

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS PRESENTED TO THE TWELVETH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FATHERS' FELLOWSHIP, DIOCESE OF NSUKKA ON SATURDAY 25TH JUNE, 2016 AT CHRIST CHURCH, EZIANI IN EDEM ARCHDEACONRY**

**BY  
HIS LORDSHIP, RT. REV. ALOYSIUS EZE AGBO JP  
BISHOP OF NSUKKA**

**Protocol:**

**Prologue**

Our heart leaps with great joy any time this number of men gathers in the name of the Lord. You may not understand; in our days men are becoming uninterested in spiritual matters, except at crisis moment, but the story is becoming different with us here in Nsukka Diocese. Your positive response makes us join the Psalmist to say *"How good to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how fitting! The LORD is rebuilding Jerusalem and bringing the exiles back to Israel."* May the Lord's name be praised!

With this joy, we welcome you to this great gathering of the Saints militant. Of course you are in your Father's house so you have to be of sound mind and ready to enjoy your fellowship with the Father. We are sure you will leave hear blessed.

We welcome in a special way these gallant soldiers of the cross: Mrs. Ifeoma A. AgboJP, my wife and the president of the Women Ministries; Rt. Rev. Dr. Jonah C. and Mrs. Rose U. Ilonuba, the pioneer Bishop and wife, and founder of this fellowship; Rt. Rev. Chijioke Aneke, Bishop of Udi and our preacher/Expositor; Sir Hon. Justice FIN Ngwu, the Chancellor of our Diocese; and all other legal officers; Sir R. U. Agbo, the seasoned chairman of this fellowship and all other officials, we love you all.

Our earnest prayer is that this meeting will be soul refreshing to all of us in Jesus name. Amen.

**THE HOST ARCHDEACONRY**

This conference is being hosted by Edem Archdeaconry here at Christ Church Eziani. We appreciate the Archdeacon, Ven. Samuel Obeta and His wife, Dr Mrs Amaka Obeta, Rev. Philip Ogbodo and Mrs Ruth Ogbodo, with all the Clergy in the Archdeaconry - Can. Sam Ezugwu, and Rev Edwin Ugwoke for a job well done.

During the Synod held at St. Andrew's Church, Ibagwa-Aka in 2009, Edem Archdeaconry was created. It was inaugurated on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2010 with Ven. T. O. Ugwuishiwu as the pioneer Archdeacon. Other Archdeacons that have headed Edem Archdeaconry are:

Ven. Dr. B. C. D. Diara --- Jan. 2011 – Nov. 2011

Ven. Sam O. Obeta --- Nov. 2011 till date

This Archdeaconry with Headquarters at St John's church Edem-Ani, is made up of four parishes with 12 Churches namely

- 1. St John's Parish EdemAni made up of**
  - (a) St John's Church Edem-Ani - Ven.Samuel O. Obeta  
and Rev Innocent Nnamani
  - (b) Our Saviour's church Obinagu-Owerre - Pastor Boniface Israel
  - (c) Emmanuel Church Orue - Pastor Martins Ezemagu
- 2. Christ Church Eziani Parish made up of**
  - (a) Christ church Eziani - Rev Philip Ogbodo
  - (b) Anglican Church EdemGbu-Gbu - Pastor Kingsley Ugwunwoti
  - (c) Emmanuel Anglican church Agbani - Pastor Jonas C Eze
- 3. St Peter's Parish Ozzi-Edem parish made up of**
  - (a) St Peter's church, Ozzi-Edem - Rev Can Samuel Ezugwu
  - (b) Mountain Zion church Amenu - Pastor Jeremiah Onwurah
  - (c) St James church Amudo - Pastor Benjamin Ugwuoke
- 4. St Matthew's Parish Akpa-Edem made up**
  - (a) St Matthew's Akpa-Edem - Rev. Edwin Ugwoke
  - (b) All Saints Church, Agu-Amagu - Pastor James Eze
  - (c) Victory Anglican church Amegu - local Helper

### **CHRIST CHURCH EZIANI**

Christ Church Eziani was established on 4<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1932. The first service held on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1932 was attended by members of St. Bartholomew's church Obimo. The church was known as Christ church Obimo three. During the induction of Anglican Youth Fellowship in 1964, her name was changed to Christ Church Eziani and that became her permanent name.

As the church kept growing from 1932 – 1943, within 1943 to 1945 the Roman Catholic church wanted to usurp the church and take over but the owner of the church through the help of the foundation members fought for the church and their plans were aborted.

By the grace of God, Christ church was inaugurated a parish on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2009 by us, Rt. Rev. A. E. Agbo, JP, Bishop of Nsukka.

The foundation members of the church were Late Abraham Ugwu, Peter Giginna, Michael Ugwuoke, Josiah Ugwuoke, Lazarus Ugwu, and Elder Mathew Ugwu.

### **The church workers:**

1. Francis Nweze (Aguleri) 1932-1935 first church teacher
2. Onurah 1936 -1838 Catechist
3. Adeue (Awka) 1939-1943 Catechist
4. Walter Nwuke (Awka) 1946 – 1948 Catechist
5. Anwunandu E. (Awka) 1949 – 1950
6. Nwaorah Benson (Awka) 1951 -1952 Catechist
7. James Ugwuoke (Eziani) 1953 School teacher
8. Vincent Ugwu (Amaeze) 1955-1958 School teacher
9. Josiah Ugwuoke (Eziani) 1955 -1958 School teacher
10. James Ugwuoke (Eziani) 1959 -1951 School teacher

11. Benjamin Asogwa(Orba)	1962 -653	School teacher
12. Thomas Ugwueze (Ovoko)	1964 -1965	Catechist
13. Stephen Eneje (Opi)	1966 -	School teacher
14. Reuben ikechi (now Igwe )	1967-1972	School teacher
15. Daniel agbo (Opi)	1973-1974	School teacher
16. Samuel Ugwuoke (Eziani)	1974-1977	Catechist
17. Christian Eze (Amechienu)	1978	Catechist
18. Philip Okpe (Abbi)	1979	Catechist
19. John Onyia (Udi)	1980	Catechist
20. James Ugwuoke (Eziani)	1981 -1985	School teacher
21. Johnson Ugwuoke (Iheakpu-Akwa)	1986 -1990	Catechist
22. Joseph Nwuguru (Imo)	1991-1994	
23. Joseph Agbo (Opi)	1995	Catechist (now Rev. but Late)
24. Theophilus Onah (Ibagwa)	1996 ordained in our church and become the 1 <sup>st</sup> Rev.	
25. Samson Ene (Udi)	1997	Catechist (now Rev)
26. Stanley Eze (Amaechienu)	1998	Catechist (now Rev.)
27. Rev. L.N. Eze (Amaechienu)	1998	
28. Johnson Ugwu (IheakpuAwka)	1999 -2003	Catechist
29. Rev. Canon Chijioke Onyechi (Abatete)	1999 -2003	now venerable
30. Rev. E.C. Agbowo (Opi)	2004	
31. Rev. Ezeja (Ibagwa)	2005 -2008	
32. Rev. Canon Engr. G. O. Ekupnobi (Obosi)	2008 -2011	now Venerable
33. Samuel Eneje (Edem)	2008 -2009	Retried Catechist
34. Stephen Ugwu (Neke)	2009 -2010	Lay Pastor
35. Oliver Ajibo (Edem)	2010-2011	Lay Pastor
36. Rev Philip Ogbodo (Neke)	2011 till date.	

### **OUR RESOURCE PERSON - *Rt. Rev. Chijioke Augustine Aneke JP***

**Rt. Rev. Augustine Chijioke** is my very close friend. His wisdom and godliness attracted me and he has been so helpful in my ministry. He is invited to speak in this conference because we believe he has a deep insight on the subject matter. And he had made a great sacrifice to be here. Brother, thanks for making yourself available as an instrument in God's hand to bless us. May God bless your ministry.

Bishop Aneke was born on 30th March, 1960 and he is the first son to Late Mr. Titus Chikwendu Aneke and Mrs. Alice Izukanchi Aneke (Nee Onyia) of Akaagbani Umunugwo Obioma in Udi L.G.A, Enugu State.

He had his education career between 1965 and 1987 in the following schools: St. Andrew's Church Primary School, Odakpu Onitsha, St. Luke's Church Primary School Ogui, Enugu, Christ High School Aborand Institute of Management and Technology Enugu.

In 1987, he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Master. It was on the 24th December 1987 through the Christmas Message of the first Bishop of Enugu Diocese, Rt. Rev. G. N. Otubelu.

He was called to Full Time Ministry in 1989. He was made a Deacon on the 4th July 1993, and priested on 10th July, 1994 by Rt. Rev. G. N. Otubelu.

In 2005, he was preferred Canon by Rt. Rev. Dr. Amos A. Madu, and on 28th May 2006, the Bishop also appointed him an Archdeacon.

He was elected Bishop on November 12, 2008. On January 11, 2009 they were consecrated Bishops (thirteen of them) at All Saints Cathedral Church Ughelli in Delta State, Nigeria. On January 14, 2009 Bishop Chijioke was enthroned and installed the first Bishop of the Diocese of Udi.

Rt. Rev. Chijioke Aneke is married, to his amiable wife, Mrs. Comfort Aneke (Nee Agbo) on 28th May 1994 at All Saints Church, G.R.A. Enugu by Rt. Rev. G. N. Otubelu. The marriage is blessed with four children: Titus Jr, Mary, Victoria and Evangeline.

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE CFF**

### **1. 2015 CHRISTIAN FATHERS FELLOWSHIP (CFF) ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

The conference was held at Emmanuel Church, Alor-Uno. It was a huge success, not for the money realized but the spiritual reawakening and revival of the faith of our Fathers in all the participants. We thank God for His servant, Rt. Rev. Henry Okeke who was our expositor/speaker. We understood clearly what the Christian Faith is and the demand it makes on us. We yielded to God and renewed our commitment to holding fast the faith of our fathers and handing it down to our decendants.

We use this opportunity to appreciate the clergy and lay people of Alor-Uno Archdeaconry for hosting us well. May God reward you in Jesus name. Amen. We also appreciate other resource persons during the conference like Dr. ObumnemeAnyim of UNTH, ItukuOzalla.

### **2016 PRAYER CONVOCATION**

This was held on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2016 at St. Paul's Cathedral, Nsukka using the Diocesan theme, "I will do a new thing" (Isaiah 43:18-19). It was indeed soul refreshing and life transforming. We thank God for the instruments he used. Over 300 men (clergy and lay) were in attendance.

### **2. PROJECTS**

#### **(a) Anglican church Ojor, Uzo-Uwani**

The CFF Anglican church, Ojor in Uzo-Uwani L.G.A has reached roofing level. By the grace of God, after the 2016 Annual conference, work on the roofing will start.

#### **(b) Benedictius Petroleum Ltd.**

The mini-mart building has been roofed. Plans are on to do the flooring of the whole compound and also lay the conduit electric pipes for the electrical installation. The work is on-going.

(c) The fellowship has employed a full time clerk by name, Miss Nnenna Eze, who is now working at the Diocesan Secretariat in the liaison office and there are plans to procure desk top computer and all the necessary accessories for her to work effectively and efficiently.

To God be the glory!

Change of name. The Church of Nigeria has directed that for uniformity, all the men organizations will from now be known and addressed as CHRISTIAN MEN'S FELLOWSHIP CMF. In compliance with that directive, we hereby change our name from Christian Fathers Fellowship (CFF) to CHRISTIAN MEN'S FELLOWSHIP (CMF).

## **THEME: CHRISTIAN FAITH AND CULTURE**

Text: 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In our 2013 conference, when we were considering "The Ancient Paths" as our theme, we observed seven things that marked out our forebears as follows:

1. Truthfulness
2. Faith
3. Rejection of Idolatry
4. Total abstinence from all heathenic cultural practices
5. Evangelicalism
6. Godly family life
7. Love and unity especially among members.

The impact of the message of that conference helped us to see the need for a further study of these marks. So it was decided that each of these marks will form our conference theme for the subsequent conferences. On this arrangement, we have looked at;

- Rejection of Idolatry under the theme- "The First Commandment"
- Faith under the theme- "The Faith of our Fathers"

Therefore we are led to take as our theme for this year - Christian Faith and culture, as we consider one of the marks of our heros past, - rejection of all ungodly cultural practices. We

considered this theme very apt, as we are living in a time that has witnessed a great quest for cultural revival, fight for ethnic cleansing, and agitation for cultural identity.

With the great influx of civilization and modernism into the African continent, there is now an understandable growing agitation by the Africans to preserve their culture from total erosion and eventual extinction. The Christian community is not out of this agitation, especially considering the inroads of westernization that apparently occasion value erosion on the pretext of moral relativism and promotion of international human rights.

That crusade for cultural revival is not out of place in the light of the inherent meaning of culture as the acceptable way of life, beliefs, customs, arts and behaviour of a people. In other words, a people without culture is a people without identity. So, the quest for identity retainership in an ever changing world is a quest founded in wisdom.

However, as wonderful as it sounds that culture gives a people their identity, we must be careful of the type of identity tag our culture has placed on us.

A story was told of a final year student of a theological college, who came from a community with a type of snake as their totem. One afternoon as he was having his lunch, there was a shout outside that attracted him and other students. On rushing out to know what was going on, behold it was a snake that the other student saw and was killing it. When this final year student discovered that the snake being killed is their totem, he was furious and bounced on the student that killed the snake, demanding from him why he should kill his "Nna Nna". Thank God, other students that gathered there were all against him.

Obviously, there are doubts, both consciously and unconsciously, as to the universality of the Christian Faith. Some are beginning to see it as an alien invasion to their culture. Even the educated Christians join to ask; why should Africa give up its religious identities to the advantage of a religion whose proclamation and implantation in retrospect appear to not a few to be only another self-alienating aspect of the colonialism imposed upon them?

They no longer see the history of worldwide mission as the history of the diffusion of liberating truth and love, but as a history of alienation and violation. The new consciousness expressed here demands that Christians consider radically who they are and who they are not, what they believe and what they do not believe, what they have to give and what is not theirs to give.

Within the scope and time of this address, we can only attempt a small part of the theme, which will at least arouse our interest on the theme for further study and as opportunity to take a definite decision to be on the Lord's side. The design and also the desire of the address is to consider the right and capacity of Christian faith to communicate itself to other cultures, to assimilate them and to impart itself to them.

In the light of the above premise, we shall now go into the details of the message of our theme focusing on the following:

- ✓ Brief reflection on our text.
- ✓ Know this: an insight to some issues on our theme.
- ✓ A look at some cultural practices

## **THE THEME TEXT**

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk among them, I will be their God and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.*

### **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

I think the best way to understand this passage, especially as it relates to our theme, "Christian Faith and Culture" is to first of all look at the first recipients of the letter, the Corinthians.

This letter was written to the believers in Corinth. At the time of writing this letter, around AD 55, Corinth was a strategic port city with great influence and exposure to the rest of the Roman Empire. Other insights into a better knowledge of the city of Corinth are:

- ❖ Great commercial city where objects of luxury were found. Someone calls Corinth vanity fair of the ancient world.
- ❖ Corinth hosts Isthmian Games which is second only to the Olympics.
- ❖ Corinth has the temple of Aphrodite with 1000 priestesses who were sacred prostitutes.
- ❖ Corinth was a byword for evil living - drunkenness and immorality.

It is only in light of this "Corinthian Culture" that the sternness of the passage is made understandable.

The key words in the text are:

- Do not be Unequally yoked
- Come out from among them.

The Greek word for "unequally yoked with unbelievers" is not found elsewhere, but has certain Old Testament picture behind the meaning. In saying this Paul was urging the Corinthian believers not to be joined to unbelievers in a strange yoke. In Deuteronomy 22:10; God had said 'You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together.' The message is this: There are certain things which are fundamentally incompatible and which were never meant to be brought together. It is impossible for the purity of the Christian and the pollution of the idol-worshippers to come to an agreement.

Come out from among them, is the second key word of our text. It was meant to challenge the Corinthian Christians to keep themselves free from the contamination of the world around them. Though, come out of them here may not mean creating another world where only Christians should live here on earth, as he had explained in his earlier letter, (1Cor.59-10); Paul insists that there are certain things that are not possible for one to do and also remain a Christian. There are things from which every Christian must get out.

Israel's history of faith begins with the call to Abraham: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house" (Gn, 12:1); it begins with a cultural break. Such a break with its own antecedent history, such a going forth, will always stand at the beginning of a new hour of the history of faith. But this new beginning reveals itself to be a healing power which creates a new center and which designs to draw to itself everything truly human, everything truly godly. "I,

when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn. 12:31)—these words of the risen Lord also apply here. The cross is first of all break, expulsion, elevation away from the earth, but precisely thereby it becomes a new center of magnetic pull, drawing world history upward and becoming a gathering of the divided.

Whoever joins the church must be aware that he is entering a cultural subject with its own historically developed and multi-tiered inter-culturality. One cannot become a Christian apart from a certain exodus, a break from one's previous life in all its aspects.

Our towns and villages are littered with gods and goddesses. Some social activities are institutes of the idols. Example of such are masquerading, some parts of funeral/burial rites, marital rites, festivals, etc. Disappointedly, many church members claim to have nothing to do with idols yet they cherish, propagate, practice and defend these institutions of the gods/goddess of their various communities. It is obvious that some Christians who champion cultural revival and continuity are ignorant of the foundation, content, reasons behind what they are fighting for. It is indeed very painful that some Christian fathers are architects to the continued existence of masquerades, strange burial rites, caste system, strange dances that promote nudity, worship of idols, intimidating and oppressing regulations that deny people freedom of movement and worship, etc.

Ironically, we don't see people fighting to recover those aspects of our culture that promote development, unity, peace and righteousness, such as:

- ★ chastity
- ★ Respect and honour to elders and leaders,
- ★ Industry and hard work,
- ★ Hospitality,
- ★ Brotherliness,
- ★ Sanctity of Life.
- ★ Traditional language
- ★ Traditional food.

### **The Needed Understanding on Culture**

1) **Christian Universality:** In his last words, the risen Lord sends his apostles to the ends of the earth: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations; baptize them ... and teach them everything I have commanded you (Mt. 28:19f; cf. Acts 1:8).

Christianity entered the world conscious of a universal mission. From the first, the followers of Jesus Christ recognized their duty to pass on their faith to all men. They saw in the faith a good which did not belong to them alone, but one to which all had a claim. It would have been disloyal not to carry what had been given to them to the farthest corners of the earth.

Christian Mission is perceived as the obligatory transmission of what was intended for everyone and which everyone needed.

2) **Truth emancipates culture:** Man's real poverty is the darkness to truth. This darkness falsifies our actions and puts us against one another, precisely because we are tainted, alienated from ourselves, cut off from the ground of our being, which is God.

The communication of truth brings deliverance from alienation and division. It illumines the universal standard which does no violence to any culture but leads each to its own center, since each culture is finally the expectation of truth.

This is the great mandate with which Christian faith came into the world; it underlies the inner obligation to send all peoples to the school of Jesus because he is truth in person and thus the way of mankind.

3) **Religion is the heart of every culture:**In all known historical cultures, religion is the essential element of culture, indeed it is its determining core. It is religion which determines the structure of values and thereby forms its inner logic.

But if this is the case, inculturation of the Christian faith in other cultures appears all the more difficult. For it is difficult to see how a culture, living and breathing the religion with which it is interwoven, can be transplanted into another religion without both of them going to ruin. If you remove from a culture its own religion which begets it, then you rob it of its heart. Should you implant in it a new heart, the Christian heart, it seems inescapable that the organism which is not ordered to it will reject the foreign body. A positive outcome of the operation is hard to envision.

4) **Culture that can stand the test of time:**The sign of a high culture is its openness, its capacity to give and receive, its power to develop, to allow itself to be purified and become more conformed to truth and to man.

5) **Cultural Dynamism:** The crisis of a culture ensues then when the culture is no longer able to bring the wisdom of the ancients into a convincing connection to new, critical knowledge. In such a case, inherited truth becomes questionable; what was once truth becomes mere habit and loses its vitality. An understanding that established a culture can become obsolete.

Society marches onward, and therefore culture also has to do with history. On its journey through time, culture develops through its encounter with new reality and the arrival of new insights.

6) **Cultural Diffusion:** Cultures can meet and intermingle. An individual culture does not just live its own experience of God, world and man. Rather, by necessity it encounters on its way and must come to terms with other cultures with their typically different experiences.

Hence, to the extent to which it is open or closed, internally broad or narrow, a culture comes to deepen and refine its own insights and values. This can lead to a profound evolution of its earlier cultural configuration, and such a transformation cannot be seen as alienation or violation.

7) **Inter-culturality or Infiltration:** We should not be speaking of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures which can be called inter-culturality. Inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic. Only if all cultures are potentially universal and open to each other can inter-culturality lead to flourishing new forms.

8) **The Standard Culture:** We must state that Christian faith itself is culture. There is no such thing as naked faith or mere religion. Simply stated, insofar as Christian faith tells man who he is and how he should begin being human, faith creates culture; faith is itself culture. Faith's word is not an abstraction; it is one which has matured through a long history and through intercultural mingling in which it formed an entire structure of life, the interaction of man with himself, his neighbour, the world and God. This means too that Christian faith is its own subject, a living and cultural community which we call the (people of God).

## **AREAS OF OUR CULTURE CALLING FOR REFORMATION**

### **The culture of masquerading**

The bedrock of the African Traditional Religion is the strong belief in the inseparable relationship between the living, the dead and the unborn. That, if you like, is the 'Trinity' of African Traditional Religion. That belief is the basic foundation upon which most African traditions and cultures emanate from. It is this belief that underlies the concept of masquerading, burial rites, Traditional Stools etc.

Within Nsukka we have such Masquerades as Akatakpa, Omaba and Odo. There is an unwritten but rigid calendar that guide the seasons when each masquerade should appear. For instance, *akatakpa* masquerades usually come out every season of the New Yam Festival. While there may be some differences in operation of these masquerades from community to community, they are essentially the same in nature and purpose. Most communities in Nsukka land call the Festival *Onwa Esa* (The Seventh Month). *Onwa Esa* is a celebration of the arrival of the New Yam for the year. This is usually between July and August of the English calendar. The actual feast is a 2-day celebration followed by several weeks of masquerading.

The masquerading is a mark of acceptance of the worship of the *Onwa Esa* celebration, (symbolizing the spirits of the ancestors that were just worshipped) will come out to 'celebrate' with the living in the feast of New Yam. So all Masquerades at least in Igbo culture are spirits who have come from the land of the dead to interact with the living. That is the ideology of *akatakpa, Omabe, Odo and others*.

There is nothing wrong in a community celebrating one thing or the other, depending on the mode and motive of the celebration. But every cultural practice must be assessed by the belief behind it. . And it is very worrisome that even some supposed Christians now see masquerades as mere fun! It is not true. Some educated so-called Christians see masquerades as a cultural heritage that must be preserved; and so even in the developed country like the United States of America, some Africans use the guise of human right to wear masquerades without a clear understanding of the ideological foundation upon which those masquerades stand.

Some of the present vanguards and preachers of masquerades are ignorant of the concrete reality of idolatry as the basis of masquerading but the truth still remains that the above set out ideology is the undertone of masquerading, and we should be on our guard.

The Feast of New Yam and the Feast of Harvest can still be celebrated by villages and communities in a godly way so that there would be no need for masquerades. It can be a season of communal thanksgiving and worship to the Almighty God; a season of gospel outreaches, community prayers for success and development. The Head of villages and communities especially the Christians, can decide to turn the *Onwa Esa* and *Egba Omabe* to seasons of harvest of souls, and by so doing, there will still be custom but with the flavour of Christ.

### **The Culture of Burial**

In the African Traditional Religion, some deaths are regarded as ‘good’ death, while others are regarded as ‘bad’ death. A man or woman who dies a natural death at a good old age is said to have died a ‘good’ death. This type of death is marked by a befitting burial based on strong belief that there is an inseparable relationship between the living, the dead and the unborn.

In order to mark the burial of a man who died a ‘good’ death, he was usually buried with human heads – those who would ‘accompany’ the deceased to the land of the dead. That was the philosophy of burying human beings with human heads. A premature death is not given such befitting burial because it is regarded to be a ‘bad’ death.

The advent of Christianity and the force of the gospel gradually phased away the concept of burying a man with human heads, at least in Igbo land. The elders thought of the nearest, biggest domestic animal that will be used to bury someone who dies a ‘good’ death. The thought gave birth to the use of native cow in burial ceremonies in Igbo land.

Therefore, the philosophy of burial in the African Traditional Religion is the concept of a befitting ‘send forth’ of the deceased by the living into the land of spirits where the deceased would be poised to ‘bless’ the living. All other idolatrous practices during burial actually hinge on this philosophy.

In the light of the above, what should be our attitude to burial? The word of God is clear on the fate of the dead in Christ and how believers should mourn. The dead believer goes to be with the Lord; and our mourning should not be like those who have no hope. Therefore, the idea of wealth exhibition and idol worship during burial should be far from believers. The time of burial should be a good time to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and remind the living the temporal nature of life and as such prepare them for their place in eternity through the gospel. This is a clarion call on us all.

### **The culture of marriage**

Marriage is another means of culture expression. And sincerely speaking, the Igbos have a good marriage system that is almost in extinction on the pretext of civilization. The different marriage stages have solid moral and cultural values. These days, young people can even marry who they are not abreast with their family traits, all in the name of civilization and love for the fiancée. Young people now marry without a structured discipleship into the family life and what that life demands.

Marriage these days has been derogated to mere charade and funfair! In the beginning, it was not so. This is an urgent call to revive those treasures of values in our marriage custom and quickly expunge unwholesome practices in our marriage culture.

## **The culture of Age grade and dressing**

*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God - 1 Cor. 10:31*

The cultures of age grade, cultural dance and dressing are gradually fading away from our social system. The philosophy of Age Grade is the spirit of the contemporary Old Boys Association of schools. The Age Grade of a community is supposed to be a pressure group that engineers the social development of the community. That spirit is worthy of urgent revival. Age Group is derogating to a mere gathering of drunks and oral fighters. This is wrong. The Christian men should take hold of that Group and ensure that the community the Banner of Christ is held high in that Group.

Our culture of dressing speaks chastity (for the women), identity, dignity, reverence, majesty, royalty and glory. These values should be revived. The tide of moral apostasy and culture devaluation is eating deep into the fabrics of our treasured culture of dressing. Christians should be on the guard. The ideology of so-called modern dressing is nudity, irresponsibility and lawlessness. Christian parents should entrench the culture of good dressing in the children. Admitted that schools once in a while do what they call Cultural Day, during which they exhibit cultures in dressing. That is alright and should be encouraged, but the more effective approach is the domestic approach of Christian parents inculcating in the children, emphasizing the moral values attached to the dressing – doing all to the glory of God

Before we conclude, let us draw our attention to the current spat of inter and intra community clashes, miriads of disputes and litigation among individuals, organizations or institutions either for land, inheritance, or other civic right. Some are political while others are even religious or cultural. My concern is that most of these crisis are between Christians and in some quarters among Anglicans in the same Church. This is an error. It is an abomination. It is a taboo. Our culture clearly stated how we should live. As a reminder, listen to these eternal words of truth:

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph.4:1-3*

*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Rom. 12:18*

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Eph.4:31-32*

*If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? 1Jn.4:20*

*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling*

*have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; Eph.4:17-20*

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude this address by drawing our attention to Paul's admonition in 2 Corinthians 7:1, *“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”*

That is to say, the Christian's attitude to culture should be such that glorifies God and the believer should not unequally yoke himself with unbelievers in the name of culture. However, the good aspects of our culture should be preserved and promoted to enhance our identity, dignity, uniqueness and above all, the glory of God expressed in our culture. That is the Biblical ground for the Christian's faith and culture.

Brethren, as our resolve to lift up the banner of Christ wherever we are, let's take Abu 224.

### **Guzo, Guzoro Jisos...**

1. Guzo, guzoroJisus,  
Ndi-aghankeobe!  
Bulieokoloto- Ya  
K'ogharihuiyi.  
Si nanmeri rue nmeri  
O gedundi' agha- Ya;  
K'O we kpochapund'iro,  
GhoOny'isin'ezie.
2. Guzo, guzoroJisus!  
Nuruudaopi,  
Puan'ok'ogun'ubochi  
Nkeotuto- Yanka.  
Unundi-dike, so Ya  
Imegidend'iro;  
Ebeih'ize-ndudi  
K'ike-unuputa!
3. Guzo, guzoroJisus  
Nanin'ikenke- Ya!  
Atukwasila obi  
N'ikenk'anu-aru.  
Yir'ih' aghaChineke,  
Nechenchen'ekpere;  
Eb'oludim'ob'egwu,  
Aghalainoya!
4. Guzo, guzoroJisus!  
Ogugadinw'oge;  
Ta k'uzu-aghanatu,  
Echib'abunmeri.  
Onyenemer'emer

Genweokpunkendu;  
O gesso Ez'otuto  
Bur'ez'ebigh-ebi! *Amen*

Thanks for your attention.

Your brother, friend and father.  
**Aloysius .**