

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE FIRST SESSION OF
THE FIRST SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF NSUKKA, AT ST. PAUL'S
PRO-CATHEDRAL CHURCH, NSUKKA, ON MONDAY 18TH JULY, 1994
BY THE RIGHT REVEREND JONAH CHUKWUEMEKA ILONUBA, *M.A.,
Dip.Th. (Lon.)***

GREETINGS:

It is with great humility and an unshakeable faith in the Almighty God who has ordained this August gathering that I greet all of you here present and welcome you to this inaugural Synod of the youngest Diocese of the Province, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

INTRODUCTION:

The long cherished dream of having another diocese carved out of the Mother diocese of Enugu was realized on Tuesday, 11th January, 1994 when in a colourful service in which the Archbishop, Primate and Metropolitan of all Nigeria, His Grace, The Most Rev'd. J. A. Adetiloye presided, assisted by about fifteen other Bishops of the Province, the diocese of Nsukka was inaugurated and the Rt. Rev. Jonah Chukwuemeka Ilonuba enthroned as the first Bishop. To God be the glory for what He is doing.

The beginning of missionary activities in this part of the country goes back to 1916 when the first Pastor and Superintendent of the then Enugu District the Rev. Isaac Uzowulu Ejindu extended his missionary activity to Eha-Amufu and established a church there.

From this congregation at Eha-Amufu a member named John Enyi, a sawyer from Mgbuji came to work at Alor-Uno. He combined his work as a sawyer with that of an evangelist and with the help of God he made converts and a church was established. In 1921 members started holding prayer meetings and evangelical campaigns. When the group at Alor-Uno grew, they decided to move down to Nsukka a distance of about 6 kilometers from Alor-Uno.

In 1927 the group moved down to Nsukka where they saw some people who were already Christians working in various government establishments. The government officials mostly strangers welcomed the idea of the Anglican Church having a base in Nsukka. Under the able leadership of Mr. Thomas Iloabachie, an interpreter, the church was established at Nsukka.

In 1928 the first Church Teacher Mr. J. P. Okeke was sent to work at Nsukka. Since then the church has grown and today we have the Diocese of Nsukka made up of the two Archdeaconries of Nsukka and Eha-Amufu.

The Preacher in this our inaugural Synod Service is the Rev. Prof. E. U. Iheagwam, *M.Sc., Ph.D.* We are grateful that he was able to make time to be with us inspite of his own crowded activities. His sermon yesterday was both inspiring and challenging and I believe we shall live up to the challenges posed by his sermon. On behalf of this Synod I say to the Rev. Prof. E. U. Iheagwam, thank you very much and God bless you.

OBEYING THE GREAT COMMISSION

The “Great Commission” is the parting injunction given by Jesus to his disciple; a marching order which the disciples have to obey if the mission of Jesus Christ is to be continued after his death and resurrection. This is found both in Matt. 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-18. It reads (Matt. 28:18f:)

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age”.

Mark 16:15f – “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved: but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those that believe; in my name they will cast out demons, they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up Serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them, they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover”.

The desire to carry out this command by Christ has received new impetus in recent years and almost all the Synod themes of all the dioceses have been revolving around this one command. The reason for this may be traced back to Resolution 43 of the Lambeth Conference of 1988 on “the Decade of Evangelism”; which reads:

“This Conference, recognizing that evangelism is the primary task given to the church, asks each Province and diocese of the Anglican communion, in co-operation with other Christians, to make the closing years of this millennium a “Decade of Evangelism” with a renewed and united emphasis on making Christ known to the people of this world”.

In order to see that this purpose is achieved, we have chosen as our Synod Theme for this year that great Commission of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. The theme is “OBEYING THE GREAT COMMISSION”.

The operative word here is “OBEDIENCE” Biblical Theology is centred on divine revelation and the receptive response of man. God speaks his word, man hears and is required to obey. The connection between hearing and obeying is therefore essential. Israel as God’s people must hear his voice and act in obedient response. In his own teaching, Jesus emphasized the need for God’s people to respond to his word in obedience. When a voice in the crowd praised Jesus’ mother, he replied saying: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it” Luke 11:28.

Paul regards obedience as being one of the constituent parts of faith. Christ stands as the model of obedience (Phil. 2:5-8), and through his obedience which is contrasted with Adam’s disobedience “many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). Obedience is therefore of the essence of authentic saving faith and should provide evidence of a responsible relation the Christian shares with his God.

No doubt we all know and can quote the “Great Commission” but we have not really obeyed that command of Jesus. Perhaps many have not realized the urgency of obeying that command or even what the task of the church is.

Howard A. Snyder in an article – “The church as God’s agent in Evangelism” wrote. “The evangelistic task of the church is to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ throughout the world, making disciples and building the church. Evangelism is the first priority of the church’s ministry in the world for several reasons:

- (i) The clear biblical mandate for evangelism.
- (ii) The centrality and necessity of personal conversion in God’s plan.
- (iii) The reality of judgment.

- (iv) The fact that changed men are necessary to change society: only changed people can change the community and change the nation.
- (v) The fact that the Christian community exists and expands only as evangelism is carried out.

The church that fails to evangelize is both biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted”.

I am convinced that if the church of Christ is going to be a light to the world, a guide to the blind, hope to the hopeless and the way of salvation to those that are perishing, we must all join hands to make the gospel real to the world around us.

Once at a revival meeting, the message was centred on “Fulfilling the Great Commission”.

At the end of the message one of those who listened who was known to have committed his life to Christ came and made the following confessions. “If I were to respond to your challenge to take what I have to the rest of the world, I am afraid not much would be accomplished, because my brand of Christianity – quite frankly – is not that attractive, exciting or fruitful”. He went on to say that he was not experiencing the joy of the resurrection in his life, the study of the word of God had no appeal, his prayer life was nil and it had been a long time since he had introduced anyone to Christ. His outward evidence of being a man of God was just a façade, by his own admission.

What about you? And what about me? Is your brand of Christianity truly the revolutionary, first-century kind that helped to turn the world upside down and changed the course of history. If not then you cannot effectively join in this crusade which we are initiating in this diocese. But it is not yet late, you can still totally commit your life to Christ here and now and ask for the indwelling of his Holy Spirit who is our strengthener and enabler.

Every Christian needs to echo daily the sentiments of an unknown poet who said:

“My life shall touch a dozen lives
 Before this day is done
 Leave countless marks of good or ill
 Ere sets the evening sun.

This, the wish I always wish
 The prayer I always pray
 Lord, may my life help other lives
 It touches by the way”.

That goal should reign supreme during all our relationships with fellow human beings. To touch lives for eternity. For if the all-powerful God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, truly reigns and triumphs surely we can tap into that supernatural power and give evidence of it in our lives. Do you believe that? My challenge to you is for a return to this first-century conception of Christianity where every believer is a witness to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, no particular group in the church should claim evangelism as an exclusive reserve. We are all evangelists for Christ. I believe that whenever men meet the living Christ, they are changed. The whole course of history has been changed because of Him. Some of our customs and traditions which still hold our people back from following Christ must be challenged with the light of Christ. All the Omabas, Odos, Akatakpas and Oriokpas and those who follow after them must ask themselves what Spirit is controlling them. “The gospel does not only convert the individual, it also changes the society”. Philip Schaff wrote:

“Everywhere the gospel has been preached, dramatic changes have resulted. It has established standards of hygiene and purity, promoted industry, elevated womanhood, restrained antisocial customs, abolished human sacrifices, organized famine relief, checked tribal wars and changed the social structure of society.

Evangelism and Political Freedom:

When in the 1950s the Nigerian nationalists fought for independence, the people of Nigeria hoped that with independence we should be a better society, but since 1960 when we attained nation-hood can we be said to be politically free?

The early evangelists who preached about political freedom did not conceive of political freedom in negative terms of the over-throw of the Jews and roman establishments. They understood and preached political freedom primarily in terms of submission of human kings and rulers to the rule of God. This is significant because history has not been able to throw up a better understanding of political freedom than this.

There are many nations today whose understanding of political freedom is no more than skin-deep. For an average Indian for example, political freedom is when the white colonial rulers leave and brown, black or yellow natives take over the rule. Most often, this colour-of-skin definition of political freedom means worse oppression and tyranny. Our own nation is not exempted from this. In almost any nation that has attained “political freedom” since the Second World War, the new rulers are happy with their freedom, but the ruled are usually more oppressed and exploited than before. Is it not true in Nigeria? Colour-of-skin definition of political freedom generally means freedom for the new governors not necessarily the governed.

It is only where the freedom is understood as the rule of law that there is some freedom for the governed. There is only one test of political freedom. Are the rulers under the law or above the law? If any of the human rulers are above the law, then that is rule of rulers, not the rule of law. It is a dictatorship not a free country. Rule of the human rulers is not freedom. Rule of law is. The question then arises. What is the source of law; human or divine? If the law is merely human, then those who have the power to make the law also have the power to change it too, and then they are above the law. Genuine freedom is impossible in societies which have only human law.

The only law that can be binding on all men is the one that comes from beyond man. Only before a transcendent law can there be a genuine equality of all men. Kings and prisoners alike can be equal before the law if the law itself is above the king or the ruler. If there is no just ruler above the kings of the earth, if He has not given His law to men, then political freedom or rule of law is a sheer illusion, a mirage that is impossible to attain. Man is condemned forever to be under the rule of “might is right”, whether the might be of a few or of the majority. The concept of the rule of law becomes a superstition without faith in a just ruler above the human rulers.

Proclaiming Jesus as “The ruler of the kings of the earth” was and is the only genuine way of establishing politically free societies. In this sense evangelism does not overthrow the existing political kingdoms, but by bringing kings under a transcendental law it curtails the arbitrary freedom of kings and thereby increases the political freedom of the ruled.

Paul witnessed uncompromisingly that Jesus, not Caesar, is the Lord. For Paul, evangelism was a socio-political reform, because it brought the kings of this world under the rule of Christ. Bringing totalitarian human rulers under the authority of a transcendent law, is the highest definition of political freedom that he has seen. We shall so witness in our own time and society that those who rule in different capacities in our country will come to acknowledge the supremacy of the divine law and be made accountable to Him in all their dealings with their subjects. By so doing our evangelism should result in curtailing the

oppressive totalitarian powers of the human rulers. The chiefs, presidents, governors, commissioners and director generals of our land should be brought under the rule of Christ. Evangelism is curtailing and limiting the power of the state over the individual, demanding that the laws of the state be just in the light of the justice and righteousness of God.

Evangelism frees the powerless individual. It limits the power of government by making Christ the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

The Holy Spirit and the Great Commission: Finally, I will like to end by speaking about the role of the Holy Spirit in the “Great Commission”. The Spirit of God is essentially a witnessing spirit. Jesus said “He will bear witness to me, and you also are witnesses. (John 15:26f). I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. (John 16:7f). God’s great purpose in giving his spirit to us, is to make us more effective in our witness and evangelism. “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses. (Acts 1:8). Indeed, whenever and wherever the Spirit is present in power, the evangelistic work of the church will flow naturally and spontaneously. The Spirit and witness-bearing go together. Down the ages missionaries and evangelists did the witnessing but the Holy Spirit gave the power and produced the conviction in the bearers. Always, the initiative and the power for evangelism come from the Lord who is Spirit. The clergy, the catechists and the different committees on evangelism cannot provide power for evangelism. They too need that spiritual power as any other person else. Only the Holy spirit of God, the prime mover in the hearts of men can drive us out to engage in that loving self-sacrificial service.

The Holy Spirit makes Jesus attractive to people. John 15:26, 16:14f. He alone can make someone a Christian. Romans 8:9. “Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him”. He alone changes us from one degree of glory to another until we begin to reflect the beauty of the Lord Jesus. Without him we can do nothing.

God has joined together the Holy Spirit and Evangelism and we cannot separate them.

*“No evangelism, no Holy Spirit.
No Holy Spirit, no evangelism.”*

There is a vital link between them; and that explains a good deal of the powerlessness in most of our churches. It is useless to attempt to witness to Christ, in obedience to his command without the power of his spirit. It is not of the abundance of the heart that the mouth will speak. In Acts 4:31 we read that the early disciples spent time in praying and when they finished praying “the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God’s message with boldness”. We need that same power today. It is given free to all believers but it will cost us something.,

The cost is outlined in five warnings about the Holy Spirit and our reaction to him:

- (i) **Resisting the Holy Spirit:** In Acts 7:51, Stephen warned the leaders of Israel. “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit”. Do not some of us do the same today? We cling aridly to what we did many years ago. Stephen was stoned for his dangerous innovations and for following the Spirit, when he could discern but they could not.
- (ii) **Quenching the Spirit:** 1 Thess. 5:19 “Do not quench the Spirit”. The Thessalonians were quenching the Spirit by despising the gift of prophecy or prophetic manifestation. To be sure prophecy must be scrutinized. But abuse should not take away the right use. God gives us not only graces of character, Gal. 5:22f but also powerful gifts as in 1 Cor. 12. We welcome both gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit.

(iii) **Grieving the Holy Spirit:** Eph. 4:30. “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”. What are the things that grieve the Holy Spirit? 419, drunkenness, adultery, idolatry, bad relations between husband and wife, unkindness, divisions, filthy talk, hatred, stealing, vengeance, injustice etc. We should never allow the spirit of love and unity to be hurt or grieved.

(iv) **Do not fear the Spirit:** Fear seems to be responsible for people’s criticism of the current emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Some church members are not sure of what will happen if they gave in to the Holy Spirit and allowed him unrestricted access to every side of their lives. I hope we are not like that and we should not be like that. The Spirit of Jesus is to be trusted rather than feared or controlled. You cannot control him. For he is the sovereign Lord God in our midst. He comes from the Father who gives only good gifts to his children.

However, those who claim to have spiritual gifts must allow them to be tested. Their claims must be backed with holiness of life, humility and love. On the other hand those who are in doubt must remain open to the dictates of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite Christ’s body not to divide it.

(v) **Despising the Holy Spirit:** Do not despise the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can give us the power we need; power of being witness to Jesus, power to cast out fear which enslaves many today. Power to transform character, power for church unity, power to live out the Christian life and power to love the lost and power for reconciliation.

To be effective in our evangelism we need the power of the Holy Spirit. The theme of our Synod is “Obeying the Great Commission”. In Acts 5:32 we are made to understand that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey him.

According to the Archbishop of Canterbury “The church is nothing if it is not a missionary movement”. Evangelism should be our comprehensive purpose in all our consultations together and in the life of our own churches. We must seek fresh energy for proclamation, for prayer, for presenting the claims of Christ; and like Archbishop Runcie we shall draw strength from your prayers and encouragement and from the knowledge that those whom God calls he also equips for his service.

CAMPUS CULTS:

At the last Provincial Standing committee held in Abuja from Wednesday 16th March – Sunday 20th March 1994, the member of the committee expressed a deep concern about the increasing menace of Secret Societies in our Universities, a phenomenon that is gradually finding its way to our Secondary Schools. As it was alleged that the eradication of this ugly monster was proving difficult because of the involvement in it of some highly placed persons in the society like judges, magistrates, chancellors, university dons and even some bishops and clergymen, the committee made the following resolutions:

“Be it resolved and it is hereby resolved that at the next meeting, and subsequent meetings of the Standing Committee of the church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) whenever and wherever held, a service will be held at which all members of the Standing Committee shall make a declaration of absolute obedience and undivided loyalty to Jesus Christ alone and swear to an oath of not belonging to any secret society, occult or any other Christian deviations, without prejudice to the generality of these expressions.

That the form of declaration and oath shall contain a list of known Secret Societies, Occults and Christian deviations of any kind.

That members who were absent at such service shall be required to make their own declaration and take the oath before taking their seat at the Standing committee Meeting. That this message be passed down to the diocesan Synods and Parish Councils.”

ORDINATION OF WOMEN:

The issue of the ordination of women was also discussed as that is now a global issue within Christendom. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) during that meeting resolved as follows:

“In recent times the press has shown an unusual interest in the ordination of women in the church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). This was in consequence of the passage of the motion for the ordination of women by the Church of England which like the church of Nigeria is an autonomous Province. The Church of Nigeria had at several times at its General Synod in 1992, at the Standing Committee Meeting in 1993 and at its Episcopal Synod deliberated on the subject.

The position of the church has been and still remains:

- (i) That there is need to discuss the subject at every level from the Parish level to the diocesan synod and that the members should be properly educated on the subject.
- (ii) That experience in virtually all the Provinces where ordination of women had taken place, has shown that it is divisive and the Church of Nigeria cannot afford a division now.
- (iii) That the ordination of women, while it may be desirable in the future, is not one of its priorities for now.

The Standing Committee therefore unanimously disapprove the making of deacons in Kwara Diocese in December 1993 and fully endorses the position of the House of Bishops that the ordination is irregular.

The ministration of the women involved in that ordination is not acceptable in the Church of Nigeria”.

NEW BISHOPS:

Five new bishops were consecrated early this year to head the five new Diocese carved out from existing Dioceses.

On Thursday, 16th January, 1994, Epiphany day, at St. Michael’s Cathedral Aba in a very moving divine service presided over by the Archbishop, Primate and Metropolitan of All Nigeria, His Grace, The Most Rev. J. A. Adetiloye assisted by over forty other bishops, the Ven. Ugochukwu U. Ezuoke was consecrated the bishop of Umuahia, the Ven. Uju Obinya was consecrated the Bishop of Ukwa, the Very Rev. Benneth Okoro was consecrated the bishop of Okigwe South, the Ven. Alfred Nwizuzu was consecrated the bishop of Okigwe North and the Ven. Jonah Chukwuemeka Ilonuba was consecrated the bishop of Nsukka Diocese.

We congratulate these new bishops and we ask that you will continue to pray for them and their Diocese for a smooth take off and the peace of Christ so that the gospel of Christ could be preached in a peaceful atmosphere.

TRAINING OF THE CLERGY: (TAP)

The need for well-trained clergy cannot be over-emphasized. If the flock of God is to be led aright and the Christian Faith and doctrine properly taught and practiced our clergy must be knowledgeable. There is need for both spiritual and intellectual knowledge. In choosing those to be trained we have to seriously pray for the guidance of the Holy spirit setting aside all sentiments and personal interests. We shall aim at giving our qualified clergy the highest education possible to equip them for the challenges of contemporary society.

The Diocese is just beginning and the fund for achieving this not readily available. I am therefore appealing that individuals who are moved to support a priest in training will indicate and we shall find out the present cost of supporting a priest in each academic year. This system of Training A Priest (TAP) is being practiced today in many of the dioceses within the Province. God will richly bless you as you do this.

ORDINATION:

Just a week ago we had our first ordination in the Diocese at St. Paul's Pro-Cathedral. The following deacons were made priests:

- The Rev. Benjamin Okwor
- The Rev. Felix Nwani
- The Rev. Festus Okolo and
- The Rev. Fidelis Ezeugwu

while the following were made Deacons:

- ◆ The Rev. Ephraim Asogwa from Trinity College Umuahia and
- ◆ The Rev. Hyginus Ugwu from Emmanuel College of Theology Ibadan

Pray for them that God will give them the Spiritual power and wisdom to be used for effective work and witnessing in their different stations.

CANONS OF THE CATHEDRAL:

The following clergymen have been appointed honorary Canons of the Cathedral:

The are – **The Revds:**

Ernest Chinweze Uwadiogwu Nnamani
Godwin Egbuna Uvuka
Ernest Eze Odo and
Prof. Emmanuel U. Iheagwam

It is our prayer that God will use them in this respected ecclesiastical status for the furtherance of his gospel.

LAITY COUNCIL:

The Anglican Church is made up of the Bishops, the Clergy and the Laity. For a balanced growth of the church; all the three houses have their roles to play for an effective evangelism.

There is need for the Laity to be properly informed about their role within the body of the Church.

For this reason the Diocese will soon organize a workshop for the Laity so that their potentials will be effectively harnessed for use in our diocese.

GRATITUDE:

I must express my sincere gratitude and that of the entire Ilonuba family to the Diocese for their sympathy and concern for us during the period of our bereavement. We thank you for all that you did both individually, collectively and as a Diocese to see that our dear mother who slept in the Lord on Friday 6th May 1994 was given a befitting burial. May God shower His abundant blessings on all of you in Jesus' name. *Amen*

CONCLUSION:

Once more I thank all of you who have given of their time, talent and wealth for the development of this young Diocese. I strongly believe that united in our resolve to build up this Diocese, we shall do great exploits, for God is on our side. Let us with singleness of heart and mind face the task ahead and win Nsukka Diocese for Christ.

Thank you for your patient listening and God bless.

The Rt. Rev. J. C. Ilonuba
(Bishop of Nsukka)