The onus was on me, therefore, to prove in a most rigorous manner the veracity of my claim. We subsequently expanded the reaction when I returned to Ibadan. From that experience, I decided that I would no longer work in any laboratory as a junior partner.

I enjoyed my research as much as I treasured the moments I worked on the bench carrying out experiments. If conditions permit, I would still like to continue bench work even now. The University has been kind to me by giving me the opportunity of working at several first class laboratories. I worked at the Universities of Liverpool, Southampton, California at Berkeley, Wales at Cardiff, Auckland, Illinois at Chicago and at Brown University. I have visited many others, like University of Bristol, Cornell University at Ithaca, Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, Cambridge and London, etc. The exposure has certainly built me to be a reasonably sound chemist. And to God's glory, it was the quality of my teaching of postgraduate students at Brown University, when my host was away on leave, that had paved the way for my being appointed full Professor at that University, one of the seven Ivy League universities. Of course these privileges allowed me to rob shoulders the world's top Chemists, sometimes in their laboratories and at other times at conferences.

I doff my cap to great scientists with whom I have interacted and from whom I have benefited immensely; I salute Professors Francis Dean, Henry Rapoport, Carl Djerassi, David Cane, Farnsworth, Crombie, Jake MacMillan etc.

The Privileges of Being a Staff of UI

Being on the staff of this University has allowed me to attend many international conferences in Asia, the United States, Canada, Europe, West Indies and Africa and to have presented papers in many of them. It has also given me the opportunity of working on a World Health Organization (WHO) project when I was involved in synthesizing long-acting oral contraceptives for use in family planning. I should also add that I have had the privilege to be an External Examiner at all the first and most of the second generation Universities in the country, was External Examiner several times to the University of Cameroon at Younde, and once was appointed External Examiner to the University of West Indies, Jamaica although I eventually could not make the trip. I also served as chairman of a Ph.D. examination panel there at Brown University in the USA.

The privileges of my trips to these places often extended to our University in the form of materials and equipment; linking Ibadan students or staff to work in such places or with such people.

On a personal level, the interactions have given me the opportunity of contributing to world knowledge in the areas of Organic Synthesis, Natural Products Chemistry, and Traditional Medicinal Chemistry. They have also given me the satisfaction of training distinguished scientists who are eminent scholars in their own right in this country and around the globe.

My Interactions with Students

With regard to students, my career has been a most humbling experience indeed. I have been privileged to counsel hundreds and thousands of students during my time. Some of my encounters with students have been memorable and are sometimes too personal and too humbling to recount.

The privileges have often led to many students reposing much confidence in me and I got to know the parents of many of the students and the homes they came from. In some cases, those I had taught and even those who were not close to me would write and tell me of some wrong things that they had done. There were those who said that a Chemistry junior staff had leaked examination questions to them at various times, and in view of their new status as born-again Christians, they asked how they could make an effective restitution. Advising such people was not always easy, unlike those who

stole library books who I normally advised to pay for the books or return them if they still had them. I once received a letter once from one of our former M.Sc. students who said that when I was Head of Department, he forged my signature to attest that he and another student had got the M.Sc. degree, while, in fact, they were still studying for the degree. I shall not give details of my responses to such confessions.

Being a lecturer at UI gave me the opportunity to help students to be more realistic and to accept their limitations. A student from a fellowship of which I was patron came to me one day to inquire about his mark in an Organic Chemistry examination he had taken. I believe he scored 24 per cent. The breakdown of the mark was 16 out of 20 in Practicals and 8 out of 80 in Theory. He came to me the following day to inform me that God had told him in the night that that was not his mark. I promised to look into his paper to see if there was, indeed, some mistake in the marking or collation. When he came to see me the following day, I sat him down and first told him the mark was his; that I had taken time to look at all the questions and the scores; and that if I were marking all of it he would not score 8 but 5 over 80, in which case he would score a total of 21% not 24%. I then took time to explain some basic truths of living and the need to distinguish between reality and wishful thinking, as well as the importance of a Christian of taking responsibility for his/her actions.

One of the saddest letters I ever received from students came from a girl whom I had told that on the basis of her performance *vis-à-vis* the laid-down guidelines of the department for final year students, she would not be allowed to register as a final year student in Chemistry. She wrote a long letter stating how indigent she was and that she must graduate at the end of the session if some calamity was not to befall her family. She said she usually had to wash her only wearable dress in the night and got it ironed dry for the morning. Her fellowship sisters were essentially her main source of feeding. The rare occasion when she had some cash gift she had to share it with her poor mother. The incident opened my eyes in a fresh way to the hardship some of our students faced.

Indigence is bad enough for any student, but more so for female students who are definitely far more vulnerable than their male counterparts. This was driven home to me a few years ago when a male student who was defending the plea for the university to reduce the fees paid by students said, to the

hearing of a large group of people, that some of the female students had to resort to giving their bodies to strangers for money in order remain students at the university!

I want to pay tribute to all the students I have had the privilege of teaching across the globe and, believe me, they are very many. I want to specially thank those who have found me a reliable adviser and even a father and a friend. You constitute my major investment in life and I know many of you will ever be precious jewels to me.

My Services to the University

I served the University in a number of ways, first as an assistant, then full warden of Kuti Hall. I was Hall Master of Independence Hall. In the former hall, my effort to ensure that we did not inflate the prices of things bought did not receive much acclamation by those who had been used to that system, but I insisted on it any way. When I was Head of our department, I did my best to stop a few members of the Junior Staff from pilfering laboratory and stores materials. I had my secret network, which succeeded in curbing the menace. We did not publicize what we did, but the message got round and we saved the department some valuable materials. I have no doubt that some would say I took extreme positions in my attitude to official duties and properties. For example, I did my best not to use official papers for private use, and paid for petrol whenever I took the departmental car on private trips, thereby modifying the concept of accountability. Although we did not have a finance committee in my time, I collected receipts for all expenses by me on behalf of the department, as well as having a record of all monies received. I believe I still have the relevant receipts. I tried, unsuccessfully, to get the department to engage itself in some moneymaking ventures to further improve the department's cash flow situation.

Probe Panels

I served on a few probe panels. The one I was not Chairman of has an interesting aspect, which to my mind, is relevant to this lecture. There was a problem among staff in a department. A retired Professor was called to give evidence and part of what he said has remained indelible in my memory. When he was Head of Department, he put up one of the lecturers under interrogation for promotion to Readership. The case failed at the Faculty

level. He said he put the same person up for Professorship the following year without any alteration to his *curriculum vitae* and by a series of manoeuvres, succeeded in getting the man promoted Professor that year. He gave this evidence to show the man's ingratitude. Apparently, he had wanted the man to be his *yes man*, but the man must have refused to do so some time along the way. In my view, that retired Professor was one of our first generation Nigerian Professors who had bastardised standards in the University. I shall not say more on the matter.

Committees

I served on various committees of the University at various times, either as member or chairman. Three of them were particularly tough. I am referring to the Senate Curriculum Committee, the Housing Allocating Committee and the committee to fashion out a new vision for the University in the 21st century.

The Senate Curriculum Committee under my chairmanship had the job of coming up with a completely new set of revised syllabi for all the departments of the University under the course system. The committee was set up in the wake of much confusion in the course system and the rather chaotic way it was being implemented from department to department. The assignment was to lead to a full reordering of the University's course system. We tried to define what constituted an hour's lecture, whether or not a course was adequately defined and its contents appropriate, both in terms of substance and the units allocated to it. The Committee was empowered to make recommendations to streamline the entire system to ensure that what the University taught was of international standard. We were to recommend to Senate clear guidelines which, if enforced, would ensure that the new initiative worked.

The committee worked very hard to produce the blue book, a major document that removed most of the ambiguities in the system, streamlined all programmes under the course system, and came up with modalities which were to be implemented without favour to any one. But implementation was not easy. In an attempt to do what was right, it was discovered that some members of staff would want rules, even those of Senate, to be bent to please them. In one instance, I had to resign, as the rule was going to be bent to please a colleague.

The Housing Allocating Committee provided a major challenge to our determination to serve the community without fear or favour. The Committee did its best to work according to existing rules, which were modified by Council on the recommendations of our committee. Although we carried out our assignment strictly according to laid down rules, with a human face when necessary, provided it did not favour anyone unjustly. Indeed, a major personal disappointment that I had was our inability to provide accommodation to a young widow when her husband died. Although I had been chairman at their wedding, and was very interested in the matter, there was no question of my insisting that she had to be given accommodation when she did not qualify for what was appropriate her. I make a strong distinction between my official obligations and my private interests.

I saw some ugly parts to the nature of some of our colleagues. Some after retiring and collecting their benefits refused to leave their University accommodation. Undoubtedly, I stepped on many toes as I did my best to put the interest of the University above mine. It was not easy. On one occasion, I had to tell a Professor who thought the University was not appreciative enough of his contributions that it was the University that had made him what he had become by making available to him the opportunity to go for international conferences and have other exposures, which he was crediting to himself. Eventually Council, at our recommendation, came up with rules for the community to observe in regard to University accommodation. Economic charges were to be paid by those who continued to flout the relevant rules and the money was to be deducted from source. This was to discourage any staff from staying indefinitely in the quarters, rather than the university making money from the charges paid by defaulting staff.

There were several other challenging duties. For example, I served as chairman of the committee that looked into the extensive damage done to University structures by the storms and rains on the 8th of October 2000. It was a major challenge to act fast and efficiently to get the blown off roofs and broken walls repaired. The assignment allowed us to show that when the need arises, the university can mobilize very quickly and get major things done at minimum cost and with full accountability.

It was however, the putting together the document for the UI Vision for the 21st Century which provided the most challenging task of all the committees that I was privileged to serve on in the University. The most fundamental

challenge was to enter as it were the spirit of the new vision – to imbibe it in one's psyche and be able to get it across to the rank and file of the university community. Another daunting aspect of the challenge was getting members of the committee to be fully committed to the dream and thereby give the assignment the quality time it deserved. Equally important was getting the document to reflect the collective vision of all stakeholders of the University of Ibadan. The idea of a Vision for the university was basically that of the then Chairman of Council, Mr. Felix Ohiwerei, and he gave the exercise his full backing throughout its formulation.

The committee put in hundreds of man-hours into producing the document, which articulated two major ideas. The first one which is possibly the more important, but which could not occupy a major part of the document for obvious reasons, is *attitudinal change*. It is true that everyone in the community needs to change their attitude to the University. Very few workers earn their pay; many workers come late to work and leave before closing time. Some staff defraud the University of valuable University property, while others inflate bills and steal things entrusted to their care. Many students are not diligent and would opt for short cuts, rather than sweat to attain greater heights. In many cases, truth is brushed aside and mediocrity enthroned. Much more can be said about our undesirable attitude in this University. Radical change is needed if we are going to turn the University the right way round. The second major idea, which is the subject of most of the document, deals with things that had to be done before the desired changes can take place.

On a personal note, I found that I had to spend a lot of time not only in attending meetings, but most exhaustingly, in typing all the materials. Working late into the night was a regular experience, and I must have spent countless hours staring at the computer screen as I typed the materials. Of course, doing this had its reward in making me quite fast in typing. I almost became a professional typist in the process. Not long after completing the work, I began to see flashes of light, even in the dark. I had what was diagnosed as tears in my retina and had to have it corrected in London through laser surgery in June 2003, at a cost of well over two million naira. It was financed mainly through taking loans here and there, and also gifts from a few relations and friends. Apart from paying my return ticket, the University paid only an equivalent of two thousand, five hundred dollars, which inclusive of ticket costs, amounted to only about 20%. I did much

telephoning and went to Abuja several times, even with the intervention of the former Chairman of Council, but I still could not get any help from the Federal Government. While I cannot say categorically that the flashes were a result of many hours behind the computer screen in working for the University, the possibility has not been ruled out either. In any case, being in the University system itself, you wonder if the University could not have done more to help my situation. And, would politicians in government and civil servants have been given the same treatment? I retired from the University with some of the loan still outstanding.

Let me again pause to acknowledge the help of individuals who were particularly supportive to me financially. They include my cousins Mr. Toyin Eleoramo and Mr. Michael Dada, also Professor Peter Okebukola the Executive Secretary of the NUC. I acknowledge with gratitude Dr. Mrs A.O. Ashaye, a competent eye Consultant, for Medical assistance, courtesies and waiving off consultation charges - she was once my student! I also thank the staff of Jaja Health Clinic for their attention over the years.

We must return to the visioning work. I have nothing but praise for all the members of the committee. As might be expected, there were some who did not show up even once and a few who gave up attending meetings halfway through the exercise, but the vast majority saw to it that the job was concluded. One must specially mention Mr. Aigboje Higo who was such a faithful member of the Visioning committee as well as the Vision Implementation Committee. He put in much to ensure that the entire exercise was successful. The current Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council, Mr. Gamaliel Onosode, was equally committed to the exercise. He was at the first meeting in Lagos when the exercise started, and was a full and very active member of the Implementation Committee. He attended virtually all the committee's meetings and at his own expense.

I salute these great alumni and also Dr. Omolayole, Mr. Ogunlana of the Endowment Committee of this University. These people are doing so much for this University.

I remember one incident in the committee's work when I demonstrated my naivety at its peak! In the early days of trying to sensitise alumni to the vision work, I led a powerful team to Abuja, Port Harcourt and Lagos. In Abuja, the alumni, under the able leadership of Mr. Adekunle

Omoni of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, had gone on air to announce our coming. They had seen some Senators, who are alumni of Ibadan, and we had what we thought would be a very successful first visit. The first Senator we saw, who was quite influential, told us how proud he was to be an alumnus of the University of Ibadan. He said they, the Senate, would give more money to us than what the President could give. (We had gone with a request for assistance to the tune of N19 billion). He said it was unlikely they would give us all of that in one go, but thought we would be able to collect all of it in three or four years. He did several other things to show his seriousness, and we believed him. I even went to our own University Senate to announce that we would have at least three billion allocated to us in the following budget. The budget was announced, but no extra kobo was given to us in Ibadan. The Senator is still there in the Senate.

I wish I could say that the vision work gave me a most intense satisfaction. I must admit that the implementation did not go as most members of the Implementation Committee and I had desired. I am particularly worried about the likelihood of implementing the vision document in a selective manner, especially in regard to promotion. We want a higher level of productivity before promotion, but it was written in the context of a more conducive environment within which to conduct research, and the availability of appropriate research equipment and other relevant ingredients of productivity. I hope members of the Appointments and Promotions Committee would take note. Let me use this occasion to make a passionate plea to all staff, especially the administrative staff; please treat students kindly; they are our future alumni and we must not make them hate UI. The careless and nonchalant attitude of some of us to their progress is worrisome!

My Involvement in Resolving Crises

It is pertinent to recount briefly my joy in seeking to work, many times behind the scenes, though that was not always possible, in helping to resolve many crises. I did quite a bit to try to bring harmony among several trade unions and between students and the University. I like to cite two instances of such intervention. At an emergency meeting of Senate one day, a Vice-chancellor announced that students had planned to go on a rampage; the Committee of Provisi and Deans had recommended the closure of the University and he wanted ratification by Senate. I asked that we, who teach

those students, be allowed to talk to them, and strongly urged that we gave it a try. There was initial scepticism about my suggestion, but it was subsequently adopted. I was in the committee set up to meet the students. We did so later that evening. Initially the students called us *Ole, ole* but eventually we gained their confidence, and a very fruitful discussion emerged. The University did not close down.

The second incident was at the Vice-Chancellor's lodge. I had been invited as a member of Council to reason along with the Provost and Deans on how to contain a problem brewing on campus. As we were discussing, one of us said he was hearing some noise. Soon, we knew it was the noise of students approaching the lodge. Within a short time, they were on us, but not before we asked the VC to go up and hide himself. They came with sticks and wanted to lynch the VC. They refused to allow either the Provost or any of the Deans to address them. The Provost asked if they would listen to me; to everyone's relief, they agreed and to God's glory they heeded my plea. One of the leaders during the period of the incident subsequently became a Pastor and he and his wife come to me virtually every week, for fellowship since the last eighteen months – the dividend, not of democracy, but of God's kindness!

I wish to pay tribute to all who have worked with me over the years on various committees and in leadership positions, be they Professors, drivers, secretaries, typists, etc. I thank you for patiently bearing with a man who can make a big demand on people and for putting up with all my foibles and idiosyncrasies.

The Department of Chemistry: a Closer Look

I must now devote some more time to discussing more things about my department. The Department of Chemistry is not only one of the foundation departments in the University, it is arguably the best organized. Along the Physics Department it has brought much international honour to this University in the 1960s and 1970s. There is little doubt in my mind that it has lost the distinction to such Departments as Economics. What it has not lost, however, for which I think it is still head and shoulders above all other departments in the University is in administrative superiority and competence in regard to her commitment to students.

Just as it was in the days of the expatriates, teaching and examinations are still held sacrosanct. I shall elaborate further, but I must add that for each assertion, there will be the exceptions. The department prides itself in starting lectures early in a new semester, and lecturers go to classes punctually. Nobody is too big to teach. Indeed, the older ones work as if to say: 'If I do not show commitment like those who taught me, how will younger lecturers challenge themselves by my commitment in this area?' Although many of us did not have formal training in teaching, we made it a duty to improve ourselves by learning the art of communicating effectively to our students. I remember turning out two monographs on two rather difficult topics after listening to a British scientist give us a HOW of presenting tough materials to students. The department has a passion to teach Chemistry attractively to all, irrespective of their disciplines – whether they take Chemistry for only one or two years or as honours students. Thus, only Professors or very senior lecturers teach students offering first year Chemistry. It is the belief of the department that a right foundation is indispensable for inculcating the right attitude to the subject. In trying to further assist students and by boosting their confidence, the department insists that, as much as possible, no class shall be taught by just one lecturer.

Examinations are also treated very seriously. Lecturers who teach a particular course set the questions, which are always vetted. The one who sets questions is normally required to provide solutions to the problems, and depending on his response, a question may be adjudged too short, too long or below the expected standard, etc. Occasionally, group leaders have been able to assess the competence of a lecturer through such exercise and have advised him/her after the meeting. In view of the experience we have had

that some junior members of staff did not prove themselves trustworthy enough in the handling of examinations, the department took a decision that setting examination questions, vetting, typing, marking and collating them were all to be done by the teaching staff. In this way, if there was a leakage, the source might be easily traced. I may mention, in passing, that those who teach a particular course do not do all the marking. A lecturer might have taught 70% of the course and find himself/herself marking only 20% of the questions. It would be difficult, therefore, to sustain any allegation of biased marking in the department.

The department regularly organizes seminars to which all staff are expected both to attend and contribute. It is normally compulsory for final year students to attend such seminars. In addition, research groups have their strategies for discussing advances in research with their postgraduate students. When I had a flourishing team of postgraduate students, I introduced the 'Show and Tell' programme, which I had borrowed from Berkeley. The entire research team would meet in my office, and the first 45 minutes or so would be devoted to listening to literature reviews. Each member was assigned to find the latest information from specified journals and present findings to the group. In so doing we were kept abreast of current work in the world. The next 45 minutes or so would be spent listening to the progress made by each researcher on his/her own work.

An innovation we had introduced and I am not claiming it was original to us) was the *Staff/Student Liaison Committee*. This committee provided a forum for class representatives to meet with a member of staff chosen by the Head of Department who chaired each meeting. The committee would deliberate on finding ways to improve relationships between all who study and or work within the department. Students were given immunity to speak freely on any topic and about anybody. They brought complaints about lecturers who were not diligent enough and those found inadequate in one way or another. Such complaints were to be relayed to the Head of Department. The representative of the Head of Department would also to convey to meeting complaints from staff about classes, which were unruly or lazy. Class representatives were to relay discussions to the respective classes. All issues were discussed freely. To illustrate the freedom and immunity enjoyed by participants, a student whose project I later supervised at the M.Sc. and Ph.D. levels and who was class representative to the 300-level students, reported me to a meeting I chaired! His class had

concluded that I was too fast in class. I listened attentively and after the meeting, reported myself to two people – first to myself with a view to slowing down, and secondly to the Head of Department.

I believe what has kept the department much better organized than others include the fact that the expatriates stayed longer and the Nigerians who took over from them were passionately committed to maintaining the high standards already set. As far as I know, there are no factions in the department. Of course, we had our disagreements and misgivings, but by and large we have maintained healthy interpersonal relationships.

I wish to use this occasion to thank all my colleagues in the department who have been such a blessing to me – both those who are much senior to me, and those who are not. I am particularly thankful to Professor Bill Bevan for calling me back to the department, and to Dr. John Powell and Professor David Taylor for supervising my Ph.D. work.

Decline and Decay of the University of Ibadan with Special Reference to Chemistry Department

In spite of the plusses I have enumerated, it is sad that our Department of Chemistry is a very poor shadow of its past. Practical classes are in a shambles. Experiments, which are meant to be performed by a single student, have been drastically reduced, sometimes by as much as 60%, and even then, the few experiments chosen would be carried out by as many as six or even eight students to an experiment.

Research has degenerated to a most pathetic situation in the department. The worst hit area is Organic Chemistry, which has almost been completely incapacitated in the absence of modern equipment. Chemicals and consumables, which used to be taken for granted are no longer available. I had refused to take in postgraduate students at the Ph.D. level for the last decade or so of my service, with the exception of one who was jointly supervised by some IITA staff and me. This is very sad in that I have, by far, accumulated more experience and competence during this period of 'No, to taking on research students' than when I used to have several of them. In those days, we did not only have good and functioning equipment, we had machines that produced for us liquid nitrogen; we had assorted gases at high

pressures; we had functioning autoclaves, basket centrifuges and many other highly sophisticated equipment.

The golden period was truly one of abundance and great productivity. We were so well off that the department often got its orders delivered through special air cargo planes and our vehicles would drive straight to the airport tarmac to unload the departmental orders.

It was also a period when the surroundings were peaceful: the beginning and end of sessions and examination periods were predictable. Indeed such important dates were determined long time ahead of their time. Convocations were held regularly without a hitch. You hardly ever heard of strikes – why would you go on strike when things were going on very well? Strikes were not known as a serious detraction from normal sessional activities. But things changed when the University became a different place to live, study and work in.

The first visible major assault was when the military government asked us to pack out of the campus during the 1973/74 session. That order dealt a fatal blow to the Nigerian University system. One Consultant called on his younger brother in the night with the wry observation that the then Head of State had taught him that he had a fundamental duty to his family, which he had neglected owing to his commitment to his profession. But further assaults in different forms were to follow. The cumulative effects of such assaults dealt a deadly blow to the Nigerian University system.

Who could go through such experiences that impoverished the system, when he/she knew what things used to be, and be indifferent to the strikes when ASUU cried out against the poor conditions of Nigerian universities, especially that of 1996? I was never a student activist, but I certainly became an ASUU activist, and was so committed to it that I was prepared to lose my job to defend that stand, especially under the leadership of that unusually talented young man now Professor Jimi Adesina. The authorities tried in vain to discourage us from continuing with the strike, but most of us stood firm. Our fight was nationalistic, and we were fighting for the good of Nigeria. In my view, the 1996 strike was the mother of all strikes. When the initial threat weeded some of us off the scene, those of us remaining were threatened with expulsion from the university. There were well-meaning appeals from various sectors of the Nigerian society, including

the Mothers in Nigeria, via a meeting held at Rita Lori Hotel in Lagos. Here in Ibadan, some very senior colleagues, including retired Vice-Chancellors appealed to us to call off the strike. They mentioned that the threat to evict us from our residences was real. I remember telling them I had no house to go to, stay but would make my landcruiser my house and travelling companion. God vindicated our stand and the university system was slightly better off, in my view, as a result of that strike action. It was during the strike that I wrote that article which was very well received in the society at large titled: *It is a Weeping Matter*. I remain irrevocably committed to ASUU.

I must digress. There was a time when I was tempted to transfer my services to the University of Ilorin when my Professorship was delayed. If I had been there I would have been among the over forty people who were sacked a few years ago. I know two of them very well: Professor Ezekiel Odelowo, a first rate Thoracic Surgeon and Professor Adeniran Mesubi, a great Chemist, are among the finest Nigerians anywhere. They are men of distinction and integrity. That Nigeria could treat them the way they have been treated just shows how far we are from sanitizing the nation. No nation can be great that ignores the truth and enthrones falsehood and mediocrity. I salute the courage of those men and women who have been made to pay such a high prize at Unilorin. God will vindicate you

It was about this time of the onslaught on all that was great in the University system that some of us got together and floated a new magazine called 'The Light', which, unfortunately, we were not able to sustain. The magazine planned to publish scholarly and well reasoned articles, which would provoke good debate that would help transform the university campus into a healthier community.

Time it was when those we had trained here at Ibadan could raise their heads anywhere in the world of academia. When Professor (then Mr.) Alo finished his Ph.D. work under my supervision, I had such confidence in the quality of his work that I asked one of the world's leading Chemists, Professor Henry Rapoport of the University of California at Berkeley to be his External Examiner. The same Alo later went to do his postdoctoral work with a top Canadian Chemist, Professor Victor Snieckus who was surprised that he got his training in Ibadan. Can I with a clear conscience rate any Ph.D. in the department very highly now? I shall not answer the question.

The department is, indeed, daily becoming more and more of a sorry sight. Unless something urgent is done to inject money and resources into it, it may suffer a deadly stroke. While it is sad that more and more experienced people are leaving due to old age, and replacements are almost all home-grown, with very little experience and insight into what true academics is all about, there are still a few good people on the ground who can salvage the system from death, if immediate action is taken. I recall that when I was Head of Department, I cried to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ayo Banjo, to come to our rescue to save us from the likelihood of graduating Chemistry students who had never done practicals! My colleague Professor Tunde Ogunmola was Dean of Science then and he gave a very strong support to my plea.

The department can, itself, do more to learn from its old and departing members. I remember seeing some old but still functioning equipment being condemned as scrap about four years ago. I knew the equipment, had used it several decades ago, but those who discarded them did not. In a similar way, I was very sad when I brought some final year students from Olabisi Onabanjo University, where I am now on contract, to come and see our equipment, which I told them were not functioning but from which we could still learn some lessons. We had gone earlier to Obafemi Awolowo University and saw a good and well-structured equipment house, as well as many functional equipment in some of their departments. I came to UI to find that the old equipment I had wanted to show the students had all been dismembered, moved and packed as heaps of rubbish in one room. You could not identify one instrument from another. Every year I had always taken final year undergraduate and M.Sc. students to see the sophisticated instruments. They still had useful information to convey, certainly much superior to just reading about them from a textbook. I am afraid that that exercise can no longer be carried out because of the way we packed have packed them in the name of expediency. Little wonder that the Ago-Iwoye students concluded that, I quote, 'UI Department of Chemistry was dead, dead and buried'!

An inevitable result of the collapse and decay in the department is the absence of high quality research articles. Anyone here who publishes a good research article in an internationally well-rated journal, especially in Organic Chemistry, must be collaborating with a fellow chemist overseas, who is doing the spectral run, plus other experiments and may also be doing

the interpretations as well. I have, for some time now, refused to publish in the same journals I had patronized for some time. I know it would be degrading to do such a thing, as I would have to depend on someone out there who may be very junior to me for virtually all the major scientific determinations. I would rather concentrate my efforts in giving what I think is first rate teaching and preparing my students who are sufficiently endowed to be able to understand the language of modern Chemistry and use it to productive effect when they have the opportunity to go outside the country.

Our department is in many areas no longer competitive, and cannot expect to win international grants unless it is better enabled. I personally bemoan my inability to reproduce myself, academically, in an increasing number. I cannot exonerate myself from the fact that we had not moved together as a team as we should have done both as members of the same discipline in Organic Chemistry or as fellow Chemists in different areas, such as Organic collaborating with the Inorganic or the Physical. The race to publish or perish has not helped this noble idea, but after becoming Professors, we still did not pursue this noble end!

Related to all this is the fact that we as Nigerians appear not to be galvanized into doing far more than we are doing, given the relegation of the Black man all over the world. We have the talents but we are often too lazy and selfish to care about challenging ourselves to excellence and providing more comfort for others and for tomorrow. In the 1960s Japanese goods were shunned and regarded as being inferior to those made in Britain. The Japanese persisted and today their goods are much sought after everywhere. We are voracious consumers of others' products and have a ridiculously high taste for flashy and sometimes bogus imported materials. We appear to forget that buying a material is not the same as making it; that giving somebody money to buy fish is inferior to teaching him how to fish. Our nakedness is there for anyone with eyes to see. Sometimes the technologically advanced countries rub it on us that we are backward and they want it to remain so. Some time ago, the technologically advanced countries took a decision that certain chemicals they called dual-purpose chemicals (they can be used for making useful as well as warfare materials) should not be sold to developing countries. When I was Head of Department, I ordered many chemicals. Most of them were delivered within six months, but none of the Phosphorus chemicals (dual purpose!!) was delivered until after 2 years. Yet they were for laboratory experiments. In 1990, I was invited to present a lead paper at a national workshop on Chemical and Biological Weapons of Warfare. I drew

attention to the need for Nigeria to quickly empower her scientists so that we can free ourselves from the shackles of colonialism, which are still hanging heavily on us. There is hardly anything we cannot do if we seriously and purposefully challenge ourselves with determination to specific goals.

I have challenged the Government a number of times to tax their scientists to doing things for the nation. Most of the drugs sold, and whose patents have long expired, can be synthesized without difficulty by Nigerian Chemists. Together with Pharmacologists, Pharmacists and Clinicians we can come up with good drugs for national use. In general, our policy makers are very myopic. The typical Nigerian has an inferior mentality: we can hardly believe we can do anything worthwhile. We are not prepared to accept we can do some things better than our white counterparts. We would rather buy things at inflated prices than try to make them ourselves. In the same vein, we get poorly informed officers to represent us at crucial technical international conferences. It does not matter if they do not understand what goes on at such meetings, provided the estacode (per diem allowance) rolls into their pockets.

Another digression. In trying to look into the past what do I see – a sea of undeserved privileges. Many of those I taught are occupying far higher positions than I have ever reached. Some of them are Vice-Chancellors of Universities, some Provosts of Colleges and Polytechnics; many are eminent Professors in their own right. I have had the joy of teaching with a former student I taught as my Head of Department. An amusing experience in the last few years was the increasing number of students who told me after some lectures I had with them, 'my father or my mother said you taught him/her here in this University' – a timely call to bow out before it becomes 'my grandfather said ...'!

My Assessment of My Shortcomings, Failings and Regrets

I admit that I can often be too serious and strict. I demand strict accountability when it comes to money and diligence, and punctuality, probity and conscientiousness in business and official duties. I take seriously and sometimes too seriously not mixing official with private matters. I have a weakness of entering too readily into other people's problems, in particular the underdog. Although I have had the privilege of helping hundreds of boys and girls over the years, it was in the last fifteen years that I assessed the females as easily the most vulnerable in the community. Since this reaching this conclusion, I have often specifically championed their causes most effectively to the extent of knowing the families of most of them. A few honest efforts at lending a helping hand have worked against me. I have learned bitter lessons that suggest that it may not always be wise to attempt to help the so-called vulnerable ones; Moses found that to his cost, although he did not give up. God forbid that I seek to give my side of any story. In the final analysis, God is the perfect Judge and will determine both actions and motives. However, it is a fact that I carry enough scars in helping others, that most would consider me foolish not to run away from giving help to that category of human race. And maybe I am. I actually took that decision, but found that I would be defending my honour, which I cannot do anyway. I have resolved, therefore, to continue to fight honestly, even with the scars from undeserved wounds that I may bear in my frame.

Let me digress once more to thank the University community, which, in spite of the bad publicity I have received, have shown enough confidence in me to ask me to serve them twice on the Governing Council of this University.

It is somewhat ironical that while on one hand I can be very pliable, on the other I can equally be very rigid, especially when it pertains to matters of principle and standards. This is one reason I never sought for any elective position when I was in service. Indeed, when a respectable University sent a high-powered delegation to search me as a possible Vice-Chancellor, I did not hesitate in telling them NO. I told them I was too strict to be a Vice-Chancellor in a Nigerian University. And when the Registrar of another University wrote formally and officially invited me to apply for the Vice-Chancellorship of their University, I did not even respond to the letter.

A painful failure is that I did not bring my work on traditional medicine into a tidy conclusion. I needed to bring out the values of what I dubbed 'profound medicine' – *okigbe, mogun, egbe, ata*, etc. I also did not bring into a tidy conclusion any aspect of my work into a useful drug, but just did enough to show the efficacy of materials. The biogas project, which is based in the department, was not concluded because our technical staff was not able to fabricate the required winding rod. I might have sought help from other sources. Ours would have preceded Professor Odeyemi's of OAU, who is now a renown expert in the field of anaerobic digester and related fields. The technology of the waste glass project whereby broken glass and resin plus other additives were turned into hard and durable floor tiles, in situ floor casting, was completed. However, the University politics at a particular point in time that foolishly terminated CEREMAC prevented the University from capitalising on this initiative.

A Harrowing Experience

It was the eighth day of August 2003, at about 6 pm. I was alone in our bedroom. I heard a knock on the door and went out to answer it. I saw two young people, in their twenties I guess, in the veranda. I was used to having many strange faces come to me for one help or the other. But they were a different type of human beings. On asking what I could do for them, they brought out their guns and marched me back to the bedroom. They gave me some orders. My responses to them caused them to threaten to blow my head off. I told them that was not my problem but theirs, for I was sure I would go and rest with my Lord Jesus Christ. They robbed me of what was to me a lot of valuables. I had re-learnt a major lesson – travel light in this world, and that the right place to lay up treasures is not here below.

A Bleak Future For University Education, If...

Enough has been said to convince any sceptics that the quality of education, particularly that of University education has fallen seriously. A country in which the teaching and research materials that were available to students four or five decades ago were far superior to those which are available to the present generation of students can only be described as dangerously retrogressing.

The Universities of Ibadan and Ghana, Legon, started about the same time. Ibadan was better known in the 1960s and 1970s, but in very few areas can Ibadan now compete favourably with Legon today. Ibadan's deterioration can be traced to a number of factors, which I shall briefly discuss.

Government

Successive governments, which were essentially military, have starved Nigerian universities of much needed funds, and appeared to be interested only in showing that the pen is not mightier than the sword! From the mid-1970s, conditions have deteriorated rapidly – old equipment donated by colonial foundations were not replaced, conditions of service declined rapidly and low morale set in among staff, fanning a brain drain phenomenon which took a dangerous dimension in the 1990s. I remember clearly that in late 1980s my take-home pay was so meagre that there was severe rationing of meat in our family meals. It was about this time that two amusing incidents happened to me. I was in Lagos one day and met an old classmate who had rejoiced greatly for making Grade 3 in School Certificate in 1958, while some of us were moody that the number of our distinctions was inadequate. He rose through the ranks to become one of the top soldiers in the country. He was happy to see me and gave me N200, saying he did not have much on him and that he knew 'You people' did not have much money. Did I tell him, 'don't worry, I am ok?' In another instance, a colleague asked me to be a surety for him in a loan he was seeking to complete his house. I agreed and signed the appropriate form. The bank did not honour my support. I was angry and went to the Manager, fuming that he let me down knowing that I had never been a debtor to the bank. He politely confirmed that I did not owe them a kobo; that my salaries came to them regularly, but then added – 'Sir what comes in at the beginning of the month always disappears by month end'. They had figured, correctly, that there would be nothing left for them to take as collateral on my colleague's loan! I went

away quietly, thoroughly embarrassment that as a Professor I was not qualified to guarantee a small loan to a colleague.

The Contribution of Academics to the Decay

The decline in Nigerian university education cannot be blamed solely on government neglect; university academic staff have contributed in no small measure to it. While successive governments must be given credit for appointing academics as Ministers of Education most of the time, the truth is that most of such ministers have betrayed the academic cause. In fact, some of them have turned out to be enemies of their university constituencies. Within the campuses, some Professors feel too big to teach, and are busy chasing one contract or another. Academics have been known take appointments elsewhere while their younger colleagues, some of whose Ph.D. work they had supervised, served as surrogate teachers for their classes. Not a few Professors appear to take delight in setting impossible standards for their younger colleagues as if they are deliberately working to prevent them from attaining to the height they had reached. Of course, one must not forget some younger lecturers who show little appetite for hard work. Some ambitious young lecturers use politics as a cover up for laziness and mediocrity. Such academics would lobby for promotion; they would fraternize with others for their names to be included in papers to which they had made no inputs; in short they would indulge in the most ignoble academic activity to promote their selfish interests.

New Universities – a Paradox, a Huge Joke but with Terrible Consequences

With all the factors for university decay in Nigeria that we have mentioned and many more that one could have cited, it is not surprising that no Nigerian University was ranked among the top 300 Universities in the world. This is why it is disheartening that the National Universities Commission (NUC) continues to license private citizens and religious groups to establish new Universities, when it is clear that the quality of exposure in most of the present ones is very poor, indeed.

I have no doubt whatsoever that most of the Universities being established today will not survive. I personally doubt how much homework those establishing that new Universities have done, and wonder if they know how costly it is to establish and maintain a university and, especially, that a university is not a money-making venture.

Universities exist primarily for the pursuit of sound knowledge. A university meant to the thirst for expansion of the frontiers of knowledge and for disseminating known ideas and principles to inquisitive enquirers requires some basic things for it to achieve its objectives. It must have the following, among others, to succeed:

- Adequately funding;
- Highly motivated staff in an environment that is conducive to productive academic work;
- An unfettered freedom to pursue learning, teaching and research in specified areas;
- A complement of competent and well-trained support staff; and
- Working ethics that jealously enthrone diligence, integrity, probity and accountability in all categories of staff.

Do many of the founders of Nigeria's new universities the monthly wage bill of each university spends a month on wage bill, and to how much is budgeted for teaching and research? Do they know that in spite of this huge amount of money, not many universities can boast of producing high quality research work suitable for publication in highly rated international journals in Science or Science-based disciplines? In my time, all assessors for professorship were from outside the country. I wonder how many professorial candidates today would be happy to have their papers sent outside the country for assessment. Yet it is not that the Professors of yesteryears had superior brains than the current aspirants to that highest academic position. The big difference is that we were better exposed and better equipped and could better stand any form of international scrutiny.

If universities are not viable money-making ventures, and if it is very expensive to make them competitive internationally, what is the real motive of those rushing to establish new universities? I must say I do not know, but guess it has to do with ego and prestige. If it is an attempt to immortalize someone's name, it would fail, as many of the universities would soon die, several of them in the lifetime of their founders. If people wish to

immortalize their names, a more viable way is to endow huge sums of money to a viable university – maybe to establish a chair, or provide a bigger sum of money for a foundation specialising in awarding fellowships and scholarships to certain categories of people, as the Rockefeller, Ford and McCarthur Foundations have demonstrated for decades. I doubt if Nigeria's private universities would allow the freedom that is consistent with university principles. Would, for example, a university founded by a church denomination insist on morning devotion, or see the institution as an extension of the church? I know of senior academics who have left some of the private institutions out of frustration. If it was not for excessive interference it might have been for an inadequate understanding of the function of a university on the part of the proprietors.

A university is very expensive to maintain. In 1988, when I cried to the Vice-Chancellor for a lifeline to my department, he gave me £20,000 which at that time was about N800,000. I took the money to London and bought many useful items, which helped the department for a while. But I remember then telling someone that if I was given an equivalent of fifty million naira I would not have succeeded in restoring the department to what it was in the late 1960s under Professor Bevan. If Chemistry needed that kind of money just to equip a department, imagine what a university would require, knowing that N50 million in 1988 would be about one billion naira today. We can compute at that rate for each of universities in Nigeria today and we shall find it to be well above the nation's total earnings.

I am aware that there is always the cry that we do not have adequate spaces in the country to admit those who qualify for university education. That is another matter on which I do not intend to discuss here. However, increasing the number of universities without paying attention to the quality of students being produced in them is counter-productive. The fact is that ill-trained citizens with high-sounding paper qualifications is deadly to a nation like ours which should be very eager to catch up with other nations which have gone way ahead of us technologically.

Do these proprietors take staff recruitment seriously? Are they concerned that students graduating from their institutions attain a high level of competence? I am told of a fairly famous private university, which had to depend, on among others, Master's level students from a sister university to survive. Recently, several universities put up advertisements in the daily

newspapers asking for applicants to fill various academic positions; including professorial positions. I am aware that there is much difficulty in finding suitable candidates for virtually all the positions, especially the most senior ones. You cannot just will professors into existence; any crash programme to produce Professors and Readers would crash. Now if already established universities are finding difficulty in recruiting academic staff, how will new ones fare?

Furthermore, have these proprietors taken seriously the numerous infrastructure services a University needs to survive? For example, can they guarantee constant water and electricity supplies for their campuses? Will a Pro-Chancellor not be tempted to take on the functions of a Vice-Chancellor in addition to overseeing to the day to day running of their institution?

I saw all these coming many years ago, and so in 1986 or 1987, I wrote a paper, which I titled 'An Imminent Collapse of Modern Education in Nigeria: First Step to Another Re-colonisation'. I gave the paper to General Domkat Bali for onward transmission to the Supreme Military Council. Whether it got there or not, I do not know. In that paper I spoke of what I referred to as 'grim facts', which included 'the near-collapse of Science in Nigerian universities' and the demoralisation of staff. Some of the suggestions proffered in the paper for reversing the dangerous trend of according education a very low priority were aimed at balancing politics with nationalism. In other words, the overall interest of the nation must override sectional desires and aspirations. Specifically, I argued that the country did not have the resources to maintain all the universities in the country then and neither does it have it now! I argued against the proliferation of universities, which would make it compelling that whatever was allocated to Nigerian tertiary institutions must have to be shared among all, irrespective of how thinly and how ineffectively it was spread.

I thought that the situation had arisen for Nigerian universities to be graded as follows.

- i. universities which are allowed to award undergraduate degrees only; and
- ii. universities which can run undergraduate and postgraduate programmes

I still think the suggestions are relevant and urgently important today. However, I wish to suggest, in addition to the two recommendations above, that a few Nigerian universities be made postgraduate universities, with clear guidelines on their areas of specialization. This suggestion presupposes that the country cannot adequately maintain all the universities on ground now, and cannot afford to allow them to do whatever they desire to do. We simply do not have the resources.

Furthermore, the time for according Science and Science-related subjects a very high priority is now. Unfortunately, as I have noted in some of my papers to the authorities at various times, Nigerian scientists have not been seriously challenged to give of their best for the emancipation of the Black race. It is not irrelevant to mention briefly that I wrote several letters to Heads of State and to newspapers advocating more nationalistic approach to national problems. But this is not the place to itemize them.

In relation to our future as a nation, I make bold to assert that the following steps need to be taken to avoid a bleak future for university education in Nigeria:

- i. Urgent action must be taken to accord education a very high priority;
- ii. Immediate steps must be taken to halt the proliferation of universities;
- iii. The current universities should be candidates for possible mergers with a view to making them more viable. Sentiment must give way to realism and the overall good of Nigeria. The banks have just shown us a good example;
- iv. Drastic steps need to be taken to rationalize universities on the basis of size and responsibilities, which would be better funded than at present;
- v. Universities should not compulsorily retire healthy and competent academics at 65. Some of them are still capable of giving very useful service especially in mentoring their much younger colleagues;
- vi. A substantial sum of money should be released for staff development without delay to allow young lecturers go abroad for much-needed exposure, even if this will be with a bonding clause to ensure their return to the Nigerian university system;

- vii. Provision should be made for adequately equipping teaching and research laboratories to bring our students to a much higher level of technical competence than at present;
- viii. The training of technologists for maintaining new equipment should be a top priority;
- ix. The updating and upgrading of library facilities in Nigerian universities need urgent attention; and
- x. The provision of easy access to computers for all staff and the guarantee of information and communication technology to postgraduate institutions should be considered basic infrastructure for meaningful education in the 21st century.

It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that I am leaving University of Ibadan with mixed feelings. I am happy I did my best and have the joy of knowing that many appreciate what God has done for them through me. However, there is the other side: my sorrow that the country continues to trample down on education and prevent geniuses in villages from rising to transform the nation. I bleed at heart for the inability to reproduce myself when I was at my best; I cry for my country that there are so many pretenders who pay lip service to all that is noble and best for the emancipation of the Black race.

My father died long before I entered the University. At the beginning of my second session in the University College I lost my mother who was very close to me and for whom I had a very deep attachment and affection. In the last two decades, all my siblings departed to the world beyond. They did much for me, and their love and sacrifice for me will ever be deeply appreciated while I am still on this side of the divide. I thank God for them all.

Concluding Remarks

I must conclude. First, a dedication: I come from a poor family and from a small village, Irele in Ekiti State and grew up in my mother's village, Ogbe in Kogi State. Most of you here may never have heard of those villages. Since the 1970s I have been fighting, unsuccessfully, to get the last twenty or so kilometres to my village tarred. In spite of these facts and many more that show how lowly my background is, God has exalted me beyond measure.

This lecture is, therefore, dedicated to all who truly appreciate that they owe whatever they may achieve or attain to in life or whatever good qualities they may possess in life NOT to their own merit but the grace of God (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Secondly, I wish to narrate a story of two soldiers, which goes like this: Both were on the same side in a war and returned from a fierce battle to report their victory. One appeared very neat with no injuries whatever, but his companion had bleeding wounds, dishevelled hair and a very unkempt appearance. Why the difference? In this case, the first managed to dodge the frontline and refused to take any risk to his life, while the other perceived a strategic point at which the enemy wanted to strike and decided to defend it even if it meant doing so with his life.

In retrospect, I can say that to the best of my ability I gave all I had to be a successful teacher. From time to time, I stumbled on many within and outside the country. I receive letters, I have phone calls, or receive visits from many; invariably they recount some good they believe God has used me to do in their lives. Some of these are too humbling to try to remember, let alone mention on an occasion like this. How many of such would I ever recognize, since no good deed was done to receive praises from anybody? Of course, I made mistakes and wear battle wounds, some of which may be well deserved while others may not. My inner joy is that through all the years, I did not deliberately plan to make anyone uncomfortable; neither did I exploit any for my personal or selfish ends.

Like the initials of my alma mater, Government College Keffi, GCK, my desire and goal has always been to reflect the truth that

Kayode's life is hidden with Christ in God. Being read inside out

KAYODE'S

Life is hidden with

CHRIST

in

GOD



COLOSSIANS 3:3

In other words, I have endeavoured to live my life in full consciousness that I am a child of God who will render an account of my stewardship to God some day.

Where I have failed, He is able to defend and uphold me more than any person can. But listen, in 1959 just before coming to the University College Ibadan following the information gathered that one was sure to lose one's faith in a university, I pleaded with God to take my life one day before that would happen to me. The danger never arose. I believe that I have left the University of Ibadan a more matured and, hopefully, more committed Christian than in 1959.

I thank you all for your attention. You may have noticed that I have tried to acknowledge all who have influenced me one way or the other during the course of delivering this lecture. The final words will not be shared with any human being; they belong to God alone.

My deep and unreserved gratitude goes to Him Who:

- worked my way miraculously to UCI when those I had helped did their best to frustrate my desire to further my education;
- was a mighty Support through my undergraduate and postgraduate years;
- enabled me to do all I did as a teacher without seeking any personal gratification;

- supported me and sent me wonderful friends when storms raged fiercely against me and many denounced me;
- made me continuously relevant to the old and the young across the globe; and
- above all, continues to nourish me spiritually.

God Almighty, thank You for the privileges of life, Thank You, my Father, Thank You my Saviour and Lord.

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