



**NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY**

**WILBERFORCE ISLAND, BAYELSA STATE.**

**38th Inaugural Lecture**

**Title:**

**The Practice of Alternative  
Theatre in Nigeria**

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**23rd June, 2021.**

**Published by:**  
**Niger Delta University Publishers Ltd.**  
Wilberforce Island  
Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

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First Published 2021

ISBN:978-978-57448-8-0

Inaugural Lectures Series No. 38

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*Dedication*

For Monica,  
My wife, Helpmeet, Best friend,  
Trusted Companion & Sweetheart

&

Isaac Isivie  
Our Son, the Joy of Our Lives

**NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY**  
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

***Motto***

Creativity, Excellence, Service

***Vision***

To be a centre of excellence defined by well articulated programmes  
that will produce creative and innovative minds.

***Mission***

To strive to maintain an international reputation for high  
quality scholarship, research and academic excellence  
for the promotion of the socio-cultural and economic well-being of mankind.

**NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY ANTHEM  
(THE BRIGHTEST STAR)**

Like the brightest star we are, to lead the way  
To good education that is all our due,  
The dream of our fathers like the seed has grown;  
Niger Delta University if here to stay.

Let us build on this noble foundation  
And with love, let our dedication increase,  
To rise and uphold this noble vision  
Ev'ry passing moment let our zeal never decrease.

In all that we do, let us bring to mind  
Our duty as staff and students of N.D.U  
Ev'rywhere to promote peace towards mankind,  
Creativity, Excellence and Service.

***CHORUS***

*Rejoice, great people old and new, rejoice  
For the good fruit through us is shown;  
Be glad in our worthy contribution  
To the growth of humanity (x2).*

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Beloved Students of the Niger Delta University, especially our  
artists, artiste and scholars of the future.

My Lords Spiritual and Temporal

Members and friends of the University Community

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

## First Thoughts

I am delighted to be afforded the opportunity of presenting my inaugural lecture today. I am very grateful to God for making this possible here and now. I am here to do a simple job which in academic parlance is named inaugural lecture. Today, I shall enjoy the prerogative of the preacher who when he ascends the podium has the opportunity to preach the good news the way he is led by the Spirit of God. For sincere and committed preachers it is not the matter of whoever pays the piper calls the tune.

Since it is customary in the tradition of inaugural lectures let me introduce myself to some of you who may not be familiar with my academic journey. I began my journey in academia on 1st April 1982, the traditional Fool's Day. It was at the Rivers State College of Education, Peremabiri Campus. But I knew I was not embarking on a foolish venture. The world of ideas can by no means be considered a foolish world. It was only for a short while because by September 24 of the same year I left for the Master of Arts programme at the University of Ibadan.

It was, however, a very intensive exercise as I taught virtually every course in the English programme at the NCE level. I still remember the response of my students to James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* and George Orwell's *1984*. After the MA programme in 1983 I returned and was interviewed and employed afresh in October 1984 at the Rumuolumeni Campus of the Rivers State College of Education, now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt.

Then I was employed as an Assistant Lecturer. At Peremabiri I was a Graduate Assistant. At Rumuolumeni I rose to the rank of Senior Lecturer. I was appointed Head of English Department when I was only Lecturer II. I was unanimously elected the Dean of the School of Languages in 1995 when I had become a Senior Lecturer. I stayed in

that position until 2000 when I left for Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone. When Niger Delta University began in 2000 the pioneer Vice Chancellor, Prof. John Cecil Buseri appealed to me to return home to join the staff of the new university. I returned home on 31st of March 2002 but assumed duty at Wilberforce Island on 11 April 2002.

I assumed the headship of the Theatre Arts Department as soon as I started work at the Niger Delta University. The headship of English Department was added to my list of responsibilities in June that year. The work I did to kick-start both departments from their inception is captured in Prof John Cecil Buseri's book, *Niger Delta University: A People's Dream Realised (98-100)*. My personal testimony about my work in the two departments is contained in *Niger Delta University: The First Ten Years* edited by Chris Ikporukpo, Welford-Abbey Izonfuo and Olanrewaju Omobuwajo (193-196).

Although I was the first professor to be appointed in the Faculty of Arts with effect from 1 October 2009, I have become the third to present an inaugural lecture. Two factors have been responsible. First, I was away from the university for six years, five years on political appointment as the Provost of the Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, and a year of sabbatical leave at the Federal University, Otuoke.

Second, and more importantly, I was averse to the initial designation of my professorial chair as Professor of Dramatic Literature in Theatre Arts. The idea of a Professor of Dramatic Literature in Theatre Arts was certainly misleading, hence, my unwillingness to accept and inaugurate the chair. I am happy that Council on April 15, 2019 approved the proper designation of my chair as Professor of Dramatic Literature and Theatre Arts, almost ten years from the time I was promoted to the rank of Professor. I would like to recognise the immense role my Vice-Chancellor Prof. Samuel Edoumiekumo played in righting the wrong of many years. Thank you, sir. May God bless you.

The present designation best describes the scope of the work I have done over the years from the time of my inception in academia at the Rivers State College of Education, now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, till this day.

### **Setting the Stage: Introduction**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, before I address the main subject of my lecture I shall draw our attention to a phenomenon that is analogous to the dichotomy between mainstream and alternative practice, the kind I shall be dwelling on with the theatre enterprise that is found in the running of media companies. Gill Branston and Roy Stafford establish the difference between the two types of media companies this way. They discuss media production and consumption in terms of mainstream which entails “large-scale activity, with clear commercial purpose, driven primarily by profit motive and representing dominant views of society” (239). They insist that “this is the province of major players” (239). They point to the other kind of production outfit which they refer to as being 'outside the mainstream' to suggest “more localised form of production, and may include educational and training material, parish newsletters, fanzines, etc”(239). The main distinguishing factor between mainstream and alternative from the perspective of media company production is heightened commercialisation in the mainstream and the absence of it in the alternative production scheme.

## **The Address**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, let me now address the subject of my lecture **The Practice of Alternative Theatre in Nigeria**. The idea of Alternative Theatre may be strange to some students as well as practitioners of theatre. It is my burden, therefore, to explain it. What is alternative theatre? What is it an alternative to? Alternative theatre is the opposite of Mainstream Theatre. Conventionally, mainstream theatre is unionised theatre which is regulated and practised for the sole purpose of business with all the rules, regulations, practices, conventions and structures that are attendant on it. Mainstream theatre is not the National Theatre of any country nor is it the theatre that is established by any state government as part of the ministry of Culture and Information, what is commonly referred to as Arts and Cultural Centres in Nigeria. It is a highly organised theatre business, the apex which we find in the Broadway example in New York and the West End in London.

Mainstream theatre is not the kind of subsidized theatre we find anywhere in the world. Mainstream theatre is theatre that is set up as business, employing workers from the various unionised groups and paying salaries that are agreed upon by the unions and the theatre owners who in turn pay taxes and all forms of levies that are accruable to the government at various levels.

Looking at it strictly from that perspective we have never had that kind of theatre in Nigeria, not even during the colonial era. Our practice in theatre began from the alternative perspective even from inception at independence in 1960. But from the British and American paradigms we can establish the factors that gave birth to the emergence of the alternative theatre traditions. My concern here is to present alternative theatre from the perspective of theatrical organisation, management and production as well as with the dramas that have been created and produced in it. But in a way it could be looked at as experimental theatre since it is “a negation of

the conventional theatre” and does not admit “fixed canons” (Okpadah 490).

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, since our focus is on the alternative theatre practice in Nigeria let me relate our practice here to its antecedents to the British paradigm. This is where we shall begin this discourse. Alternative Theatre is described by Laurence Kitchin as the “contemporary set up, or the new drama” (46). But Ronald Hayman regards it as anti-establishment theatre (24). Peter Roberts, however, describes it as underground theatre” or “fringe theatre (96). In fact, he argues that the umbrella “Alternative Theatre” is a safe one under which to bring any theatre group which provides an alternative to the mainstream commercial theatre or established theatre (96) that Kitchin regards as “conformist theatre” (46). It is the same notion that is expressed by Sandy Craig who describes Alternative Theatre as a theatre that is established in conscious opposition to both commercial and subsidized theatres (10). But Steve Gooch observes that Alternative Theatre came into existence in opposition to, as well as a complement to the subscribed range of conventional established theatre. Established theatre comprises West End and the nationally subsidized theatres and the regional repertory companies (10).

According to Arnold P. Hinchcliffe, the emergence of Alternative Theatre was prompted by the need to use theatre as a means of apprehending the realities in human existence. Writers, actors, and directors were no longer satisfied with merely entertaining people. This led to the production of dramas, which assessed human experience in terms of psychological distress and political reasoning (189). In this regard, Craig asserts that:

Alternative theatre almost alone amongst the arts in the past decade has identified itself with that tradition of the oppressed, which teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the

exception but the rule. It became a social seismograph of the seventies, registering long-buried underground pressures well before they rose to the surface of social life. And, in this process of expression, it helped to bring into existence hidden, exploratory ways of feeling and perception (9).

Craig traces the evolution of the Alternative Theatre in Britain from the 'underground' to 'fringe' and 'alternative' but maintains “that over the years it has always been separated from the commercial and bourgeois theatres” (10). Catherine Itzin also attempts an evolutionary development of Alternative Theatre from its earliest beginnings in Britain to the present era. She asserts that the alternatives to establishment theatre were called 'underground' in the early sixties. The notion underground implied that they were subversive to some extent.

Towards the end of the sixties the alternative theatres were called 'fringe' theatres. The change in the label did not necessarily mean that there was a change in the content of the work they were doing. The implication of the change was that the alternatives to establishment theatre were then on the periphery of the centre. At the moment the alternatives to mainstream theatres are simply known as alternative (172).

Simon Trussler disagrees with Craig and Itzin about the evolutionary pattern in the development of Alternative Theatre in Britain. As far as he is concerned the 'fringe' era even preceded the 'underground' days. He argues that fringe theatre came into being during the Aldermaston period, and that it was a political theatre, which adopted conventional channels of work. The insufficiency or ineffectiveness of the solutions proffered through fringe theatre then led to the development of the underground theatre (13). But he endorses the mission of the present alternative theatre. According to him:

The 'alternative' theatre is chiefly characterized by a 'new willingness to respond to community needs: and at its best it does combine the political commitment of the 'fringe' with the flair and the guts of the most successful 'underground' (13).

In this way, Trussler recognizes the distinctiveness of alternative theatre, which he would not like to be compromised with the institutionalized or mainstream theatre in Britain (12).

### **Characteristics of Alternative Theatre**

By nature, alternative theatre is amorphous and heterogeneous. It represents a *mélange* of attitudes against the established theatre such as those who are bent on working in the theatre and others who would like to remodel it (Hayman 221). Some alternative theatres, are political in nature, they serve to further some ideological purposes. Some theatres are community-services oriented. Such theatres carry out social objectives. Some theatres are formed by people who could not get jobs elsewhere (Hayman 221). As Steve Gooch suggests, they could not wait in the sidelines to be allowed a place in the established theatre. They had confidence in their ability to work in the theatre.

Besides, they wanted to communicate their experience of the world through a medium they knew was readily available but were made distant to them by the necessity of the economics of production. The only answer was to begin something (23). What's more, the desire for artistic expression that may serve as an avenue for self-fulfillment (Hayman 225). Other considerations for engaging in alternative theatres include aesthetic approaches, organizational structures, work methods, and preferred location or geography.

In dealing with the formation of alternative theatre, Gooch underlines two factors, which always govern the production of art:

first, you cannot prevent people saying what's on their mind simply by closing the principal channels of communication to them. Second, artists in any society will inevitably work either through or around the channels that are available (33).

## **Manifestations of Alternative Theatre**

Since Alternative Theatre is heterogeneous in nature, it cannot easily be categorized. The boundaries between areas are fluid. Some groups sometimes begin as one kind of theatre and end up as something else. Despite the propensity for change that is evident in alternative theatre groups, broad lines of development in it have been established earlier on, and it can be classified into the following categories: **political theatre companies, community theatre, theatre-in-education** and **performance art groups** (Craig, 20). Gooch adds **feminist theatre** and **ethnic theatre** (10) to Craig's list of some of the manifestations of alternative theatre. Augusto Boal would not want any distinction drawn between any kind of theatre and politics. He believes that "all theatre is necessarily political because all the activities of human beings are political and theatre is one of them" (ix). He insists that "those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error and this is a political attitude" (ix). He is not alone in holding this view. Denise Nicholas corroboratively affirms "as a matter of essential form, the theatre, all the arts in fact, are political. The question is whose political interest a particular theatre or a particular production will serve (74).

Basically, a **political theatre** is one, which uses theatre to express a political point of view. What it is intended for is political communication (Gooch 10). This kind of theatre is the most pervasive of all forms of alternative theatre. It is relied upon in the furtherance of a group's cause be it the black liberation movement in the United States of America or the black consciousness movement in South Africa. Of course, just as the Black Liberation Movement in the United States of America gave rise to black revolutionary theatre

(Hill 408) so did the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa beget “new drama” in South Africa (Horn 221). New black drama is devoted “to the bold purpose of developing political awareness towards ultimate liberation (Horn 221). This theatre is particularly characterized by its exclusiveness to the extent that it has adopted a policy of disallowing whites from participating in production or attending performances as patrons (Horn 225).

Political theatre calls for commitment on the part of its operators. People must be agitated enough by a cause in order to get involved. For instance, as noted already, the Black Nationalist Movement in the United States of America provoked the need for the establishment of theatres to further its cause. As Cassandra Medley claims “with the Black Nationalist Movement coming there was a demand for a wider range of literature and a demand of new voices” (57). As a response for the demand for new voices black theatre groups grew. Medley observes further that “we developed our separate Black theatre groups both within the community and in the university. Within the university students directed plays by Blacks. I directed Leroi Jones' *Dutchman* (58).

Theatres that grew out of the movement were protest theatres. They were minority theatres, which spoke to white Americans about the deprivations blacks had suffered (Oliver and Sills 23). Political theatre, however, is not a new phenomenon. Even though its manifestation in some parts of the world may be recent, yet it existed in Russia prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1905 workers started drama circle in several parts of Russia but it was suppressed. But following the revolution of 1917, drama, was officially incorporated as a tool of agitation and education (Howard 54). In the United States of America too, political theatres existed as far back as the 1920s. Its first manifestation was the workers' theatre, which came into existence under the aegis of the Workers' Drama League in 1926 (Bernard 53). By 1927 John Howard Lawson and John Dos Passos and others established the New Playwrights. This theatre was

established in defense of the under-privileged.

Following in the heels of New Playwrights was the League of Workers' Theatre which was formed in 1932. This was an amalgam of the best of agitprop troupes that were formed in the United States of America (Bernard 54). Political theatre played a part in China during the period prior to the 1949 revolution. Political theatre was used during the civil war, the anti-Japanese war and the war of liberation. When the Communist Party assumed power in 1949 it used drama as one of its resources for mobilizing the people towards creating an industrialized society (Howard 55).

Martin Esslin sees **political theatre** beyond the scope of John McGrath's theatre, codenamed 7:84, a socialist theatre in Britain, which is established to awaken in the working class the knowledge of the fact that they are exploited. The company, which is made up mostly of Marxists, strives to make the working class take pride in their values, which are better than those of the middle class or upper class.

In fact, the name of the theatre "7:84" serves as a way of reminding them that 84 percent of the wealth of Britain is in the hands of 7 percent of the people (Hayman 222). Esslin argues that theatre because it is a pre-eminently social form of art is political. He, therefore, insists that every play is a political event: it either re-asserts or undermines the code of conduct of a given society (29). Every drama is partisan. The political dimension of the theatre is evidenced by the development of national theatres by most modern nations of the world. A National Theatre, according to him, is an institution that is established to contribute to a nation's image of itself (29-30). He adds that some nations have national plays, which are performed on important occasions in order to re-affirm its nationhood. He cites Goethe's *Faust* as the German national play. The French have Moliere and Racine whose plays they produce while the English have Shakespeare. According to him *Henry V* is the English national play

(30).

The next theatre within the ambience of alternative theatre I shall consider is **community theatre**. Community theatres are theatres that are based in a particular locality and which see as an important part of their work the generation of a geographically local culture. Their productions would always express the viewpoint and culture of the people in that area (Gooch 9). Some community-oriented theatres are touring companies but they always endeavour to consider doing plays that would express the interest and concerns of people in the area they visit. Ed Berman's Inter Action and Doggs' Troupe are examples of community theatre. Inter Action was established with the main aim of utilizing the arts, particularly drama, in a way that it would be useful in the lives of the people in the urban community so that it could help break down cultural boundaries that may be in existence in such groups (Hayman 216). Doggs' Troupe was established as a street theatre group, which was to serve children by giving them improvised performances. This group was particularly designed to take drama to a volatile area such as Notting Hill, which was the home of social upheavals. The intention was to involve audience in-group improvisations as a way of diffusing tension and making for integration. This experiment was to be carried out in the street, play ground and amusement park (Hayman 219).

**Theatre-in-Education** companies are part of alternative theatre. They see it as their brief to service school-age children within their catchment area (Gooch 9). They do plays that would meet the needs of children at particular times in particular places. The productions are sometimes participatory. In the main, they are a form of developmental drama which is geared towards strengthening the child's self-expression and also to enable him develop his/her critical appreciation of the world (Omoera "Repositioning Early Childhood" 60). Bill Martin spearheaded the work of theatre – in- Education in Britain with his Contemporary Theatre (Craig 24). Other theatres like Nottingham, Salisbury, Bristol, Exeter, The Belgrade Theatre and

Coventry have Theatre-in-Education team (Woolgar 84).

**Performance Art** also belongs to the alternative theatre spectrum. It is a form of production or performance in which unscripted mélange of elements of theatre are married together with music, the visual arts and dance to form a theatrical amalgamation (Carney 39). Performance art owes its influence to 'Happenings'. Happenings was anti-commercial. The art product was to be shared freely with the audience wherever there was space. Happenings militated against the idea of showcasing the art product by agents (Carney 41). Happenings as a form of theatrical production began in 1952. But it was in 1959 Alan Kaprow first used the word. He produced, what he called, an 'event' which he christened '18 happenings in 6 parts' (Marowitz 181-182). Happenings are based upon a 'score' or scenario, which could be compared in depth of detail to a musical score. They also incorporate elements of the spontaneous via improvisation, but those are prepared for not rehearsed (Marowitz 183).

**Feminist Theatre** as a category of alternative theatre grew out of the women's movement. This theatre identifies its work with the movement (Gooch 10). The Sistren Collective in Kingston, Jamaica is a good example of feminist theatre. The group was formed in May 1977. The membership comprised twelve working class women who worked as street-cleaners. The leader of the group, however, was Honor Ford-Smith who at that time worked at the Jamaica School of Drama. What motivated the formation of the group was the desire to do plays about the sufferings of women. In Stephen Langley's estimation they were propelled by the humanistic motivation (7) to engage in theatre. They wanted the truth about the sufferings of women in Jamaica to be revealed through the medium of the theatre. About the methods of operation of the Sistren Collective, Ketu Katrak notes that:

Working class women's personal experiences form

the base and inspiration for Sistren's many theatrical productions, their collective organization and drama techniques. Their progressive political agenda explores working class women's daily struggles and links them to the larger structure of social, economic and power relations within society. In creating an artistic space, through dramas from women's personal stories, Sistren illustrates how the very naming of personal oppressions is a first group step towards a struggle for social change. (Katrak 27)

The Sistren Collective's rise to fame was rapid. Under the artistic directorship of Honor Ford-Smith they did *Downpression Get a Blow* (1977), *Belly Women Bangarang* (1978), *OPH*(1983) *Nanayah Muffet inna a wi*, and *Domestick* (1984) (Katrak 27). About the goals and orientation of Sistren, Ketu Katrak sums up in this way:

Sistren's plays successfully embody a dialectic relationship between culture and politics. Further, their artistic agenda recognizes culture as politics, cultural production as tools of resistance to oppression. Their work gives new and vital resource to a well-worn phrase, namely, the personal-as-political. In the best tradition of political theatre, using song, ritual, Caribbean and African roots of feminist traditions, Sistren explore concrete steps towards social justice and equalit (28).

**Ethnic theatre** is another category of alternative theatre that I shall discuss. Ethnic theatres are created to cater for the needs in a given minority community (Gooch 10). Ethnic theatres existed in the United States of America as far back as the 1920s. There were theatres performing in German, Italian, Hungarian, Swedish, Yiddish and many other languages. Some of these theatres though they were isolated from the nerve centre of the American theatrical activity,

rose to prominence within their spheres of influence.

Two of such groups that rose to prominence were Artef, a Jewish workers' theatre and the Ukrainian Dramatic circle (Heinz 53). When The Free Southern Theatre was established in Mississippi in 1963, it was set up as a minority theatre. Gilbert Moses, one of its founders, observes that the theatre was meant “to deal with black artists and the black audience” (Dent 9). Thomas Dent, another of the originators, argues that it was necessary for black people to have their own theatre. Broadway and other regional theatres had nothing to do with black lives. A form in which the theatricality of the black church, the black freedom movement, black music, black militancy, black power as it was conceived could be dramatized publicly was very much in demand (xi). Only a black theatre would serve all these purposes.

**Christian Theatre** is the last manifestation of alternative theatre I shall discuss. Christian theatre is a theatre of commitment. Christian theatre is defined as one which is established to communicate biblical truth through its productions of skits, sketches improvisations, operas, reviews and plays (Agoro “Definition of Christian Drama and Theatre” 195). According to Jeanette Clift George the goal of a Christian theatre “is to present original plays which draw on Christian materials in order to show the relevance of biblical truth today (22). The growth of Christian Theatre in the last few years of the twenty first century has taken a tremendous dimension. In the United States of America Christian theatres exist as part of the work of many local churches (Egbunu 12-13).

With the establishment of the graduate university, Christian Broadcasting Network University at West Beach, Virginia, now renamed Regent University; Christian theatre received serious attention in the academia. Besides, the trend in the growth of Christian theatre has witnessed the emergence of even a specialized

group such as the EPPIC, whose mission is “showing the Gospel on stage without words”. EPPIC's mission is summoned up in the words of one of its members Mikael Rudolph this way:

EPPIC is a group, which performs the Gospel through the art of mime. Their performances are accompanied by recorded music with small narration. We pantomime scenes from the Old Testament, and New Testament, as well as contemporary Christian drama... Our ministry's base is three fold. First, it is a discipleship ministry to the members who are involved. Second, it provides encouragement to other Christians through performances in churches. And third, we want to reach people in prisons, schools and on the street (29).

EPPIC, according to another member Tom Downs, stands for “Each person personally in Christ”. He says that though the group began as a youth group in one church, it has grown into an inter-denominational faith mission (29). Stanley Williford reports another dimension in which Christian Theatre has grown in the United States of America. He cites the impact of Christian theatre on off-Broadway. He traces the career of Evangelist turned actor Brent Grosvenor whose play “From My Rags to Riches” played off-Broadway six times in November 1999 at the respected Lamb's Theatre in New York. Before its production in New York, the play has had performances at local churches, theatres and civic centres in the Tucson, Arizona area. Against standard theatre practice “the performances at the Lamb's Theatre always conclude with an altar call.” Williford reports, Grosvenor's claims, he has had the distinction of being the first to offer an altar call at either a Broadway or off Broadway show (28).

In Britain, too, Christian theatres were established as part of church

ministries. For example, The Riding Lights Theatre Company was established as part of the work of St. Michael-le-Belfrey, York, in 1977 by Paul Burbridge and Murray Watts (Burbridge and Watts 11). Leonard, L (personal communication, March 1992) reported that Steve and Janet Stickley formed Footprints “with initial aim of bringing drama into the life and mission of the church”. Other groups that have been formed are Arts Centre Group, Upstream Theatre Club, Aldersgate Productions, Cornerstone, Back to Back Theatre Companies, Primary Colours and Direction Mime (Burbridge and Watts 24).

Apart from the United States of America and Britain, Christian Theatre exists elsewhere in the world where the faith is preached. In Nigeria, Christian theatre which was initiated through the missionary effort (Agoro “Precursors of Modern Drama and Theatre in Nigeria” 13-27) has flourished so much and now finds its recent manifestation in the genre Nigerian video films (Oha 94). Beyond discussing Christian theatre within the Alternative Theatre family, Zikky Kofoworola argues that it could stand on its own as “The Ultimate Theatre”. He avers that the theatre that deals with the relationship between God the Creator and mankind his creatures could not be said to be alternative to anything. It should be the Ultimate Theatre (Agoro *A Handbook of the Ultimate Theatre* v).

## **Defining Features of Alternative Theatre**

I have tried so far to provide outlines of the categories within the alternative theatre 'family.' As Sandy Craig has pointed out, there are several points of divergence among alternative theatre groups. Differences occur in content, form and context. They also differ ideologically. There are socialists, anarchists, feminists and social democrats among alternative theatre practitioners. They also disagree about the function of their art and have different theories about theatre. For some, theatre is a mode of individual expression;

others see theatre as a weapon. For others still, theatre is seen as community expression, while for others theatre is a dialectical mirror (Craig 28). But in spite of all these differences, alternative theatres share a number of characteristics, which set them apart from the established or commercial theatre. First in terms of location, alternative theatre takes place in public house, on buses, as well as in the street. Sometimes, alternative theatre is housed in basement and attic theatres (Robert 96). The scope of the location of alternative theatre embraces the church, the schoolroom, the loft, the cellar, the meeting hall and the store-front (Bentley 413). Really, anywhere an audience could be attracted to watch a performance could serve for alternative theatre. Besides, alternative theatre does not take place during the conventional time of commercial theatre. Some alternative theatre companies or groups open at lunch time or very late at night (Robert 96).

Moreover, the scale of production in alternative theatre is small. Its plays are done before small audiences. It is a minority theatre. Hence, its production is characterized by small audiences found in small places in which the relationship between actor and the audience could be very intimate. Also, the scripts done are usually short; one-act plays (Robert 96). Because of financial constraints, alternative theatre groups could not afford the stage technology and detailed, expensive naturalistic sets (Craig 17).

Furthermore, as an alternative to the commercial theatre, money is not the motivating factor behind the establishment of alternative theatre companies. These companies subsist on grants that are made available to them by individuals or some institutions. Some, however, charge fees that by commercial standards would look ridiculous. But in the majority of alternative theatre companies, theatre is made virtually free to all who would like to attend (Robert 100). Because most alternative theatres do not usually have regular theatres at which they do their plays, most of them embark on touring. This is one basic way in which they create audiences for productions from one town to another. Normally, alternative theatre

audiences do not like to pay high sum of money to watch a production. They would really like it to be free.

Indeed, people who constitute the audience at alternative theatre productions are people who are mostly not enthusiastic about theatre. They are more or less coaxed into watching plays. In some cases plays are done in pubs. Members of the audience then combine eating and watching plays in a single ticket (Hayman 222).

As for the content of plays produced, alternative theatre groups have paid considerable attention to the areas of decay and moral breakdown in contemporary society. Whereas commercial theatre, because it is committed to entertainment, has veered away from this area, “alternative theatre groups have, on the contrary seized on the decadent and the immoral and thrown the result straight in the face of the public” (Robert 102-103). Alternative theatre companies are established to meet the needs of specific audiences. These audiences are drawn from a wide cross-section of the community. It is, therefore, necessary to produce for them plays that would suit their needs. Plays are done for audiences on a general or particular basis. Really, each Alternative Theatre determines not only its mode of production but the particular audience to serve (Itzin 6).

Alternative theatre companies, because they operate outside the conventional perimeters of the establishment theatre with its conventions and aesthetic parameters, have developed many flexible forms. Plays are normally scripted but they always make room for improvisation. The productions are mostly designed to accommodate audience involvement or participation. This could take the form of sing-song dialectical interaction or post production interaction. At other times, productions are in the form of shows or are plays done in a show-like manner involving the following elements: plot structure with strong narratives, mostly comic and music (Itzin 7).

## The Practice of Alternative Theatre in Nigeria

I shall devote this part of the lecture to examine to what extent the various manifestations of alternative theatre are practised in Nigeria. My starting point is **Theatre-in-Education**. Theatre exists at all levels of our educational institutions. Even at nursery and primary levels our kids are taught to appreciate and learn how to express themselves through theatre. That is why school functions often have theatrical activities as part of the programmes. At the secondary school level, the presence of Dramatic Societies is an acknowledged phenomenon. Theatre enthusiasts have always worked with such groups to create performances that have entertained school and community.

The visit of a Dramatic Society from another school to do a performance used to be celebrated in the school calendar. Professor Barth Oshionebo in his inaugural lecture “Drama and Theatre-in-Education and the Educational Theatre of the Future” has paid considerable attention to the subject in its multifaceted dimensions. I should, therefore, concern myself with the idea of **Educational Theatre** which I am referring to here as productions that are done in the premises of an educational institution, especially at the tertiary levels. Stephen Langley describes it as “any theatre sponsored by an educational institution” (141). John E. Clifford sees it as “theatre that is part of an educational institution” (17).

I have referred to it in another study as the school play which is the drama production that is done by a primary school, a secondary school, a department of English or Theatre Arts in a tertiary institution (Agoro, *Theatre and Drama in Education* 76). Barclays F. Ayakoroma attributes the survival of theatre practice in the educational institutions to two main factors: first, is the availability of ready audience at productions at college and university campuses.

The second factor is the use of productions to assess students in some courses. Besides, theatre is used as a means of communicating vital information or messages to the academic communities (529).

Prior to the commencement of the premier Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan in 1970, theatrical activities were in existence at the University of Ibadan and other universities in Nigeria. Theatrical productions took place under the auspices of the Dramatic Societies that existed in each university, usually promoted by lecturers in the English Department who were theatre enthusiasts. The case of the University of Ibadan is worth citing here. Joel Adeyinka Adedeji in the first inaugural lecture in Theatre Arts in an African University presented the emergence of two dramatic societies from one common inspiration in the University of Ibadan.

He mentioned that in the early days of the university an Arts Theatre was put in place to serve “as a place for open lectures, concerts and film-shows” (Adedeji 8). The coming of Mr. Geoffrey Axworthy as a lecturer in 1956 to the English Department was the critical factor in putting the Arts Theatre to use as a place where productions would be done by dramatic societies in the university. In his undergraduate days at Oxford University he was a member of the Oxford University Dramatic Society (O.U.D.S). He presented a paper that led to the inauguration of the Arts Theatre Management Committee which was responsible to Senate and charged “to manage the Theatre and plan its further development.” It insisted that “in managing the theatre, the cultural and academic interests should guide the committee in its work” (Adedeji 8). It is Adedeji's contention that it was the work of the Arts Theatre Management Committee (ATMC) that led to the emergence of two amateur dramatic societies: the University College Dramatic Society (a student group) and the Arts Theatre Production Group (a staff group) (Adedeji 8). Apart from the two dramatic societies, four other cultural groups emerged and made use of the place. They were:

1. The Music Circle

2. The Ibadan Operatic Society
3. The Film Society and
4. The Hoi Phrontestai (for classical plays in Greek and Latin (Adedeji 8-9).

Matthew Umukoro corroborated the submission of Adedeji about the existence of the Arts Theatre Production Group and University of College Dramatic Society as the dramatic societies that existed prior to the emergence of Theatre Arts as a discipline in the university. He, however, mentions that 'The Players at Dawn' that was formed in 1959, a year before independence was the dramatic society that preceded the ones Adedeji mentioned in his submission (101-102). Umukoro further documents that Dapo Adelugba was the leader of the University of College Dramatic Society. Under him, University College Ibadan Travelling Theatre started in March 1961 (102). What started at the University of Ibadan in 1970 has now spread to over forty-six universities and twenty-six colleges of education. There are even departments of Theatre Arts in some Polytechnics (Illah ix). So, play production has become a regular event at these institutions. Where regular departments of theatre arts do not exist, the tradition of the existence of dramatic societies is still in place. Some people may prefer to call it cultural societies nowadays. We now have many more playwrights in these institutions than in the past.

Since plays must reflect society and for the Nigerian playwright, his society, one aspect of the society we find treated mostly in plays is our politics. We have used our creative works to do a study of our politics. Ironically, politicians hardly ever watch what we do. When they are invited at command performances they are in too light a mood that they can seldom take in anything by way of the message of the play. Sometimes they think they have been trapped to come to make a donation of a sort. So, they would be thinking of how much they should give while the play is on such that it detracts them from enjoying and absorbing the message of the play. But we do stage political plays in our campuses. Our plays have always been vehicles with which we carry political messages across to the audience. So,

political theatres exist in Nigeria.

**Political Theatres** exist in Nigeria but not exactly in the form of established companies doing productions, either in one city or in a number of cities, or as travelling companies presenting political plays from one town or city to another in Nigeria. But Nigerians have shown great fecundity in writing and producing plays that are very suitable for political communication. This is because they have such messages enshrined in plays that portray politics in one guise or another. Since the era of *Yoruba Ronu (Yoruba Think)*, a play by Hubert Ogunde, which treated the political division in the Western Region between Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Samuel O. Akintola at that time in an allegorical manner that led to the banning of his theatre company in 1964 (Ebun Clark 58), political theatre has assumed a definite pattern of growth in this country.

We can now even attempt a discussion of the taxonomy of political theatre in Nigeria. Basically, there are five types of political plays in Nigeria. The first category of plays that are historical in nature but deals with the politics of resistance to colonialism and its aftermath we find in Ola Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Akassa Youmi, Minima's *King Jaja*, Matthew Umukoro's *Nana Olomu*, among others.

The second category of political plays is that which advocates for regime change. An existing regime that is incapable of dealing with the yearnings of the people must be butted out of office. Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon* fits into this category. The question of political change is his main preoccupation in *Farewell to Babylon*. Babylon is in dire need of change in its political structure. Who would bring about the change? Onita whom others regard as a messiah declines to assume the preposterous role. Rather, he suggests that each person should look for the messiah in himself. In this way, Sowande debunks the pseudo-messiahs Africa has produced in the political arena and in some intellectuals who

masquerade themselves as messiahs and cry for the well-being of the masses while seeking for opportunities to use the masses as the springboard for their own causes in life. But we find regime change even in a historical play such as *Kurunmi* by Ola Rotimi.

Philip S. Bagu in “The Nature and Character of Politics in Nigeria: Lessons from Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*” sees the militarization of the Nigerian political landscape as one of the major concerns of Rotimi in the play (126). His analysis of Lejoka Brown's failure in applying military tactics to politics is very apt. But the play treats the issue of regime change vividly. Sikira the third wife of Rahman Taslim Lejoka-Brown emerges as a winner in an election which he had struggled hard to win. His party is defeated by his wife's party.

There is also regime change in Barclays Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave* which Olu Obafemi classifies as a political play (8). The play presents the motif of sex and rebellion at the grassroots level in a tragic dimension. Not much is shown in the relationship between Olotu and Alaere. The conflict between them is defined in light of the protest for equality with men which the women of Toru-Ama stage. The idea of equality *per se* as requested by the women could have been negotiated in an atmosphere of cordiality. Where love exists Alaere the Queen, could have solicited for the womenfolk with the Olotu the King. But that is not the case between Olotu and Alaere who seems to be the prime mover of the trouble in Toru-Ama. She takes the lead to undermine the authority of her husband the King. In this way, she stages a coup which succeeds. This is because the King, unable to withstand the stress of his wife's undermining of his authority and denial of the fatherhood of his daughter commits suicide.

The third category of political plays deals with dictatorial governments and corrupt institutions and systems where the rights of the people are infringed upon at will by those in position of authority.

My paper “The Motif of Political Tyranny in *Kongi's Harvest*” (93-103) by Wole Soyinka is a good example of an analysis of such a political system. But I have also explored the theme of political tyranny in *The Gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, in *Topics in Modern African Drama* (3-14), looking at both plays as political theatres. The event of the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa, the international writer, human and environmental rights activist by hanging by the General Sani Abacha's regime, produced repertoire of political plays the most notable in the genre being Adinoyi Ojo Onukaba's *The Killing Swamp* and Uwemedimo Atakpo's *Ken Saro Wiwa-N-the Niger Delta Trial*.

The fourth category of political plays involves the search for and creation of political space. The first attempt of a play in this vein was done by Simon Ambakederemo in his *Isaac Boro*. Ben Binebai's *Drums of the Delta* amplifies it.

Then we have the fifth category of political plays - the Marxist plays or those inspired by Marxist tenets. In this classification the plays of Femi Osofisan feature prominently. As Okpadah would say “Femi Osofisan in his attempt to create a theatre that would reflect the Nigerian socio-political structure, brought to the fore a revolutionary theatre located in the Marxist tradition” (493). Sam Ukala's dramaturgy is also located in the revolutionary and Marxist aesthetics. His plays which incorporate Marxist aesthetics in the judgment of Stephen O. Okpadah include *The Placenta of Death* (2007), *Akpakaland* (2011) and *Break a Boil* (2011). These plays he insists “are homilies on class struggle.” The production of these plays are not located to a given theatre house where political plays are done. The plays have found their ways into many production arenas throughout the length and breadth of the country.

**Feminist Theatres** just as there are no companies that exist in the name of political theatres in Nigeria, we do not have theatre companies that could be described as **Feminist Theatres**. No

individual feminist or coalition of feminists has started companies that are devoted to the production of plays to further the feminist cause in Nigeria. But plays exist in Nigerian dramatic literatures that have dealt with virtually all the nuances of the feminist manifestation and expectation. Theoretical works abound in which the feminist cause is expounded and clarified in several depths of treatment. Nigerian academics and scholars have dealt in a tireless manner on the subject. Ironically, we even study feminist playwrights in a number of courses in our departments of Theatre Arts in Nigeria but the practical realisation of having a theatre to produce feminist plays to the exclusion of other works remains a challenge for our generation. A cursory look at these titles: *Nigerian Feminist Theatre: Essays on Female Axes in Contemporary Nigerian Drama* by Mabel Tobrise, *African Women Drama and Performance* edited by Irene Agunloye as well as the majority of the essays in *Gender Discourse in African Theatre, Literature and Visual Arts: A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Mabel Evwierhoma* edited by Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh and Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma will demonstrate the understanding of the feminist cause presented in these essays.

Like political theatre, feminist theatre is promoted in the productions that are done in the tertiary institutions in the country without a designated company we can point to as a feminist theatre. Our challenge remains The Sistren Collective in Kingston, Jamaica, feminist theatre which was formed in May 1977. The leader of the group was Honor Ford-Smith who at that time worked at the Jamaica School of Drama. The membership comprised twelve working class women who worked as street-cleaners.

**Ethnic Theatres** by definition from the perspective of alternative theatre do not exist in Nigeria. What is an ethnic theatre? An **Ethnic Theatre** is a minority theatre that is established to serve a given ethnic minority outside their geographical area. A theatre company that is formed in Ilesha which goes to reside in Ibadan to do

performances does not qualify to be called an ethnic theatre. But if that theatre settles and does production in the Yoruba language in Port Harcourt, Owerri, Benin City, Calabar, Kano or even in Yenagoa to a collection of theatre-goers, then it could qualify as an ethnic theatre. Looked from this angle we could have an Izon theatre in Ajegunle which will qualify to be classified as an ethnic theatre but if one is established in Amassoma it cannot qualify. This is also a challenge for the future. As we are concerned about the maintenance of our cultural way of life, ethnic theatre as a medium could come in handy. We do not need too large a number of people to constitute the audience in any given performance be it at ethnic or community theatre. Of course, there is no given maximum number to be in attendance for theatre to take place.

**Performance Art** as a manifestation of alternative theatre does not exist in Nigeria. For us here we stress the utilitarian purpose of art. We hardly can do a production which does not serve a purpose of a kind. Some of our productions especially in educational theatres do combine certain elements of Performance Art such as the marriage of music and dance along with pantomime and acrobatics as well as masquerades within the performance milieu. Even when that occurs we would prefer to call it 'total theatre' than subordinate to a different art form. We really could appropriate Carney's submission and insist that aspects of Performance Art such as "unscripted mélange of elements of theatre are married together with music... and dance do belong to 'total theatre'.

**Community Theatre** is a veritable form in which theatre, as a kind of entertainment, is created and consumed. This is one type of theatre that is so widespread in the country. There is no major town or city in Nigeria that we do not have a community theatre of one form or another. G. Olu Akomolafe asserts that "almost every state of the country has an Arts Council with theatrical activities (114)." Apart from the theatres that exist as part of the Arts Centres in virtually every state capital in the Federation and Abuja, little play houses

adorn the cultural landscape of the nation. Patrick-Jude Oteh in “Community Theatre Practice in Nigeria” (2020) situates his discussion within the framework of a definition of the concept. He says “community theatres refer to theatres that are based within communities performing a variety of shows or performing only one type of performance. The actors in the community theatre are also peculiar – they do not have to have any experience or training.

It is a theatre that survives solely on “come and show what you can do.” He adds that “community theatre will be viewed as the drama of, by, and for a community that appropriates artistic practices for its own desires, which are not always in accordance with those of mainstream theatre practices.” Oteh's work is very useful and insightful as he makes a list of some prominent groups among the community theatre movement around Nigeria. His list includes: the defunct Ayota Play House of late Segun Taiwo, Chuck Mike's Collective Artistes/Performance Studio Workshop, Ben Tomolaju and Company, Fred Agbeyegbe/Jide Ogungbade's-Ajo Productions, Joseph Fom's Black Heritage Theatre, Jos, Segun Adefila's-Crown Troupe of Africa, Bariga, Lagos, Bode Sowande's Odu Themes Meridien/Bode Sowande Theatre Academy and Patrick-Jude Oteh's Jos Repertory Theatre. This list is not exhaustive.

The foregoing is here to represent one form of theatrical manifestation that exists in Nigeria. Barclays Ayakoroma commends the Jos Repertory Theatre for sustaining the yearly Jos Festival of Plays which begun in 2004. He describes the positive impact the group has created this way: “it is gratifying to note that in spite of the current crisis in Jos, the group still organised the Jos Festival of Plays this year” It is his submission that theatre has always been “a veritable medium for social cohesion and integration” (534).

## **Theatre-for-Development**

A cursory look at the idea Theatre-for-Development (TfD) may suggest that its existence is only in the realm of mere academic

exercise. It may be assumed that it consists only in few exercises that are geared towards doing some superficial projects for the purpose of earning degrees or writing some journal articles. It may not seem to have enduring projects. Some may question if any project done within the framework of Theatre-for-Development has ever been replicated in other areas with any measure of success. These may appear to be some of the misgivings Tfd suffered from the time of its inception. But a practice that has lasted for over a period of thirty-five years in John Egwugwu Illah's estimation (ix) has certainly outgrown and outlived these suspicions and misgivings.

Theatre-for-Development has evolved its poetics and it is only proper that people who practice it subject themselves to understand it in all its ramifications. It is one form of alternative theatre that has grown out of a very rigorous workshop tradition. Barth Oshionebo describes it as “the people's theatre which serves as an effective agent of education, information, change and development. It is a theatre that addresses the problems which confront a community, problems that need to be addressed and solved in order to usher in development”(21).

According to Frances Harding the underlying principle of Theatre-for-Development is the theory of education posited by Paulo Freire in which the notion of a 'narrative stance' adopted by an 'educator' confronting a passive 'audience' of learners is rejected in favour of a shared participatory approach of learning in which members of a group learn from each other. Each individual brings different knowledge to a group and by exchanging it, acquires more knowledge and greater understanding of how the parts create the whole (100).

The evolution of Theatre-for-Development in Nigeria according to John E. S. Illah is linked to the work of lecturers and students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria under the leadership of Brain Crow who he describes as “the resident theoretician” and Dapo Adelugba “who served as External Examiner” from Ibadan. Illah avers that

“with Michael Etherton, they shaped what has emerged today as discourse and practice, as well theatre for development” (viii-ix). The idea of TfD as Dapo Adelugba would say arose from the debate between a Ph.D. candidate Iyorwuese Hagher and his supervisor Michael Etherton. Hagher when he presented the title for his Ph.D. thesis insisted on the nomenclature Theatre-for-Development as part of the title, but Michael Etherton felt locating it in the area of popular theatre would be better. As the external examiner Dapo Adelugba was able to resolve the difference between the supervisor and his candidate. Adelugba's testimony is apt to cite here: “I as external examiner, managed to talk to Michael Etherton into letting the young man stay with his 'Theatre for Development' title which today has become an acceptable umbrella title now for all the work in the popular theatre vein in Africa... that is what they now call it – Theatre for Development (TfD), the development-oriented theatre anyway” (173).

Saint Gbilekaa is not concerned about the initiator of the concept of Theatre-for-Development but he espouses the process he thinks was at work in the creation of what has now become popularly known as Theatre-for-Development. For him Theatre-for-Development could be seen in the merger of two movements with the goal of using theatre to forge a better Nigeria. Both of them originated in the universities: the radical and the popular. As Gbilekaa would say, “generally, both popular theatre and radical drama within the universities have revolutionary perspectives that open up the people to the discovery of new realities which imbue them with hope and confidence as agents of change” (268). At first university theatres took well made plays and staged them in the communities for their entertainment. Some of these were plays geared toward awakening them to challenges in the community they needed to address. When with time this became the passion of university theatre practitioners who came to work in the community the theatre-for-development front was cultivated. But it all started with community theatre. As it was at Ahmadu Bello Zaria so it was at University of Ibadan.

The main difference between Theatre-for-Development and Community theatre could be seen in the fact that Theatre-for-Development always began as a project that was deliberately carried out based on a theme and a goal. In Theatre-for-Development plays were no longer created for communities. Each community created its play based on the challenges it wanted to use theatre to solve. Theatre-for-Development always starts with the gathering of information which in Tfd's parlance is known as data. Information collected is analyzed, selected and transformed into drama (Harding 99; Omoera "Theatre for Development" 45). For John Illah this was the sequence things followed. At first students were encouraged "to go into the communities to research given problems, turn the data into synopses and later improvised sketches to be taken back to the same communities." This was in tandem with early beginning of Tfd. With time the communities with the facilitators would create and consume the product. But Emmanuel Dandaura is critical of the emphasis on drama as the main outlet for the manifestation of the product of Theatre-for-Development. He claims that:

Traditionally Tfd process begins with the identification, and prioritizing of development challenges of the partnering community and then tries to identify the appropriate indigenous theatre or communication media that can be used as vehicles to engender discussions on the prioritised development challenge(s). The choice of workshop theme, methodology, timing and expected results are often set by the facilitators who may not necessarily be resident in the host community. (611)

As Jumai Ewu would say "primarily the objective of Tfd is to encourage community participation and dialogue in development whereby community participation in theatre becomes symbolic of

and catalytic to its participation in development (89).” To answer Dandaura's criticism, it is obvious that out of the available options drama may appear the easiest a community working with facilitator could achieve their objective within a short space of time. Hence, many Tfd projects have ended up expressing themselves via drama.

Theatre-for-Development in Nigeria is rooted in an intensive workshop culture. In fact, Tfd as a practice was brought about through many workshops. A few are highlighted here for the purpose of this lecture. From its humble beginning at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, since 1975 (Dasyuva 211), virtually every university has organised Tfd workshop in Nigeria. The Benue Workshop took place from December 1982 to January 1983 in four villages in Benue State. It was funded substantially by the state government on the initiative of Dr. Iyorwuese Hagher, now a Professor, and then Director of the State Council for Arts and Culture. The criticism against this first workshop was that the attendees were inexperienced in participatory theatre process and techniques.

In Oshionebo's presentation the first Tfd's workshop took place in 1977 in five villages in the Soba District 80 kilometres from Zaria, along the Zaria-Jos Road. This workshop was initiated by the Sub-Department of Drama at ABU, initially called Community Theatre. Workshops first clustered around the Zaria axis for long between 1977 and 1981. We will not split hairs over the dates 1975 and 1977 about the commencement of Tfd workshop at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. In 1982 the first Tfd was organized outside Zaria codenamed International Theatre for Development Yandev, Benue State. This was sponsored by the Benue State Council for Arts and Culture. The Council sponsored similar conference in 1983 which held at Katsina-Ala. College of Education (COE), Katsina-Ala became the first COE to embrace Tfd courtesy of the workshop it hosted. Oshionebo asserts that Tfd practice became integrated in the curriculum of Nigerian Universities as far back as 1984 in Jos and Kafachan and in Abuja in 1992.

The University of Ibadan experience in Tfd too began with Community Theatre. The initial project which was under the auspices of popular theatre for development was in the area of Child Survival which the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan began a few years ago with UNICEF. Dapo Adelugba in an interview with DasyIva Ademola says that “The 1991-1995 project of UNICEF was aimed at creating a place for Community Theatre work based on health themes. But how our own work from 1996 to 2003 differs from the earlier period of popular theatre is that we have moved out of the concept of creating play for the community into that of getting the community themselves to make their own plays whereby we act only as facilitators, as animateurs” (198).

The workshop tradition which grew at the University of Ibadan gave rise to the “Training of Trainers Workshop.” This was to ensure continuity in the event that if UNICEF opted out of funding and organizing the workshops it would still survive. But the relationship with UNICEF was worthwhile as Emmanuel Emasealu pointed out in “Theatre-for-Development in Nigeria: The U.I./UNICEF Experience”. Emasealu attempts an in-depth discussion of Theatre-for-Development in this study. It is a well thought out and thoroughly executed article. It almost could pass for a poetics of Theatre-for-Development. The author's suggestion of the integration of Theatre-for-Development production within the context of popular theatre is insightful.

National Workshop of Training the Trainers took place in November/December 1998 at the Premier Hotel, Ibadan and at Iseyin. This national workshop took as its slant Child Survival and Women Empowerment. Two of such workshops were organised. Universities involved were University of Ibadan, Jos, Port Harcourt

and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Three books grew out of the National Zonal workshops.

The Tfd workshop which took place in 1995 at Epeme-Lagos had as the title of the skit it produced, 'A (bout) with AIDS.' The workshop was done by Performance Studio Workshop (PSW) of Chuck Mike and Members of PSW. In 1996/97, however, 'Oyela, the Drum that Beats a Change' (formerly called 'Whose Choice is it Anyway?'), which was a sketch also on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), was performed by the joint team of PSW 1996/97 Apprentice and the Tfd Cell of the University of Ibadan, Department of Theatre Arts, as an opening skit in Olosunde (61).

The Katsina Workshop of 1997 explored the Effects of Desert Encroachment on the health and lives of women and children. It was tagged "Seeds of Life." Frances Harding one of the participants at the workshop notes the championing role by Oga Steve Abah when she says that in Nigeria, "a substantial pool of very experienced Tfd practitioners headed by Oga Steve Abah had been established in 1990s". The Katsina workshop was sponsored by the British Council. The 1998 Conference on Theatre-for-Development which held at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture; Ibadan was an international one. The date of the conference was 16-20 February. The conveners were British Council, in collaboration with Performance Studio Workshop (PWS) and the Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA) with assistance from the United States of America Information Service.

Participants for this conference came from: South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ghana, Cameroon, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and host country Nigeria. The precursor of this conference was the one that was held in Harare with the theme

Arts Development. Jumai Ewu notes about the Ibadan Conference in this way: “For me Ibadan '98 was unique because it demonstrated the growing interest in Theatre-for-development (TfD) as a discipline and awareness that its future lies in the broadening of its cultural activity through collaboration between the various cultural media and development processes” (87).

Living Earth Nigeria Foundation organised workshops in Bayelsa State between 1998 and 2001. One of the participants Emmanuel Emasealu recorded his experiences in a journal article which he entitled, “Theatre for Development in Nigerian: A Case Study of the Living of Earth Foundation (Nigeria) Project in Bayelsa State.” In the paper he situates critically the relevance of TfD and shows its usefulness in the projects it was applied to in Bayelsa State by Living Earth Nigeria Foundation. He notes its viability as a potent means of communication and modification of a people's behaviour and underscores TfD as a means of enhancing community growth.

The growth of TfD, no doubt, has passed through many stages. Although workshops are still being organised ever since it became integrated to the curricula of many universities and colleges of education. It has become more of independent work by adventurous students who under guidance carry out projects in the field. But the seed that was sown at the University of Ibadan is worth referring to here. John Illah is appreciative of the efforts of UNICEF which as from 1980 adopted TfD as a strategy for advocacy and intervention. He is emphatic in underscoring that by 1998 UNICEF commenced a partnership under the facilitation of Batilloi Warritay, with Theatre Arts Department, University of Ibadan to introduce TfD into the curriculum.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir, Niger Delta University even though far from the University of Ibadan, benefited from the partnership with UNICEF. Prof. Christine Odi's Ph.D. thesis “Theatre for

Development and the Empowerment of Rural Women in Bayelsa State, Nigeria” in 2007 came on account of that partnership. We have been involved in Theatre-for- Development in this university but our emphasis has been on tourism. We have gone around studying the festivals and dances of Bayelsa State to see to what extent we can organise, package and showcase them for the consumption of tourists. With a more clement political and social environment, we even as a university can invite the world to come and see our rich cultural heritage.

**Christian Theatre** is the last manifestation of alternative theatre in Nigeria I shall present in this lecture. Here, I shall be referring to Christian Theatre as the Ultimate Theatre as Professor E. O. Kofoworola counselled some years ago. So far as he is concerned Christian Theatre is not just a manifestation of alternative theatre, Christian theatre is the Ultimate theatre. A theatre about God the Creator and Maker of all things and His relationship with His creatures cannot be said to be alternative to anything else in nature. It must be the ultimate theatre (Agoro, *The Ultimate Theatre* v). The Ultimate Theatre is very wide spread throughout Nigeria. Let me in this lecture categorise the most common forms of the Ultimate Theatre that we have.

In my paper “Christian Drama and Theatre in Nigeria” I discussed some of the functions of the ultimate theatre which include: serving as a viable means of communicating the gospel among others. Since it is so, any group that is focused on evangelism would like to have the ultimate theatre as an arm of the ministry or church. Besides evangelism, its capacity to be useful in exhortation is another factor that endears theatre to churches. For shy and fearful people witnessing through theatre could be very rewarding. Theatre has capacity of providing wholesome entertainment for the Christian. It is informative, entertaining and didactic (37-45).

We find the ultimate theatre in every town and city in Nigeria. This

has happened with emergence and growth of the new churches and para-church organizations that are interested in using drama and theatre in their evangelistic efforts (Agoro “Christian Drama and Theatre: A Review of Criticism” 1-24). There are theatre groups not only in mega churches but also in small congregations. The drama group as it is often called exists as an activity group in virtually every Pentecostal church. The older churches such as the Catholic, the Anglican, the Baptist, the Methodist, among others, also use the theatre for spiritual expression and communication. If we calculate the audience that could be generated at such performances in any given year then we would realise that we have an enormous number of theatre enthusiasts among Christians (Agoro “Two Decades of Christian Theatre in Nigeria” 65-80).

Over the years, there has been an increase in the growth of interdenominational organisations with keen interest in drama and theatre. One of such groups I have worked with in the past is the Scripture Union. At one time I was the Zonal drama Coordinator for the Port Harcourt Area. We took productions around the old Rivers State and even went with one of our plays as far as Abuja. Besides our group in Diobu, Port Harcourt at that time, there were theatre units in other Scripture Union groups throughout Nigeria. Theatre has always been one key area the Scripture Union uses in its work in the Lord's Vineyard. Productions are often done in the language the audience understands. The production of a play is always a key activity during retreats, conventions, zonal or regional meetings (Agoro “Two Decades of Christian Theatre in Nigeria” 65-80).

The Ultimate theatre is also promoted among nation-wide Christian students groups such as the Nigeria Fellowship of Evangelical Students (NIFES) and the Students Christian Movement (SCM). In each group or chapter as the case may be in all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria there is a theatre or drama group that does productions on a

regular basis to further the cause of the gospel. At the University of Ibadan, The Royal Theatre is the name of the group of the theatre which is part of the ministry of the Ibadan Varsity Christian Union. I served my internship so to say with the group as I wrote and directed a number of the productions the group did while I was an undergraduate and as postgraduate student. We took productions to other universities as well. We were invited to present my play *The Scapegoat* at University of Nigeria, Nsukka. We took another of my play *Within the Walls* to the University of Ilorin. *Agonies of the Dream World* by another brother was staged at the Federal Prisons, Ado-Ekiti. It would be safe to generalise that the way we were enthusiastic to use theatre in ministry our counterparts in other universities and colleges too did (Agoro “Two Decades of Christian Theatre in Nigeria” 65-80).

Apart from the nation-wide students Christian groups I have referred to here, theatres exist within the various denominational groups on the campuses of our tertiary institutions. So every denomination that has a sizable population in any given tertiary institution is bound to have a theatre or drama group. That is why productions are always available. What they do on campus has a positive spill over effect on the cities and towns. With the productions that take place among the numerous groups in Nigerian tertiary institutions, we can assert that our tertiary institutions have become veritable outlets for the supply of the ultimate theatre.

The Ultimate theatre is made available throughout the country through the Christian Corpers' Theatre under the aegis of Christian Corpers' Fellowship. This phenomenon is present in all the States of the Federation and Abuja. Christian Corpers' Groups are often patterned after the models that exist on campuses of our tertiary

institutions. Normally, Christians who have been members of Christian theatres or drama groups while in the university or polytechnic easily find their way into the membership of Christian theatres in the Christian Corpers' Fellowship. By the time they graduate they exhibit a greater degree of maturity in the way they learn and use the arts of theatre.

The ultimate theatre has over the years been fuelled and sustained by three factors. The first is the workshop tradition in Christian drama and theatre. Christian drama and theatre from its inception developed from the tradition of workshop. Although Christian drama is not taught even in the numerous Bible Colleges and Seminaries in the country, yet there has been a conscious effort to educate people to become acquainted with the arts of the theatre through the medium of workshop.

The desire to keep people abreast of the need to be better trained in order to use drama in several services as Christians want to put it is not confined to student groups only. In most major Christian conventions and annual conferences, provision is made for Christian drama seminar or workshop. Many issues are usually handled during such seminars/workshops from improvisation to script writing and from rehearsals to production. For instance, at the Conference of Practicing Evangelists which the Gospel Unlimited Foundation hosted at Offa in Kwara State in 2002 and 2003, it always featured a workshop in Christian theatre. As it has been the practice, the workshops were handled by Theatre Arts graduates (Agoro "Future Trends in Christian Drama and Theatre in Nigeria" 145-157).

The next factor which has been instrumental in the existence and freshness of the ultimate theatre is in the presence of born-again Christians who are engaged in drama and theatre scholarship as

teachers at tertiary institutions. For them there is the added responsibility of adopting a Christian attitude to the teaching of several aspects of the discipline. In these days in which obscenity is being raised to the pedestal of high art, the Christian attitude is indispensable.

Since 1985 I have written and directed many Christian plays at the Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown and Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island where I have taught. Under the auspices of the English Department two of my Christian plays *Born to Cleave* and *Within the Walls* were performed in 1989 and 1990 respectively. *The Catalyst* and *You are a Dead Man, Boss* were staged by Theatre of the Way, Diobu, Port Harcourt at the convocation ceremony in March 1988. In 2000, *The Query Institute* was staged at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown as part of the millennium celebrations. *Beyond Queries* was done at the same institute in 2001. In 2004, *Something to Die for*, *The Exclusive Business* and *The Pain of Love* were all staged as part of the Faculty of Arts Celebration at Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State (Agoro “Future Trends in Christian Drama and Theatre in Nigeria”145-157).

The last factor I shall consider is the Festival of Christian Theatre. A number of them take place across interdenominational lines. I have worked with a number of groups and organised such festivals at which Christian groups came with productions for the entertainment and edification of the audience. The foremost of such example is the Festival of Christian Talents which the Gospel Unlimited organises each year in June (Agoro “Two Decades of Christian Theatre in Nigeria”65-80). From this submission it obvious that the ultimate

theatre is one veritable example of the way in which alternative theatre is practised in Nigeria. From this point I want to consider my personal journey with the alternative theatre.

## **My Practice of Alternative Theatre**

### **The Genesis**

The year was 1965. I was ten. This is the earliest time I can remember of how my excursion into the world of theatre begun. This year I acted in the annual production of skits and revues of my community Igbogene. I also took part in the school end of year celebration at St Luke's Primary School, Agudama Epie in which we presented skits. I was in primary five and in our class skit I was to act the role of a palm cutter. My father was vehemently against my acting that role. He threatened to withdraw me from school if I went ahead to act that part. So I was given another role to do which I do not remember. He was superstitious that the role would influence my life. Before he died he had seen me mature as an artist as I had performed a worse role on the stage for his entertainment. From that initial inception I became a regular participant in the annual production of skits in the community.

In 1971 I met the first formally trained theatre artist, Sir Simon Ambakederemo Bekederemo, of blessed memory, a graduate of University of Ibadan School of Drama who became my literature teacher in class four at Bishop Dimeari Grammar School, Yenagoa. I acted in his play, *Isaac Boro*. Incidentally, that would be the first political play I shall perform.

From that time on the consciousness about the use of theatre germinated. But the Ultimate Theatre perspective was to be borne in my consciousness following my new birth on 12 October 1974 while a student at the Rivers State College of Education, now Ignatius

Ajuru, University of Education. From that time onwards my goal became doing everything even in the realm of the intellectual to the glory of God. I ensured that virtually every play I wrote was gospel-oriented. It did not matter whether I was writing it for an examination in the university or not. The Christian Union Drama Group presented the platform for the exploration of my ideas. I wrote *Determined*, a short play which was a testament to my new birth experience as well as another script, *More than Reformation* which could be considered autobiographical in treatment.

## **The Threshold**

1975 was the year of the first National Congress on Evangelisation in Nigeria. It was a programme that held for ten days at Adekunle Fajuyi Hall, University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife from 18th August to 27th August 1975. I was among the youngest participants at the Congress. I remember the Congress here for three reasons. First, at it I confirmed the usefulness of theatre as a means of evangelisation, a practice I had started immersing myself in. Second, as a participant of the workshop in Drama and Theatre in Evangelisation, I acted in the production *Religion without Christ* which was done at the Congress. Finally, at the Congress I came in contact with the group, the Gospel Unlimited, which adopted me as one its members. It was under the mentorship of Prof. Joseph Oladele Durojaiye Adegboye, its leader that I would be exposed to the full range of what I have found myself doing in Christian Drama and Theatre which we now consider as the Ultimate Theatre. Even during my undergraduate days at the University of Ibadan, he gave me the opportunity to conduct workshops on Christian Drama and Theatre at the various Festivals of Christian Talents the Gospel Unlimited organised. At the University of Ibadan, The Royal Theatre, an arm of

the Ibadan Varsity Christian Union provided ample opportunity for me to practice the Ultimate Theatre as I wrote and directed many plays which we took to many campuses of Nigerian tertiary institutions. While on vacation the Scripture Union family in Port Harcourt provided an outlet for my practice of ultimate theatre. My book *A Handbook of the Ultimate Theatre* documents the work I did at that time.

Prior to my admission at University of Ibadan for my undergraduate programme, and where I later took all my degrees, I have been involved in a form of Alternative Theatre. By the grace of God, I continued during the time I served the nation in the National Youth Service Corps as a graduate of the Nigeria Certificate in Education at Teachers College, Mubi, then in Gongola State, now Adamawa State. By this time I had matured to grapple with the use of theatre to explore political ideas. My play, *The Generation Gap*, which deals with the essence of regime change, could easily have provided an excuse for any military takeover of government at that time. The military were in charge of the affairs of the nation, so we were safe. The premiere of the play was on 18th and 19th of November 1977. Among the cast of the production, Aliyu Umar who acted as Aze, one of the youth leaders, would become the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. At that time he added Modibo to his name. Hence, he had become Aliyu Modibo Umar. Other plays which I wrote at this time which were produced when I had joined the staff of Niger Delta University were: *Sineni's Dilemma*, *A Voice from the Past*, *The Third Shrine* and *The Man we Wanted*.

In 1978, I started my undergraduate programme in Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan. I was exposed to the study and practice of the discipline in all ramifications. I also got involved in departmental

politics and was elected as the Librarian of the Association of Theatre Arts Students (ATAS), University of Ibadan Branch. It was in 1981 members of ATAS from the University of Benin, Benin City, led by Ignis Ekwe of blessed memory visited us at Ibadan and presented the idea of Nigerian University Theatre Arts Festival which was to be a forum at which we could gather and do productions to entertain ourselves. The pet idea that came from Benin was welcome. At the first meeting we, however, solicited with our colleagues from Benin that as the first Theatre Arts Department in the country we should be given the honour to host the first Nigerian University Theatre Arts Festival (NUTAF), UI '81 as it became commonly known (Agoro "Future Trends in Christian Drama and Theatre in Nigeria" 145-157).

I was appointed the Business Manager of the festival. My little management team and I ran all the shows and accounted for the monies we made at the end of the ceremony. The monies made were shared equally by all the participating universities. NUTAF was initiated as a student organisation. It would be best kept that way without any interference by lecturers, especially if the intention is to hijack and make a personal or group enterprise. Since it is often the case with students' organisation, a kind of supervisory role by staff will not be out of place. With the festival I was able to establish my prowess with managing a large scale production. But I wrote plays, directed and acted in a number of productions during the undergraduate programme. Even though I may not have been ranked as a 'star,' at least, my lecturers were satisfied with my acting.

A watershed in my career began in 1984 when I was employed as an Assistant Lecturer at the Rivers State College of Education, now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, where I rose to the rank of Senior Lecturer in 1995. I came

to the College with a huge wealth of experience in script writing and production and did the best as I could in an environment like that. The productions I did were in the spheres of Ultimate Theatre and Theatre-in-Education. In most cases the thematic thrust was wholly in ultimate theatre but the atmosphere of production, since it was the College campus, was in educational theatre. The college then operated a three-campus system: Rumuolumeni, St. John's and Ndele. But the productions were done mainly in the campuses in Port Harcourt. Apart from writing the plays, I also directed them, constructed the sets with my students and supervised the production process. In fact, I constructed a platform that could be dismantled and stored with ease for future productions. This platform was no longer in existence when I returned from my doctorate programme in 1994.

I taught the students to light shows as well assisting as Assistant Directors in a number of productions. Between 1985 and 1999 I did over twenty-eight productions with my students in the Department of English at the Rumuolumeni and St. John's Campuses of the College. By this time my understanding of the ultimate theatre had come full circle. By the 1990/91 session I had started my doctorate thesis entitled: "Theatre and the Church: The Study of Contemporary Christian Drama and Theatre in Nigeria (1970-1992)." By then I had developed my style as well having an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon I was studying. The programme which was slated to finish in 92/93 ended with the defence in 1995 courtesy of the incessant strikes of academic staff, non-academic and the ones that were induced by students. In fact, because of the several times the university was shut down, University of Ibadan lost a session during my Ph.D. programme.

By 2000, I was enlisted in the Technical Aids Corps and was sent to Sierra Leone where I was deployed to the Institute of African Studies,

University of Sierra Leone, as an expert in Drama and Theatre Arts. I taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the Department of English and at the Institute of African Studies. Fourah Bay College provided ample opportunity for productions. With a standard Theatre with adequate facilities, production was attractive. The audience was very responsive. As part of the 2000 millennium celebration, the Institute of African Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Mount Aureol, Freetown, Sierra Leone, staged my play *The Query Institute* to a full house on 13th and 14th April, 2000 at the Mary Kingsley Auditorium. I directed the production. Michael Sam, a postgraduate student served as the Stage Manager while Kwame Harleston, a Senior Lecturer in Fine and Applied Arts did the Artistic and Graphic Design for the production which was produced by Raymond Desouza-George who became the Director of the Institute. The Chief Patron of the production was Mr. Anthony George the then Acting Director of the Institute of African Studies. The production was adjudged very successful. Its impact was not only felt on the campus of Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown but it reverberated in the city of Freetown as well.

I embarked on an ultimate theatre project in Sierra Leone using my students at the Institute in the production of a Christian radio drama series entitled *Parables for Living*. As the title goes each episode was devoted to the exploration of the human situation from a purely biblical perspective. The series was broadcast by Believers Broadcasting Network FM 93.0, Freetown. The programme was aired between 25 December, 2000 and 16 April, 2001. The programme was very popular in the city of Freetown and its environs. Because of the popularity we had two slots for it in a week: the initial broadcast and its repeat. The programme made my students popular in the city as people tried to identify the voices of the actors they had

heard over radio as they came in contact with them. For me the creator, writer and producer it was an exciting experience. The episodes were broadcast as shown in this schedule:

1. *The Unique Child*, 25 December 2000.
2. *Much Ado About Versions*, 15 January 2001
3. *These Practices*, 22 January 2001
4. *Costly Harvest*, 29 January 2001
5. *New Love*, 5 February 2001
6. *A Kindness to Celebrate*, 12 February 2001
7. *Musa's Choice*, 19 February 2001
8. *Waiting for Samuel – Isaac*, 26 February 2001
9. *The Easy Yoke*, 5 March 2001.
10. *The Ultimate Option*, 12 March 2001
11. *Chosen to go to New York City*, 19 March 2001
12. *Playing with God's Grace*, 2 April 2001
13. *A Higher Calling*, 9 April 2001
14. *A Score to Settle*, 15 April 2001
15. *Two in Love with One*, 16 April 2001.

The success of the production of *The Query Institute* spurred me to write and produce *Beyond Queries* in 2001. Its premiere took place on 15th and 16th of May 2001 at the Mary Kingsley Auditorium, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Mount Aureol, Freetown, Sierra Leone. I directed the production which was done by the Institute. My Assistant Directors were Raymond Desouza-George, a staff on the production and David Vandt, a student who now works with the Voice of America and is resident in the United States of America. Other members of staff on the production were

David Braima, Phillipa Walker and John Kamara. The Acting Director of the Institute George Anthony was still the Chief Patron of the production.

I introduced my students at Fourah Bay College to home video production, the kind of experience that had become popular in Nigeria at that time. I wrote the script *Partners at Large*. It was a film that was to serve as an advocacy for HIV/AIDS. The film was launched at the Mary Kingsley Auditorium. Because of its success, the Institute decided to collaborate with The Solid Rock Organisation which I had founded in Sierra Leone with three friends to work on a movie *Gone with the War* which dealt with the aftermath of the war which had just ended in Sierra Leone. It was that project which delayed my assumption of office at Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island. With two film projects my students had become acquainted with the rudiments of film making.

### **The Main Practice**

When I assumed duty at Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island on the 11th of April, 2002 I was already a Senior Lecturer of seven years standing. Right from the inception I considered myself as an asset to the university. I was not coming from the background of ignorance. I knew what the university enterprise was all about and what was required of me as a staff. I was willing to give my best to develop the Niger Delta University while at the same time preparing myself for a day like this. At the then Rivers State College of Education which was affiliated to the University of Ibadan, I had started teaching degree programmes since 1986. So, when I came to Niger Delta University I had fourteen years of university teaching at the undergraduate level and two years at the postgraduate level in my possession. Mine was a rigorous work done under supervision of the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan and at the Institute of

African Studies, and Department of English, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown. I was not a stranger to setting questions, drawing up marking schemes or moderating scripts of colleagues assigned to me.

## **My Contributions to the World of Learning**

I shall, present my contributions to the world of learning under the following divisions:

1. My joy in academia and theatre practice has been in **the creation of the poetics of the Ultimate Theatre**. The practice of the ultimate theatre in all its ramifications I have presented in *A Handbook of the Ultimate Theatre*. Not only have I presented the elements of drama, I have shown how drama is made or created, scripted, rehearsed, acted, directed, organised and managed. I have also devoted time to present the management of the ultimate theatre and the organisation of its production outing. I have taken time to clear some misgivings about theatre and the Christian Faith. For some, the idea of the ultimate theatre will appear as sheer propaganda. Foluke Ogunleye avers that “Christian drama... can be regarded as propaganda through extensive education (29).”

In my work “Christian Theatre: Art or Propaganda?”(123-135) I argued for the existence of Christian Theatre as art. I discussed the anatomy of propaganda and established the relationship between it and art. I did an incisive exploration of many plays proving that plays which exhibit the characteristics of art even though the message is Christian could be regarded as art. I concluded the study by observing that “as demonstrated with the examples cited; it is obvious that Christian plays which are artfully and artistically structured are works of art in their own right. The message may be the

communication of one aspect of the gospel or another, but so long as the work has the basic ingredients of art, namely: “it embodies a message within an idiom of communication, and it arouses a sense of mystery - a feeling that it is more than it appears to the intellect to be” (Bohannon and Curtin 79), it should be recognized as art not propaganda” (133).

**2. Another area of interest to me in which I have spent considerable energy upon is in Theatre-in-Education.** Here too I have produced a manual that has been useful in the department in the past. *Theatre and Drama in Education* addresses the foundational thoughts in the practice of educational theatre. It tackles the play production process and pays considerable attention to producing the school play. My involvement in the production of the school play in Niger Delta University has been documented in many ways. Besides doing plays on our stage here, I have taken plays outside to other towns and neighbouring states with my students, especially under the auspices of the course Theatre and Tourism Studies that took us on tour to Port Harcourt, Uyo and Calabar.

**3. I have created and produced works to instil aesthetic values in students.** Out of the fifty-one plays which I have written for the stage, twenty-six have been produced in Niger Delta University. I participated in the productions in numerous capacities. I served as the producer and consultant at all productions. Kenneth Eni directed *The Query Institute* (2003), *A Query for Professor Aburie* (2005) and *Sineni's Dilemma* (2011). Binebai directed *Beyond Queries* (2005) and *Something to Die for* (2005) and *The Bond* which was the convocation of play of 2012. Some of the other plays were directed by these lecturers: *Partners at Large* (2006) and *A Voice from the Past* by Asuefien Makbere, *Captain Teki* (2006) was directed Sunday

Abraye. Rudolph Kansese directed *Odds against God* (2006) and *Born to Cleave* (2012) while Sunday Edum directed *The Cost* (2010), *The Generation Gap* (2010) and *Within the Walls* (2010). Steve Pregbegha-Waidor directed *The Third Shrine*. I directed *The Pain of Love*, *A Different Purpose*, *Crazy Papers*, *Little Minds* and *The Man we Wanted* (2002-2012).

**4. In the fields of Dramatic theory and Criticism, I have extended the frontiers of scholarship.** With my creation and definition of Christian drama it became imperative to establish the canons of Christian tragedy (Agoro “Biblical Basis for Christian Tragedy” (72-81) & “Christian Tragedy: Exploration in Nigerian Dramatic Literature (60-76), Christian comedy(Agoro “The Notion of Christian Comedy” (15-24) and Christian tragicomedy(Agoro “Christian Tragi-comedy: An Exploratory Discourse (15-21). The discourse in which Christian drama is defined is in *Journal of Pedagogy and Educational Development* (192-204).

In it I provided a categorical definition of Christian drama “as a play in which there is the manifestation of Christian ethos, and which represents an authentic presentation of the Christian worldview as depicted in the Bible.” Christian tragedy I defined as “a play which presents in its actions a hero who experiences an irreparable disruption in his moral nature which makes him forsake good and volitionally adopt evil for which he suffers without hope of redemption” (11). We may find Christian tragedy embedded in the fact of the volition given to man either to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved or to reject him and be damned (John 3:18). Christian comedy I defined “as a play, which presents in its plot a hero who successfully resists pressures to abandon his moral nature and adopt vice instead of virtue.

Sometimes there may be a temporary or minor inversion in his moral nature but this does not lead to a complete abandonment of virtue. In the long run, however, the hero is able to assert himself as he allows virtue to prevail over vice. In Christian comedy there is the threat against the stability of the Christian worldview, which re-asserts itself as equilibrium returns to the universe of the play following the restoration of the Christian worldview” (15-24). Christian tragicomedy I aver “is a play, which combines the ingredients of Christian tragedy and Christian comedy into a fitting *mélange*” (15-21). On the whole, my works have shown a definite direction in the growth of dramatic theory beyond conventional anticipation.

## **5. Creation of Subgenres in Christian Drama in Nigeria.**

Without prejudice to whatever trends or forms that may be in existence in Christian drama in other parts of the world, in my study I have documented four sub-genres in Christian drama in Nigeria. These genres are derivatives of Christian drama, which I have defined in this lecture already (Agoro 195). The four sub- genres in Christian drama are as follows: Evangelistic Drama, Exhortatory Drama, Doctrinal (Instructional) Drama and Worship Drama.

Evangelistic Drama is the first subgenre we shall attend to. Evangelism is defined in the fourth Covenant of the Lausanne convention of 1972 which Dr. Byang Kato; Late Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar considers a correct and concise definition of the word (Kato 1). According to Covenant 4, “to evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the scriptures,

and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe” (Kato 1). Evangelistic Drama, therefore, is concerned with the presentation of the gospel message through the medium of the theatre so that members of the audience would have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved from their sins.

Forde defines evangelistic theatre as one, which “clarifies the gospel in particular” (95). The goal of evangelistic drama is the presentation of the gospel in order to win non-converts to Jesus Christ. It is one medium of presenting the gospel message to church going people too who may not have become converted (Agoro “Evangelistic Drama as a Subgenre in Christian Drama” 37-45).

Exhortatory Drama is geared towards communicating to people how to live the Christian life, to teach virtues and to point out vices. The goal of Exhortatory Drama is the edification of people. The end is that people should learn and stay away from things that may cause them to fall. But in the event that they fail or are inconsistent in the things of God, they could learn better ways of appreciating the grace available in the faith in order to grow stronger in the faith (Agoro Exhortatory Drama as a Sub genre in Christian Drama in Nigeria”32-51). The purpose of Doctrinal (Instructional) Drama is to teach Biblical truths in a formal way. What we are classifying as Doctrinal (Instructional) Drama Forde calls Didactic Theatre.

According to him, “Didactic theatre... clarifies the teaching of the Bible (95).” The following features characterize Doctrinal Drama. Its goal is the systematic unfolding of Biblical information as a direct way of imparting knowledge to the audience. In Doctrinal Drama,

concepts have to be properly illustrated in an unambiguous manner in the course of the plot. Plots may seem contrived in the hands of the unskilled.

But a good writer will teach whichever Biblical concept within the scope of a properly worked out plot. The knowledge to be imparted must be strategically laced along the unfolding plot. In doing this, symbolism is used. Characters sometimes operate on two levels. At one level, they are human-like so they operate like people in the play. On the other level, they stand for ideas other than what they represent (Agoro "Doctrinal and Worship Drama as a Sub genres of Christian Drama in Nigeria" 151-156).

Worship Drama is a kind of elastic subgenre. Depending on the Bible story, which is enacted, it could be either exhortatory or evangelistic. But whatever is the case, as we have said earlier; its production would be in the context of worship in a church or fellowship. The drama would be such that it is sufficient to meet the spiritual appetite of the worshippers. It would be such that would make the preaching of a sermon at the end of it irrelevant. The goal of worship drama should be to enhance a good relationship between the performers and God.

Of course, worship in the other sense would always be a mode in which man expresses awe and reverence for God. This feeling could be achieved even within the context of the theatre. After all, the theatre started in sacred contexts. Although worship connotes honour and reverence for God and also an attitude of contemplation of Him, in His totality, an experience that could be realized within any context in which a Christian drama is presented, yet in this presentation the idea of Worship Drama is restricted to the kind of drama which is integrated within the worship scheme in a church. The play is part of

the liturgy at that given period of worship. The subject matter should be derived from the Bible. It is a dramatization of a Bible story in the course of a church service (Agoro “Doctrinal and Worship Drama as Sub genres of Christian Drama in Nigeria 151-156).

## **6. Extension of the discussion of the taxonomy of Nigerian Drama to situate Christian Drama within it.**

With my definition of Christian Drama and by being able to situate it within the general discourse of the taxonomy of Nigerian drama, I created an extension of the classificatory schemes of Nigerian drama (Agoro “A Survey of the Taxonomy of Contemporary Nigerian Drama” 30-36). I have also classified the taxonomy of Christian drama into hard core Christian plays and peripheral Christian plays. Works which show a consistent and in-depth exploration of the Christian worldview belong to hard core Christian plays. On the other hand, peripheral Christian plays present the exploration of Christian themes in them but not strictly from the theological perspective (Agoro “A Review of the Taxonomy of Contemporary Nigerian Drama” 140-149).

7. Mr Vice Chancellor, Sir, it is not my intention to keep this august gathering for too long a time. But let me mention another area of my contributions to learning to be in the: **Creation of Dramatic Literature**. I am restricting myself in this vein to my published stage plays and screenplays that have become the subject of movies. To this end I shall present the following plays in this lecture.

*Odds Against God* (2014) is a hardcore Christian play. Dr. Jonmos is finally moved to go on voluntary retirement with only a few steps to the height of his career at the University of South. But he retires not to

assume a more paying job, but to become a missionary. This new shift in his career is not welcomed by Miranda, his wife and his mother Mrs. Omovie. Dr. Charles, his friend and colleague too is not happy that he is checking out of academics at a time he has a professorial position and a deanship in the offing.

His pastor Revd. Camara would have liked him to remain at home to serve God, but Dr. Jonmos thinks differently. Only two people are in support of his decision to go to the mission field: Dr. Kingston his colleague and Miss Ibisio Jemina, one of his students and fiancée of Dr. Charles. Miss Ibisio Jemina is convinced that God deserves the best, so she not only applauds Dr. Jonmos' move to go to mission field, she also surrenders herself to the service of God, risking the break in her engagement with Dr. Charles. On the eve of his departure for the mission field his friends and mother come to bid him farewell as well as Dr. Charles and Ibisio. But Dr. Jonmos leaving for the mission field is no longer at odds with his mother. Neither is Dr. Charles bitter with him for seducing his fiancée with his kind of religious zeal. How that all happens is the complete story of *Odds Against God*.

*The Remnants* (2012) is the story of a family that is assaulted by the vicissitudes of life. Ategene the matriarch of the family loses two of her five children in old age. Abedibe, her son-in-law, who is unsympathetic with her plight, insults her, accusing her of witchcraft. To add salt to injury he sends Ofinavie, his wife and Ategene's daughter, out of the home to add to the emotional trauma of the old woman. Ategene does not have rest staying at home as her only son Giasa, a polygamist like her son-in-law, would always fight with his wives and threaten the peace of her fragile life. She is removed from the emotional pain at home as her granddaughter, Somkieni, comes home and takes her to go and be with her in Port Harcourt till the day she dies. Somkieni insists that unless Abedibe recalls her mother to

the house as his wife she would have nothing to do with him in life again. So when she goes home to take Ategene to Port Harcourt, she doesn't go to see him.

After some months of stay with her Ategene dies in Port Harcourt. But Somkieni would not like her father to be involved in the burial of her grandmother since at the time of death her mother Ofinavie is sent out of the home. She manages the burial of her grandmother in style to the surprise and pleasure of her father who now realised that the only way he would have access to his daughter is by bringing her mother back to the house as his wife. Due to her positive pressure and role the relationship between her parents is restored. Ofinavie returns to Abedibe as his legal wife and harmony is restored to the family. The play stresses the importance of the education of the girl child in the family who would always be a positive influence on the family.

*Little Minds* (2011) is set in a tertiary institution called Delta Academy of Arts, Science and Technology. Prof. Mebom, an Epie by ethnic group is asked to return from the University of Lagos where he is holding the Chair of Psychology to head the Academy. He returns to Delta Academy and turns himself into a tin god. He is full of himself, so allows his pride to ruin the institution. He bullies the members of staff under him. He treats them in a very derogatory manner. He allows his little office to get into his head. His behaviour at work affects his domestic life. All his elder children walk out on him. But Prof. Mebom is made to realise his errors one day. He changes. What is the catalyst behind the change in his life and how does it affect his family? That is the story of *Little Minds*. Just a note of caution! *Little Minds* is an artistic creation. We do not apologise for any resemblance it may have with any person or circumstances that have existed or may come into existence anywhere in this country. What we are presenting here is a package that is geared towards

provoking you think as you laugh.

*Partners at Large* (2011) is a play that is set in Sierra Leone. It is an adaptation of the screenplay which was written in and shot on location in Sierra Leone in 2000. *Partners at Large* explores the dropout syndrome among female students in the secondary school. It deals with the HIV/AIDS phenomenon among commercial sex workers. It also treats the vexing issue of child abuse. It shows to what extent an understanding principal of a high school could shape the destiny of her students positively.

*The Query Institute* (2005) is the next play I shall present. It is set in Delta Academy of Arts, Science and Technology a tertiary institution. Professor Jemina Green returns to assume duty as the 6th Principal Director. His coming provokes a flurry of activities in the institution. There is excitement in the air. The Secretary of the Academy Mr. Gogo, in order to procure the favour of the Principal Director for his lover Mrs. Ada Nathan, the Director of Admission, instigates her to issue queries to some lecturers in Delta Academy. They include Iyaye, Zuowei, Lesi, and Miss Tamunosaki. In a bid to resolve the conflict generated by the issuance of the queries, the lecturers are introduced to The Query Institute, a new institution devoted to the study of Query in all its ramifications. After a brief spell at the institute as occasional students they are able to solve the riddle of queries they are issued. As graduates of The Query Institute they are mandated to form The Query Club that is conferred with the sole right to issue deserving queries to people.

*The Query Institute* X-rays corruption in tertiary institutions. Most often male lecturers are the only objects and targets of scrutiny. The concern of the play has to do with how some Registrars and other functionaries of tertiary institutions are corrupt and use their

influences to deepen corruption in the system. It also pays attention to the abuse of query as a tool of correction in the public and private sectors of our economy.

In *Beyond Queries* (2004), Delta Academy undergoes a metamorphosis. It is changed into the University of the South. Prof. Aburie becomes its first Vice-Chancellor and settles down to the business of administering it. As an administrator he has his own approach to things. In his search for justice he does not spare anybody. On assumption of office, he maps out his strategies for dealing with the several problems he inherited from his predecessor. This entails setting up several panels to investigate some of the key functionaries of the university. Among them are the panel on the dereliction of duties, sexual harassment, and subversive activities against the university. Besides these panels, the Governor of the Core South State institutes a visitation panel to the university. The fallout is predictable. The Registrar, Gogo and the Bursar, Adim are sacked from office. Professor Blackie, Dean of Law who is guilty of sexual harassment is also laid off from the services of the University of the South. The sacked Registrar and Bursar approach Professor Aburie who declines to be involved in assisting them get out of their mess, observing that they deserve their sack.

In *Beyond Queries* solutions are proffered for the corruption in the university system. Visitation panels should regularly be instituted so that the rottenness in the system could be exposed and dealt with. There should be no sacred cows. The play is critical of the promotion guidelines in operation in the university system. It calls for equity in the promotion procedure in the university system.

Next is *A Query for Professor Aburie* (2004). Gogo and Adim the sacked Registrar and Bursar decide to undermine the administration of Professor Aburie as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South. They blame their sack on him and vow to fight him to make his administration unpopular. Their goal is to work towards his sack as well. They have three ways of getting this done. First, they instigate Zuze the President of the Students' Union of the University of the South to start a crisis on campus over the purported decision to increase school fees by 400%. They also hire the services of a State Security operative, Scott, to make the University of the South his unofficial beat and write reports about the university that will put Professor Aburie in the wrong light.

They have as their allies Hon. Brand, a politician cum contractor and Ms. Enos. Hon. Brand has a personal axe to grind with Professor Aburie over a shoddy job he did for the university which the Vice Chancellor refuses payment. Ms. Enos, former lover of Professor Aburie, joins them in the fight against him for undisclosed personal reasons. In the end, all the plans to remove Professor from office are unsuccessful. Zuze the Students' Union President receives money from Gogo, Adim and Hon. Brand to stage the students' protest which leads to his indefinite suspension from the university. Only on the intervention of Professor Blackie, the sacked Dean of Law, on his behalf is he allowed to return to the university. The Acting Governor of the Core South State warns Scott over his role in the university. So also does he warn Ms. Enos, Commissioner of Education to leave Professor Aburie alone.

*A Query for Professor Aburie* investigates the unwholesome influence of various interest groups in the running of an institution such as a university in Nigeria. It is critical of the role of the Students'

Union in allowing outside influences to determine what they do on campus with university functionaries. The play projects the fact that any person who is straightforward would succeed in the administration of a university, wherever the institution may be.

*A Higher Calling* (2003) (a radio drama) is set in an imaginary kingdom of Otuasega. Odogu the Obenema, King of the Kingdom of Otuasega, grooms his son Dameni to step into his big shoe as the king on his demise. But Dameni goes to the university and meets the King of Kings who he vows to serve with his life. Everything in his life thins into oblivion. Odogu unable to convince his son to renounce Christ bans him from the kingdom. But Odogu falls ill following the departure of his son from the kingdom. He is taken to all the fine doctors in the country and abroad, but his not healed. His son has ministrations away from home that his father's life is in danger. He returns home broaching the terms of the banishment. He prays for his father and he is healed. King Odogu, overwhelmed by the experience of the restoration of his health, becomes a Christian, but surprises his priestess as he hands his kingdom over to Christ to rule. The thrust of the short play is the transformation that commitment to Jesus Christ produces in converts which makes them consider everything as dung in comparison to knowing Him. Every genuine change produces immeasurable impact on the life of the individual and his immediate circle of friends and relations.

*The Catalyst* (2002) is one of the plays in the collection, *The Prison Plays*. It is a hardcore Christian play. The play is set in a prison cell. It is during a military dispensation. A despotic and intolerant ruler, General Zamfara, assumes the political headship of Nigeria and in his bid to legitimise his regime decrees to have drug dealers arrested tried and killed. This he does in order to attract approval from the

populace. But General Zamfara is intolerant and insensitive to the spiritual aspiration of his people, especially Christians. He makes public preaching an offence punishable by five years imprisonment. His first victim is Evangelist Aneze who defies the ban on public preaching and is arrested and thrown into prison where he meets Akpan and Dada. Akpan is condemned to die for trafficking in cocaine. Dada is jailed seven years for assaulting an elderly lady and raping her.

Aneze seizes the opportunity to do in prison what he is not allowed to do outside of it. He follows in the noble tradition of Christians who in the shoes of Paul change the prison to the pulpit. He presents the message of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ to his cellmates (19-21). He is able to win Akpan to the Lord (30-31). This comes to Dada as a big joke. Although he does not understand the mystery of salvation, he also learns to trust in Jesus Christ for his salvation as Akpan who is on death row is miraculously released from prison as the despotic regime of General Zamfara is overthrown. As Dada and Aneze leave the prison cell to enjoy their liberty Dada cries out in agony to the Lord “God please forgive me too” (35).

In *Another Chance* (2002) the second play in *The Prison Plays*, Dada the prisoner becomes an evangelist in prison. He tries hard to convert his new cellmates Zema and Bonta. He is unable to win them to the Lord. But he is able to make a convert out of Udensi, a former warder who turns prisoner (60). What precipitates Udensi's conversion is partly due to a dream the warder had in which an old man tells him to be born-again. He warns him not to trust in his own self-righteousness.

Dada rightly interprets the old man to represent God. He tells Udensi,

“Chief, you can't run away from God again. You must not miss this other chance. To save you, God had to take your job momentarily from you. God had to take your comfort from you so that when he speaks you would hear” (60). He rehearses the story of his conversion to Udensi and implores him not to resist the Holy Spirit as he urges him to pray and ask for the forgiveness of his sins. He begs Udensi “You better don't resist it. That's the way the Holy Spirit touches us.” Udensi's prayer, “God, forgive me my sins and accept me in Jesus name,” is a sign to Dada that his evangelistic efforts in prison have not been in vain.

*Something to Die for* (2001) is critical of people who give up on life in the face of rejection, or on encountering one problem or another. It admits of hardships in life as tests for preparation for manhood. It is critical of discrimination in Christian circles. It upholds love as the best therapy to combat the sense of hopelessness that comes in the wake of rejection. Tokieme considers himself hopeless in life until he finds Asueme, the lady he is ready to die for. Asueme by her love for him, in spite of his addiction to drugs makes him find meaning in life.

Tokieme suffers from rejection at the hands of Bonze and Nimi. To fill up the void in his life which the absence of a loving relationship with a lady has created; he finds solace in the haven of drugs. He almost dies from an overdose of heroin. He is rushed to the hospital where he is rehabilitated. A relationship grows between him and Asueme. He enters into this relationship at a risk. But he eventually receives his father's approval to marry his sweetheart even though she comes from the family of lepers, a serious taboo among the Epie people.

In *The Pain of Love* (2001), Dr. Lasman uses his position as Director of Delta laboratories to try to seduce Lovelyn. Unable to make her his mistress he denies her promotion for a period of five years, but when he runs into trouble she goes to testify in his favour. He is restored to his position. Overwhelmed by what God had done through the testimony of Lovelyn, Dr. Lasman becomes a born-again Christian. The concern of this play is the presentation of Lovelyn as a sterling example of a believer who resists every attempt to mortgage her spiritual destiny for morsel bread. She does not sleep with her boss, Dr. Lasman, as a precondition for him to promote her in the office as he demands. She endures this yoke for five years without any bitterness. She does not look for any opportunity to seek revenge against him.

When, however, Dr. Lasman is framed for financial offence he is not guilty of, it is Lovelyn who goes to testify of his innocence. Dr. Lasman, humbled and de-schooled by this show of Christian love, finally gives in and becomes a believer.

*The Exclusive Business* (2001) is the third play in the collection in *Something to Die for and other Plays*. *The Exclusive Business* presents marriage in the Christian perspective as the exclusive business between the husband and wife who are wedded in love to the exclusion of everybody. Nitabai demonstrates to his father Ayam that he has no right to interfere with his home. He wouldn't allow Dameni his younger brother or Obebi his younger sister to disturb the peace of his home. He stands against all attempts by his father to dictate the way he runs his home. The work underscores the need for couples not to neglect to communicate with each other on every subject that could create disaffection between them. Kitoye would have allowed the maltreatment she has been receiving at the hands of Nitabai's younger ones to come in between her and her husband, even though she has

not communicated the issue to him. When Nitabai eventually learns of how his younger ones have been disturbing his wife, he sends them out of his house to go and stay in the boarding house. In this way harmony returns to the union between Kitoye and Nitabai which was threatened.

*Caught at Last (2000)* is a short play. It demonstrates the fact that a hypocritical lifestyle cannot last long. No matter how the individual manages it, the truth about the true essence of what he or she is doing secretly will be revealed one day. Fiense, even though she claims to be born-again Christian, has an illicit relationship with Udama which she keeps away from the knowledge of Abara, her brother. She declines to go to fellowship with Abara because she has arranged with Udama, her lover, to visit her. Udama comes to see her when Abara has left the house. But in course of fiddling with the Bible he is convicted of the sin of his illicit relationship with Fiense. Abara returns to the house and helps Udama to understand the scripture about repentance and forgiveness of sins. In the course of his admonition, Fiense is also restored to faith.

*Co-Tenants (1997)* is one of the plays in the collection, *Generous Donors and other Plays*, which I edited. Chikere and Lenee drop out of school. They want to live life on the fast lane. So they take to robbery. They rob Erefa's room. Then they sublet the same room to Chima who is new in town. They claim the room belongs to their elder brother who is away at home on Christmas holiday. Chima is defrauded of his money but is later forced out of the room by Erefa and Ibim as the couple return home from holiday to see the strange presence of Chima in their house. Erefa and his wife are all dropouts from school. In this short play the dropout syndrome is not blamed on social factors only. Chikere acknowledges that he is paying for his neglect of God. He observes that he deserves his fate in life because of

his neglect of God in his teenage days. He thinks the presence of social amenities in the family alone will not do if the kids are not given knowledge of God.

*Our Wives* (1993) explores the theme of the effects of one's past on one present life. It warns that in order to avoid some painful experiences in the future one should be mindful how one lives in the present. The other issue it presents is the need for forgiveness as way of resolving problems in inter-personal relationships. Mawulu marries Anne, a village prostitute; all his friends have slept with. He dabbles into politics and fails. He believes that his failure is because he is husband to a former prostitute. Giabo, his friend and business colleague as well as Pulovie and Eugene his employees are insensitive as they taunt him about the matter. Anne, Mawulu's wife engineers him to seek vengeance. With the assistance of Anne he rapes Fanny, Pulovie's wife. He is able to seduce Martha, Eugene's wife. But he fails to make Nezem, Giabo's wife false to her marital vows. Giabo and Pulovie take offence. They plan to kill Mawulu and Anne. Their argument is a simple one: they made love to a prostitute who Mawulu was foolish to marry. But Mawulu is brazen in raping Pulovie is wife and trying to make Giabo's wife false to him. When they are not successful in killing him in the hotel, Mawulu is frightened to his wits' end. Anne gets the elders Ata and Zedaeni to sue for peace. At the peace meeting reconciliation is procured as each offending party apologises to the other. Finally, peace is restored to the community.

## **8. Production of feature films, short films and television series.**

I objected to the initial designation of my chair as Professor of Dramatic Literature in Theatre Arts because it grossly misrepresented my academic and professional output. It did not take in to cognisance the work I had done in film and television and the

most recent medium cable. Since I came to the Niger Delta University as a staff on lateral transfer from the Rivers State College of Education, now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, it was only needful that I included all the works I had done in academia from that point onwards. Of course, some of these works featured in my assessment for the promotion to the rank of professor.

*Partners at Large* (2000) is the first work to be considered in this regard. I wrote the screenplay of the film which I directed. The Associate Director was Raymond Desouza-George. Victor Banard Cole was the Director of Photography. I wrote the lyrics of the soundtracks. Instrument and voice came from Ibrahim Wright-Samura and company. I produced the film with Teddy James Kamara and Alusine K. Alu-Conteh. The film *Partners at Large* is set in Sierra Leone. It was shot on location in Freetown in 2000. Members of the cast and crew were drawn from the staff and students of the Institute of African Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, principal among them is Miltona Eunice Momoh who acted as Avon, Sia Mamah M'bayo who played the role of Zainab and Mamie Konie Kamara who acted as Hawa. Others are Mariatu Koroma who played the role of Aminata and Mabel Gamaga who acted as Memuna.

Hawa and Zainab are bent on living on the fast lane. So instead of staying in school to mind their studies they run around with men. In their bid to enlarge their scope of friends they entice Aminata a new student to their school to join their group. They promise her that they would find a man for her. Memuna their principal invites them for a chat about their future. She gives them wholesome counsel which Hawa and Zainab scorn. Aminata, however, appreciates the counsel of Memuna. She changes for the better. But Hawa and Zainab are hell

bent on pursuing their promiscuous lifestyle. They drop out of school to become commercial sex workers. Aminata on graduating from high school a changed girl is able to proceed to the university. On graduation from the university she sets up an NGO that is interested in working to get commercial sex workers out of the brothel in order to learn trades with which they can cope with life.

In the course of her work, she meets her high school friends who are now prostitutes in a brothel. She is able to talk to them to leave the business of prostitution. She promises to rehabilitate them. Hawa and Zainab are willing to leave the brothel because they have learned from experience the hazards in the prostitution business. Besides, they have lost one of their partners, Avon to the AIDS' scourge. Avon is forced into prostitution because she is abused sexually by her father Amnon who would have liked to have her as a mistress. *Partners at Large* explores the dropout syndrome among female students in the secondary school. It deals with the HIV/AIDS phenomenon among commercial sex workers. It also treats the vexing issue of child abuse. It shows to what extent an understanding Principal of a high school could shape the destiny of his students positively.

*Gone with the War* (2002) deals with the evil effects of war on a people. It documents in its variegated manner the aftermaths of war on a people. The fabric of society is affected and relationships are out of joint. It shows how war brings out the worse in people and cautions against it in all ramifications. The production of *Gone with the War* was collaboration between Fourah Bay College and The Solid Rock Organisation, an NGO I had founded in Sierra Leone. The movie was produced by me, Teddy Kamara and Rollings-Sirajin Kamara as co-producers. Albert Momoh and Ahmadu Bah all of the Sierra Leone

Broadcasting Corporation were the Directors of Photography.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, in continuation with my work in media arts let me mention the television series *Parables for Living*. I had hardly settled down to business at Niger Delta University when I embarked on transforming *Parables for Living* from the radio drama format series it was broadcast in Sierra Leone to a television series format. The series which I created and produced was directed by Fred Mayford, dgn. Rudolph Kansese was the director of photography. Kenneth Eni and I acted in it. A number of my students in Theatre Arts and English Departments were involved in it too. I was the Head of English Department at that time. It was broadcast by the Niger Delta Television, Yenagoa.

*Indecent Proposal* (2003) came next. *Indecent Proposal* was shot on location in Port Harcourt in 2002. It features Pete Edochie as Gogo, Rachel Oniga as Daisy, Prince James Uche as Laolu (Police Commissioner) and Saviour Agoro as Pastor Dan, among others. Larry, a young man, drops Chisa his former fiancée and opts to marry Sonia the daughter of Gogo, a powerful politician. But Chisa who is bent on frustrating Larry's wedding to Sonia hires Adams a police officer and through his help abducts Larry as he comes out of his house prepared to go to church to wed his bride. Best man hurries to church to report that Larry has been abducted. When Sonia hears the news of the fate that has befallen him, she faints and is hurried to the hospital. She is restored to life again.

Larry comes to explain the circumstances occasioning his absence from the church on the day of his wedding but Gogo who feels slighted would have nothing to do with him again. Pastor Dan and his wife Deborah too, go to plead on behalf of Larry but Gogo sends them

out and would not listen to them. Larry who is hurt decides to sue the police over his wrongful arrest on the day of his wedding. But Dan prevails on him to leave the matter in the hands of God. Dan, however, goes to register his grievance on behalf of Larry to Laolu, the Police Commissioner, who investigates the matter and bring the erring police officers to book. Sonia gets married to Joseph, Dan's son, in a private ceremony in the court, an incident that Dan considers demeaning but for Gogo provides the only way to save his daughter's reputation.

Larry who is disappointed in his bid to marry Sonia turns his attention to Perpetual who is willing to accept his hand in marriage. But he runs into another hitch. Chisa who is a friend of Rosalyn learns from her that Perpetual, her niece, is about to marry Larry. So, they worked against the marriage. On the day Larry is to wed Perpetual, Rosalyn and Chisa lie to her that Larry has put another girl in the family way that is bent on coming to the church to disrupt the marriage. They advise her to avoid disgrace by breaking up with Larry. She, therefore, does not go to church to honour Larry by getting married to him.

Dan, in order, to avert disgrace coming the way of Larry a second time, under instruction of God, decides to do the unimaginable. He gives his daughter Linda in marriage to Larry in the absence of Perpetual. But the bubbles burst later. Perpetual learns that she has been lied to and used by her aunt and Chisa in order to avenge themselves on Larry. She walks out on her aunt and promises to have nothing to do with her in life again. She goes to beg for pardon from Dan. Through the instrumentality of Dan the warring parties get reconciled, each person forgiving the other. *Indecent Proposal* explores the theme of the sovereignty of God over the affairs of human beings. It underscores the role of human choices in determining people's destinies. It takes a critical look at the issue of

the misuse of the machinery of law enforcement in Nigeria. It calls for forgiveness as a way procuring harmony between parties that have been at loggerheads.

*Love beyond the Scourge* (2014) focuses attention on the importance of HIV/AIDS awareness campaign through school rallies, church rallies, campaigns within professional groups and other kinds of community related awareness programmes. The soap itself functions in the same vein. Besides, it exposes the dangers of the possibility of the spread of HIV/AIDS in a community where wife inheritance is practised as we find in many communities in Bayelsa State. The role of the church and public spirited individuals in the campaign against AIDS is also highlighted. The series makes appeal to NGOs, governments and the general public to assist in supporting victims of the malady while the search for a cure is on.

In *The Exchange*, which was shot in 2015 and telecast as a television serial, but has now been released in YouTube in 2020 as a film in two parts, as *The Exchange* and *The Sudden Exchange*, Billy acted by Vitalis Ndubuisi is a millionaire. He owns many companies. In fact, he is a mega business magnet. But he is an unhappy man. He is married to Dorothy, who is impersonated by Camilla Mberekpe with whom he has two daughters. His constant brooding over the absence of a male child to inherit in vast business empire stands in the way of everything in his life. He is unable to convince his wife that they should adopt a son. She is not happy that he is unwilling to let Diseye performed by Sessei Odukwu and Ifiemi acted by Rufyna Mbamah, their daughters be groomed to take over from him as the managers of his estate on his demise. Billy's constant depression affects the people working under him. His secretary Celina who is ably acted by Happiness Lawrence is aware about the cause of his constant

depression but does not know what to do about it. Freda, Celina's friend who is impersonated by Vivian Omons, prods and entices her to seduce her boss. Due to her counsel Celina works her way into Billy's life as his wife. Billy's mother Boma, whom Esther Megwa embodies in the production, is a useful ally in frustrating Dorothy out of his life.

Celina marries Billy and gives him a male child, Josh acted by Isaac Saviour Agoro but Billy is not happy. Celina forces Boma, Billy's mother out of the house. The birth of Josh creates more anxiety for him as Celina would like to ruin his business empire with wasteful parties because she has given him a male child. Besides, she is unfaithful to him. She takes Al Tan, Freda's lover acted by Imoh Ebong alais Slowice from her. Al Tan is an employee of Billy. Thinking about how Celina has come to upset his life makes Billy collapse. He is hospitalised. By the time he recovers and returns to the house Billy takes Diseye his daughter into confidence and gives her control of his business. Celina and Al Tan plan to destroy Billy. She forges Billy's will. Through the aid of Diseye and Brand whom Maxwell Jerry Opoikumo carries faithfully, Celina's schemes are discovered. She is sued to court over her attempt to forge Billy's will. Before the case is called for hearing, Diseye prevails on her father to let her mother return to the home. This time, Boma too is sorry for the role she has played in making Dorothy leave Billy. Celina collapses in the court when the case is called for hearing. She is surprised that Al Tan her lover is willing to testify against her. She goes into coma and stays in the hospital for a long time. Dorothy and Billy remarry. He withdraws his suit against Celina who recovers from coma, and apologises for the way she has come to separate a stable home. She forfeits her custody of Josh. The birth of Josh becomes the costly exchange Billy would enter into in life. The films were shot on

location in Yenagoa and its environs under Lloyd Tamarapreye as its Artistic Director and Fred Mayford, DGN as the Director. Michael Chukwu served as Director of Photography as well as their Editor, while Saviour Nathan Agoro produced both films.

I did a re-make of five of the episodes in the radio drama series which I had converted to the television series format, into short films. In that format they were longer than the episodes in the series but shorter than feature films. The five short films are *Costly Harvest*, *New Love*, *The Easy Yoke*, *The Ultimate Option*, and *Two in Love with One*. The films were all shot in location in Bayelsa State. The casts feature vibrant upcoming stars within the state. It was deliberate to avoid using known stars in order to come out of the syndrome that had characterised much of what has been happening in the wider Nollywood production motif, where in order to cater for the whims and caprices of the audience, the tendency to cultivate new performers is hindered. I saw in that approach my own way of grooming the stars of the future in Bayelsa State. Most of the stars had served their years of tutelage in the university under me in the department and practical apprenticeship in the Arts and Cultural Centre as actors and actresses. Some came from among the Actors' Guild in Bayelsa State. Others are members of The Solid Productions, an outfit I had established for the purpose of doing Christian films in the ultimate theatre paradigm.

*Costly Harvest* (2015) explores the motif of sowing and reaping. Finda against all parental advice decides to live a loose life. She becomes pregnant by Leon who refuses to have the baby. Damsel, her friend, cautions against aborting the pregnancy. But Finda is bent on flushing out the 'bastard.' She is afraid her father, Bona will carry out the threat of disowning her and driving her out of the house if she

becomes pregnant. She dies in the process, lamenting the fact that she is responsible for her costly harvest of eternal damnation in hell.

*New Love* (2015) portrays a change in the pattern in the life of Lati when she becomes a Christian. Before her new birth, she is enslaved in a relationship with Goba. Her new birth brings an end to the relationship. She cultivates a new relationship with Jesus Christ and joins a fellowship of believers. She abandons her former lover, vowing to live a clean life.

In *The Easy Yoke* (2015), Miranda's expectations in her marriage to Sean are not realised. She would want to live life in the easy way. But Sean does not have the money to procure everything she would want in life. She, therefore, uses sex as a weapon against him. Sean is fed up with her constant refusals. Miranda goes to her mother Ayo for counsel who warns her against denying her husband her body. She warns that for every excuse she gives for not going to bed with her husband another lady would gladly contrive of a reason to sleep with him. But Miranda is not moved.

Sean, unable to keep his problems to himself, discusses his marriage with Bernice, his Secretary. He exposes himself to be manipulated by Bernice but he is saved by the arrival of Rex who counsels him against discussing the problems in his marriage with an outsider, especially an unbeliever. Beyond counselling Sean, Rex and his wife Pamela offer to provide Sean and his wife some of the things Miranda complained about in the past. The role Rex and Pamela play in the union of Sean and Miranda bring healing and restoration to the marriage. The film reminds us all to be and act as our brothers' keepers. We must learn to bear one another's burdens.

In *The Ultimate Option* (2015), Clarke would like to bring up Victor

to be a decent young man. But Victor has his own attitude to life. He is riotous and party conscious. So he always turns Clarke's sitting room into a party hall. Clarke would have none of it. But Mercy thinks differently. She does not exert any positive influence on Victor. She would only be moved to think about the safety of Clarke when Victor threatens that he will kill him if he does not give him one million leones for his birthday party. For once she goes with him to the police station to report Victor's threat. But before they would come to arrest him he has changed already, having been preached to by Terence, a friend. This short film also treats the positive effects of the new birth from a different perspective.

In *Two in Love with One* (2015), Rose and May are friends. When Brand drives Rose out of the house it is May who takes care of her. But in the process of staying with May, Rose falls in love with Pascal, an acquaintance of Rose. But Rose is also in love with Pascal and May does the foolish thing of proposing marriage to him. Pascal turns down May's overtures. He proposes instead to marry Rose. May realises this and is crushed. But she vents her anger on the wrong person: Rose. She accuses Rose of stealing her fiancé. It takes Stewart, an understanding man, to bring the friends together again. For obvious reasons, Rose and May cannot stay together again. Rose moves in with Pascal her new love.

This film treats the often misunderstood subject of God's will in the lives of believers. Sometimes we are too quick to judge relationships out of context. Not every show of kindness man exhibits towards a woman is a signal for marriage. And, of course, in the relationship between the opposite sexes, a high degree of the sense of propriety must be maintained. It would always appear way out for the lady to initiate to propose marriage to a man. The five short films were

directed by Fred Mayford (dgn). Michael Chukwu was the Director of Photography as well as the editor. The sound track was done by Sonia Chika. I acted and in them and produced all of them.

### **9. Making published and unpublished works available for students to use to do original projects to forestall plagiarism.**

I have always been concerned about the quality of project our students produce on a yearly basis. In order to forestall if not avoid plagiarism completely; I have always made my works published and unpublished available for students to use in their projects. These works have been used by students who major in Directing: *Our Wives* (2012) by Kind Dickson, *Take Care John* (2012) by Rachel Evans and *The Exclusive Business* (2013) by Consider Okara. *The Remnants* directed by Promise Abiri (2010) was the Final Year Production exercise for the graduating Class. Akassa Desmond and Comfort Dorgu directed *The Catalyst* and *Another Chance* for the Class production in THA 435 Theories of Modern Theatre.

### **10. Grooming students to make their own films and supervising the project from start to finish.**

Under my supervision Betty Wuradah made *The New Deal*, a feature film which I scripted. Komezwe Gwegwe's movie was *Who is Fooling Who?*, *The Exclusive Business* and *Something to Die for* were all movies made by two different classes I supervised from start to finish. My house became the primary studio as well as location for all the students' film productions. The risk involved in opening up my house to students for the dry runs and shooting could at best only be imagined.

### **11 Creation of the Journal, *Wilberforce Island Review* during my**

## **Deanship.**

As Acting Dean of the Faculty of Arts, I birthed the Faculty Journal, *Wilberforce Island Review* which is still in existence till this day and is promoting scholarship. It became a source for the publication of many highly rated articles. Apart from scholars in Niger Delta University and other Nigerian universities, scholars in the West African sub region have benefited from publishing in it. As an ambassador of this university, during my sabbatical leave at the Federal University, Otuoke, I founded *Otukpa: A Journal of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences*. I served as the Editor-in-Chief. The journal has provided a veritable platform for the publication of ideas by many scholars. I am on the editorial board of many journals. I have always carried my friends and colleagues along too in all these outlets. I serve as an Associate Editor of *The Dawn*, an online journal, which is based in India. Through my influence the journal has published twenty-six African scholars. I am on the Editorial Board of various local and international journals: Consulting Editor, *EJOLLS: Ekpoma Journal of Languages and Literary Studies*, Department of English, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria; Consulting Editor, *International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities*, George Padimore Research Library on African Affairs, Accra, Ghana; Consulting Editor, *WATPAJO: West African Theatre and Performing Arts Journal*, Performing Arts Department, University of Ilorin, Ilorin and Department of Theatre Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana; Consulting Editor, *EJOTMAS: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria; *The Ethnographer*, *Journal of the Niger Delta Studies Association*; Member, Editorial Board, *Tributaries: A Journal of the Department of Theatre Arts*, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island; Member, Editorial Board *Abalabala, Journal of the Bayelsa State Council for Arts and*

*Culture, Yenagoa*; Member, Editorial Advisory Board, *Iroro: A Journal of Arts*, Faculty of Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria.

## **12. Creation and revision of curriculum in Theatre Arts and English and Literary Studies at Niger Delta University.**

I have earlier mentioned the work I did in streamlining the BA programmes in Theatre Arts and English and Literary Studies. For the sake of emphasis let me restate that I midwived both departments from their inception as it is captured in Prof John Cecil Buseri's book, *Niger Delta University: A People's Dream Realised* (98-100). My personal testimony about my work in the two departments is contained in *Niger Delta University: The First Ten Years* edited by Chris Ikporukpo, Welford-Abbey Izonfuo and Olanrewaju Omobuwajo (193-196).

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, my choice of the topic of this lecture was deliberate. We seldom think about theatre beyond it being a way of making money. That orientation is wrong. Because of the growth of the film industry and the apparent success we see in the lives of a number of our stars and producers, everybody now looks at the study of theatre arts as a way of making money. That is why from being a grossly undersubscribed department by way of admission, we have become oversubscribed. Many of our students who do not see in theatre arts beyond a way of making money will be grossly disappointed when on graduation they look for jobs that are not there and cannot create a theatre to generate income for themselves.

The other things which we can use theatre to do in the life of a nation should also concern us. We should be able to use political theatre to demonstrate to our people that politics should not be a do or die affair. We should still use Feminist theatre to cater for our women who are marginalised in the society. The need for the use of ethnic theatre to help in reviving the positive aspects of our culture should find a place in our thinking. And for our relaxation community theatres should be encouraged, trusting that the government will ensure security for the lives and properties of the people. I have demonstrated that theatre has a role to play in the development of any given community. We can always go to communities and study the prevailing problems and use theatre-for-development to proffer solutions with the people themselves directly involved in the process. As for me the ultimate theatre will always remain ultimate. So, whether we make money through theatre or not, so long as we can use theatre to direct people to their Creator we would have done our best in the department.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, because we consider the non-commercial aspect of the course too important we have made **Alternative Theatre** a postgraduate course but because of its elective status its importance will seldom be felt as students weigh or grade courses by their designation. Well, we know that to a large extent course designations are arbitrary; it is not an exact science. Sometimes, it is borne out of strife among members of staff. Let me propose, Sir, that we make this course a compulsory one so that our students will benefit from it.

My second recommendation is in the way departmental heads should be appointed in the university. It is my thinking that there should be a planned succession programme put in place in every department which should not be subject to accidents of any kind nor should be the

product of scheming. Where a roaster exists, every staff that is of Senior Lecturer status can anticipate when it would be their turn to pilot the affairs of the department. No individual's tenure should be prolonged. But a person's tenure could be cut short if as a head he/she misbehaves.

It is conventional and it should be kept so. In the same vein, seniority in the university system is usually by promotion or appointment. This applies to every rank. Whoever is appointed or promoted to any given rank before another usually takes precedence over that individual. The presentation of the inaugural lecture should not be used to rank professors. It is not the standard practice anywhere and it should not be done here. Professors are usually invited to come give the inaugural lecture by the university in order of seniority. It is a mark of honour. Otonti Nduka (1), Anthony I. Nwabughuogu (1) and H. G. J. Evans (1) all agree on that premise. There should be no rush to give the inaugural lecture in order to earn a place in terms of seniority before others. Professor Ogwo E. Ogwo of Abia State University, Uturu was Vice-Chancellor of the university between 2000 and 2005 before he gave his inaugural in 2008 (Ogwo iv). Many other professors have had to give their inaugural lectures after many years of promotion to the rank. The onus will, therefore, rest with the Registrar's office to keep a good record about the promotion exercises in the university.

It is obvious that even if four persons are appointed as professors in a given department someone's report would come earlier than those of the others. There is no way twelve assessors will bring in their reports at the same time. In course of the inaugural lecture, the university can decide to honour the lecturer in whichever way it deems fit. The current practice of giving the inaugural lecturer a plaque to honour

him or her and to recognise the event could still be done.

We live in an era in which fake news is prevalent. One type of fake news that comes up every now and then is the ranking of national universities, regional universities and global universities. There is an authentic document that deals with indices or matrices that are used in ranking world class universities. Let us acquaint ourselves with the document and situate the Niger Delta University on the continuum.

We can cultivate a deliberate policy to determine the areas in which we can strive to excel as a university with the kind of funds we get and can generate. Let us not belabour the inadequacies of government in terms of funding and the cultivation of all the infrastructures we want. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the good work you have been doing to promote this university is not hidden. I commend you for your efforts. Let us continue to do what we can for the growth of the university but we must be careful not to over subscribe in terms of admission because we want to generate funds internally through school fees.

I was surprised when I returned to the university after a period of six years to hear of a concept such as 'academic amnesty'. It became obvious to me that something had gone wrong which was not taken care of in time. It was clear that academic rules were not strictly applied. If a student didn't deserve to go from year one to year two they should not have been allowed. It is not a thing of pride but we were not under any illusion to allow students who could not cope remain in the programme. The first four candidates who came to read Theatre Arts were sent packing for academic failure. We never allowed our emotions to becloud our judgment. In this era of conference marking a weak student could be noticed by all. The

insinuation that a lecturer has failed a student for sex or financial related issues would certainly be laid to rest.

My final recommendation is that departments should determine definite areas in which chairs could be created and scholars should be encouraged to deepen their researches in selected areas. Sometimes after reading through the papers of a scholar in course of assessment, articles are seen to have been written over a variegated span. In terms of number the criteria could be met, but when we consider specialisation the work could be weak. Our colleagues should be forewarned to avoid that kind of pitfall.

I want to conclude my lecture on the note of these recommendations. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir. I appreciate your kind attention and that of this august assembly. God bless you all. Thank you.

## Appreciation

I am grateful to God for seeing me through my academic journey till this day. I still remember vividly when I arrived at Mellanby Hall that evening in October 1978, at University of Ibadan. I had just been admitted as a direct entry freshman by JAMB. I had no letter of admission, only a newspaper cutting and so was rightly told by the porter that since I was not a student he would not open any room for me to sleep till the following day. But God came to my rescue he provided me accommodation that night through Brother Gbile Akanni and his roommate. From that time till now His hand of blessing has always been on me.

My church, Greater Evangelism World Crusade, in Bayelsa State and friends in the church in other states of the country, have been very supportive with their prayers and encouragement. I have enjoyed the friendship and cooperation of my colleagues in the Board of Trustee of the Church. The fellowship of the Ministerial Council has been invaluable. So also the Council of Elders of which I am a member by the grace of God. But the International Director of the Ministry Pastor Isaac Valentine Olori and District Minister Pastor Ibim Alabrabra deserve to be mentioned here. I appreciate the keen interest they have shown in my welfare and career of which the inaugural is part of. The District Administrator, Pastor Jeremiah Ebide, has been a close comrade whose friendship and encouragement I have always cherished. But it was Pastor Lamech Ivifiwol my first Zonal Minister who God used to break my resistance to the pastoral call. Pastor Ebikebuna Tuesday my Area Pastor and his wife Pastor Alice Tuesday, and my friends Evangelists Nathan A. Ayibakeme, Cletus O Okpu and Monday Geregere have all demonstrated concern about my career, among other people in the church. They are mentioned here as representatives of the vast number of people I cannot put down here who love and care about me.

I cannot omit to thank the members of the committee in charge of Caught-Up TV, a satellite broadcast channel of the Greater Evangelism World Crusade, of which I am the Executive Producer and Head of the Production and Technical Department. In the same breath, I thank members of the Solid Rock Night Vigil, namely, Archbishop Christopher Honeycomb Ganagana, Apostle Bipeledei, Pastor Kanus Ebimie and Deacon Donatus Uche, Evangelist Daughter Appah, Revd. Benson Egbejule and others. I want to put on record the prayer support of other Christian friends like Ven. (Dr) S.T.K. Appah, Revd. Daniel Chinedu Wilson and Ellis Iyoyo, my mentor, since my early days in the Lord, who laboured in prayers for me.

The making of a professor is not a matter of a few years. It is obvious; however, because of the length of time it took for me to arrive at this stage that I cannot remember all the teachers who taught me from primary, secondary, college of education to university level. The few I shall mention here is representative of the efforts of the team that was instrumental in shaping my academic destiny.

Let me start with Dr. Ibiba Sasime. He was there to shape me at secondary school level. As I went to the College of Education as a student, before I will finish my studies he had returned from the United States of America with a Ph.D. in History from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, the first black man to earn a doctorate degree from the Department of History in that university. Augustine Ikein in a WhatsApp message to me on 5 June 2020 noted: “His unique topic of research is in the university scholarly archive as special collection to his credit and was especially honoured as honorary citizen of Lincoln city, the capital of Nebraska, USA.” He joined the staff of the History Department and was very useful in giving me a

sense of direction (I read Education, English and History at the NCE level). My choice of Ibadan as the university to pursue my academic programmes may have come on a count of my admiration of his alma mater; beside the fact that the University of Ibadan was the very first place where theatre scholarship started in Nigeria. His visible presence both at the Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt and at Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island where both of us became foundation heads of department is still within the story of influence and mentoring. I always aspired to keep the standards he had set.

Another lecturer worth appreciating is Dr. Mrs. Abigail Afiesimama. She taught me English at the NCE level at the College of Education. From that time onwards she became my academic mother. She has shown me so much love and concern and appreciated my progress in life. When I resumed my career after my master's degree at Ibadan in 1983, she was there as a member of staff in the English Department. As I assumed office at Niger Delta University where I became the Acting Head of English she had joined the services of the Department and worked with me. My success to a large extent could be attributed to her counsel and concern. She always protected me as her child when others misunderstood me.

The Ibadan story should follow naturally. I have acknowledged the contributions of some of my lecturers in my MA dissertation and Ph.D. Thesis. Here it is needful that I recall the laudable works of some of them. They are among the mentors that have shaped my academic career: Late Professors Dapo Adelugba, (Head of Department and Chairman of my Ph.D. defence), J. Adeyinka Adedeji, my first MA Supervisor and 'Zulu Sofola whose interview with me at the University of Ilorin, gave me a sense of direction in my Ph.D. work. She was my lecturer at undergraduate level before she

relocated to University of Ilorin. I also remember Late Dr. Jide Malomo who was my second MA dissertation supervisor, Late Dr. Femi Fatoba my first Head of Department during the Ph.D. programme, Late Dr. Sunbo Marinho, Dr. Ndubuisi Nwafor-Ejelima and Dr. Femi Adedokun who were not only lecturers but my friends. I benefitted from the support and cooperation of Emeritus Professor Femi Osofisan who gave me the opportunity to serve as a lecturer while a Ph.D. candidate and who made me have confidence in myself as a playwright. Professors Lanre Bamidele and Hyginus Ekwuazi showed keen interest in my career and became models for me to imitate.

Late Dr. Carroll Dawes first stirred up in me the need to do a Ph.D. programme. She was willing to supervise me but the University of Port Harcourt where she had relocated to at that time was yet to start postgraduate programme. Dr. Sola Aborisade always encouraged us to improvise and experiment with sets. I learnt a lot from his industry. Dr. Fidelma Okwesa, my dance lecturer, with who had several debates about dance theories, was always mindful to give me the scope to speak up. She did not intimidate and make me shrink from asking questions or making contributions I felt strongly about. It was Dr. Esohe Molokwu who introduced me to Theatre Architecture. Now I have a theatre that was built based on the initial sketch I gave to the architect. I am grateful for all your contributions in making me the scholar I have become. Professor Mathew M. Umukoro supervised my Ph.D. thesis in a painstaking and thorough manner. My thesis benefitted from his methodical and meticulous approach to things.

Other academics that have influenced my career for the better include: Professors Kalu Uka, Barth Oshionebo, Irene Isoken Agunloye, Henry Leopold Bell-Gam, Muyiwa Awodiya who ignited

my interest in Theatre Management at undergraduate level, Augustine Ikein who richly supplied me materials from the US which I used in my MA dissertation in Television Station Management who as he joined us at the new Niger Delta University mentored me on a regular basis. At a very personal level he is the first professor from my town, Igbogene, so has been a very sure source of inspiration. Professor Enumah Austin Anigala, the immediate past Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Delta State University, Abraka is one academic I have enjoyed working with. Some of his creative works provided raw materials for my analysis as I worked on aspects of my Ph.D. I have learned with him to apply our faith to our work as academics. Also worthy of appreciation is Prof. E.O. Kofoworola, who examined my Ph.D. thesis and became my mentor from that time onwards.

I have enjoyed the love and comradeship of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) family. Under the leadership of Professor Sunday Enessi Ododo as President I was conferred with the Life Time Achievement Award. Professor Alex Asigbo as President admitted me to the College of Fellows of the Society. Even within the SONTA family I want to recognize some classmates and school mates whose progress and successes in life have been sources of inspiration to me: Professors Ayobami Akinwale, James Atu Alachi, Uwemedimo Atakpo, Saint Gbilekaa, Effiong Etim Johnson, Emmanuel Emasealu, Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma and Samuel Chinedu Ukala, who I always call Senior, and Associate Professor Samson Alhaji Shaibu. Prof. (Barrister) Mabel Evwherioma was not only a classmate; I had the privilege of having the same supervisor with her. We were a formidable research team of a sort. Besides these, I have enjoyed the friendship of Professors Tor Iorapuu and Emmanuel Samu Dandaura. My telephone conversation with them helped clarified as an aspect of Theatre-for-Development.

Professor Durojaiye Oladele Adegboye gave of himself to mentor me consciously. That made him draw me close to himself, a young man he seldom knew anything about, save that he had become a participant in his group the Gospel Unlimited. Spending my long vacations with him in Zaria made me have the opportunity to know what it meant to celebrate as a department when a candidate had defended a doctorate thesis. His house was full of books and I read the ones I found fascinating. I remember three titles vividly: *Marital Discord*, *Languages of the World*, a bilingual book in English and French and *Index of Nigerian Languages*. My fascination with the two books dealing with languages was that in both of them I found Epie, my mother tongue, listed as a language in the world in Nigeria. From reading *Marital Discord* I discovered a number of factors that could rock marriages. But in the play I wrote after reading the book I zeroed in on sex as a factor that could destroy a marriage. *Not for the Rocks* derived inspiration for the book. My relationship with Professor Adegboye has been a school of a different kind. Even when I became a pastor he came and spent a weekend training members of my Church in Amassoma to develop skills in evangelism and Christian service. We have always enjoyed our time with him as family.

I would like to appreciate the goodwill of the former Executive Governor of Bayelsa State Hon. Chief Henry Seriake Dickson in appointing me as the Provost of the Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama. The experience of being provost even though very challenging has enriched my understanding of human nature. Besides, as a Theatre Artist it afforded me the opportunity through the provision of funds from TETFUND to build a Theatre Complex in the institution, an edifice that does not exist even in many universities in Nigeria.

I appreciate his confidence in me in making me the Chairman of the Bayelsa Higher Education Students' Loan Board. This board has become a new family for me. I appreciate every member of staff at the board for your love and cooperation, especially the Executive Secretary, Dr. Michael Amaegberi, a reputed academic and economist who is in charge of daily piloting of the affairs of the board. Of a truth you hardly can see the kind of lovely work environment he has put in place at the board in many work set-ups. I thank you all for making my job of being a Chairman easy for me hence the ease with I could present this inaugural lecture.

I thank Prof. Seth Accra Jaja, Vice-Chancellor, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State not only for providing me the opportunity of doing my sabbatical leave in his university but who also gave me the privilege to serve as the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. As Dean, I was able to start a journal in the faculty, *Otukpa*, which was ably edited by Professor Osakue Stevenson Omoera who also came on sabbatical leave at that time. I appreciate the goodwill of the former Dean of the Faculty Prof. Diri Teilanyo along with other professors and staff of the faculty who made my administration of the Faculty a success. I am happy that at the time my tenure as Dean came to an end I handed over to my friend, Professor Benjamin Okaba, with who I started learning the art of growing in academics. I am grateful that Prof Jaja has further extended his goodwill to me by engaging me as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of English and Communication Studies. I feel very much at home in the department. Within the short space of time I have worked under three different heads: Professor Chris Onyema who is now the Dean of Education. Professor (Mrs.) Cecilia Eme with who I was admitted to the Nigerian Academy of Letters, and Dr. Chris Diri, who currently serves as the head of Department. I have enjoyed the friendship of colleagues: Professors Joseph Ushie, Macaulay Mowarin, Barine

Ngaage, Ogaga Olukuyade, Osakue Stevenson Omoera, Nkem Okoh, Leopold Henry Bell-Gam and Professor (Mrs.) Philomena Ejele. A constant source of joy for me in the department is to have two of my former students at Niger Delta University as members of staff. They are Ekiyokere Ekiye (First Class Honours) in English and Ike Onyeka who has become a successful novelist. These other colleagues too have been fun to work with: Mrs. Alieksandra Kpuduwei, Mrs. Blessing Umunnah, Drs. Musah Oyakemeagbegha and Chinedu Ogoke, Dr. (Mrs.) Patricia Anyanwu, Dr. (Mrs.) Franca Okumo, Dr. (Mrs.) Christabel Onyema, Dr. (Mrs.) Blessing Uwasomba, Dr. (Mrs.) Preye Iyalla-Amadi and Mr. Charles Okorodudu. I must make special mention of Professor Osakue Stevenson Omoera who has constantly reminded me of the need to get done with the inaugural lecture so that I can move on with other things in life. He called virtually every day to find out about the progress I was making with the work.

It is needful I put on record here the role the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Federal University, Otuoke, Prof. Teddy Adias has played in my life these years. As a brother Provost I learned a lot from him. Coming to the Federal University, Otuoke, to work under him has been a wonderful experience. He combines humour even as he deals with serious matters. It is fun to have him preside at Senate meetings on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. That is a serious food for thought for me as an artist.

I thank my colleagues who took care of the Department for the six years I was away. I am particularly grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts Prof. Chabovie M. Sorgwe that during his second tenure in office a number of my colleagues have become Professors. He was the pioneer Acting Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the time I assumed

work at Niger Delta University. I celebrate Professors Benedict Binebai, Christine Odi and Kenneth Eni. The others who also helped to hold out the forte include: Drs. Sunday Abraye, Tam Azorbo and Rudolph Kansese. Mr. Kingsley Inerite, Mr. Asuefien Makbere, Mrs. Doubara Otiotio as well as Mr. Charles Tambou cooperated to keep the department going.

I appreciate all of you who worked with me in the Faculty of Arts when I acted as its second Dean. I thank those of you who mentored me in the faculty namely: Late Professors M.Y. Nabofa and S.E.Ogude. Prof Isaac Akanji Nasiru came in when the department of Theatre Arts was still in its formative years. We always had healthy debates that were instrumental in giving shape to things. I appreciate those of you who were professors in the Faculty before me, especially Prof Chris Dime during whose Deanship I was promoted to the rank of a Professor. I want to put on record my profound gratitude to Professor Richard Olaniyan who respected me and insisted that I should be given room to express myself on issues during Faculty appraisal meetings even though some insisted that I should not be given room to express myself since they considered me as a neophyte professor or eaglet professor who should be seen and not heard. I enjoyed the goodwill of Late Professor Welford-Abbey Izonfuo who was my tutor in the secondary whose mentorship continued from that time until we met at Niger Delta University. As Dean of Science he gave me and the Dean of Arts counsel on how to prepare me for promotion to the rank of professor. His advice was invaluable.

It is time for me to appreciate my wife, Monica who kept on asking when the writing of the inaugural would be over. She had stood by me through thick and thin. She had laboured more than many women to manage a difficult man who always had something that would take

him away to the study always. My son, Isaac Isivie, missed me while I wrote this lecture. If he had the courage he would have told me to get done with it in time so that I can pay attention to him. I thank my staff Osborn Tarigbolo and Emmanuel Peter for the way they accommodated me in the numerous errands they ran to keep the office and the house running. My mother was very sensitive as she prayed for my welfare. She knew when time was up for me to leave my position as Provost of the College of Education Sagbama. So she asked God to take the job and give me back to her. She did it as if she was in a trance. During morning devotion one day, she called me out. She asked me to kneel down and told God: “I thank you for the child you gave to me. I appreciate the job you gave him as Provost. But now, I want you to take the job and give me my child.”The prayer was as short as that. She was done. It was only a few days later that my removal from office as provost was published in the government Facebook page. Her prayers have always been invaluable in my life.

It will be unhistorical and improper to forget the 'living ancestors' who laid the foundation for the work we have been doing in this university. I thank God for preserving the life of the pioneer Vice-Chancellor Prof. John Cecil Buseri to this day. He invested his life in building this place and took the kind of risk many people were not willing to take at that time. We always travelled in the same boat. We never had any security operative protecting our lives. It is good to note that foundation for this place which he laid was solid no wonder it can carry the load we are daily heaping on it. Professor Chris Ikporukpo built on it and in his tenure we had the first professorial promotions and the system of inaugural lecture was instituted in order of seniority. Now it has become a normal practice. Professor Humphrey Ogoni, the first professor to be appointed by Niger University, who became Vice-Chancellor, has continued in the good tradition of growing the university to heights beyond where he met it.

I trust that with time as it has become the tradition he will put on paper 'The Ogoni years of Niger Delta University.'

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I thank you and the Council of this great university for giving me the Chair that has now become appropriate under whose auspices I have presented this inaugural lecture. I am happy it has taken place at a very auspicious time in the life of our great state under the leadership of the Miracle Governor HE Senator Douye Diri who himself is the Visitor to the university. I trust that under his watch the university will make greater strides as attention is paid to the infrastructural and manpower development of the premier tertiary institution of the state. I pray that God will continue to bless this university and make it a beacon of light for the generations to come. God will reward your efforts in building this place to the standard it has assumed and beyond. Your works are speaking daily. They are visible. All the ceremonies that should be part of the life of the university you have been carrying out: inductions, matriculations and the recent colourful convocation in which you were able to redeem those several past years. I appreciate you all for your kind attention. Thank you.

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## 38th Inaugural Lecturer



## Saviour Nathan Anari Agoro

BA, MA, Ph.D. (Ibadan)

MNAL, Fsona, FNIM, FIMIM, FCAI

Professor of Dramatic Literature and Theatre Arts

## ABOUT THE INAUGURAL LECTURER

Professor Saviour Nathan A. Agoro, MNAL, FCAI, FNIM, fsonta, FIMIM mnipr, is a native of Igbogene Epie, the gateway town to Bayelsa State from Rivers State. He was born on the 8th day of April 1955. He was educated at the Rivers College of Education, Port Harcourt, now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, where he earned a teaching diploma, Nigeria Certificate in Education, from the University of Ibadan. He studied Theatre Arts at University of Ibadan, Nigeria, where he obtained BA (Hons.), MA, Ph.D. degrees. His doctoral thesis in Alternative Theatre was adjudged a monumental contribution to theatre scholarship. He served as the pioneer Head of the Departments of Theatre Arts and English and Literary Studies., Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island. He was instrumental in the creation of the Theatre Arts curriculum for BA, MA and PhD programmes at Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island. The Council of Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, at the time it deliberated on the recommendation of the Appointments and Promotions Committee (Academic) and approved his promotion from Senior Lecturer to Professor, directed that he be “commended for exemplary academic performance during the assessment period.”

He served as the Dean of the School of Languages, Rivers State College of Education, now Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island and as the immediate past Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. He is a certified member of the Teachers Council of Nigeria. He also served as Provost, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State from August 2012 to July 2017. Professor Agoro served as a Visiting Senior Lecturer

under the auspices of the Nigerian Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Programme at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, from January 2000 to March 2002, where he taught Drama at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the Department of English and Theatre Arts at the Institute of African Studies.

Professor Agoro serves on the Editorial Board of various local and international journals including *The Dawn Journal*, an online Journal based in India. He is a member of the Nigerian Academy of Letters. He is a Fellow of the Institute of Corporate Administration, Fellow Nigerian Institute of Management (Chartered). Fellow of the Institute of Mass Communication and Information Management of Nigeria and Fellow of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists which conferred on him its Life Time Achievement Award on 1st November, 2017. Besides, he is a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, and Association of Nigerian Authors. He also belongs to the Directors' Guild of Nigeria and Association of Movie Producers.

Professor Agoro has written over fifty plays. Among them, *A Query for Professor Aburie*, *Beyond Queries*, *Something to Die for*, *The Pain of Love*, *The Exclusive Business*, *Little Minds* and *The Remnants*, have been prescribed for Junior Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State. His film credits include: *Partners at Large*, 2000, *Gone with the War*, 2002, *Indecent Proposal*, 2003, *Love Beyond the Scourge*, 2014 and *The Exchange*, 2015. He has written eight novels. *Along the Tunnel*, *Off Target*, *Beyond Justice*, *The Battle for Bernice*, *Season of Errors*, *Daughters of Destiny*, *The Matron's Wish*, and *The Spirit of the Master*. Professor Agoro has contributed and is still contributing to scholarship in the area of dramatic literature and criticism in Africa and beyond. He is a consummate Theatre Arts practitioner. He is currently, Chairman of the Bayelsa Higher Education Students Loan Board.

Professor Agoro is happily married to Monica, his dear wife, and they are blessed with a son. By the grace of God, he is a pastor in Greater Evangelism World Crusade, where he also serves as a member of the Board of Trustees and heads the Production and Technical Department of Caught-Up Television (CUTV).

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