

Nana Ansah Kwao IV Speaks on “Rethinking Our Cultural Identity For Nation Building: The Role Of Tertiary Institutions In Ghana.”

A SPEECH DELIVERED BY NANA ANSAH KWAO IV, AT THE 3RD DISCIPLINE IN LEADERSHIP PUBLIC LECTURES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, AT THE RTC AUDITORIUM, ABETIFI-KWAHU

1. SALUTATIONS

The President,
Council members;
Management;
The Clergy;
Nananom,
Deans and Heads of Department;
Staff of PUCG
district assembly workers,
Staff of NCCE
Students of PUCG
SHS students
Nananom and loved ones here from Akwamu,
Distinguished invited guests;
Members of the press;
Ladies and gentlemen;

... all other protocols duly observed.

2. GREETINGS:

I bring you fraternal greetings from Akwamuhene, the OdenehoKwafoAkoto III and Nana AfrakomahII, Akwamuhemaa.

3. FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

Before I start let me make a little confession – Rev Prof. Chairman.
What hit me as I arrived at the University Campus was the sense of order. I was impressed with sense of order in this institution and I think you deserve a round of applause. I guess it’s called **DISCIPLINE IN LEADERSHIP**.

4. INTRODUCTION

It is a great honor for me to be given the rare opportunity to deliver this speech at the 3rd Discipline in Leadership Public Lectures. May I say your motto alone is a topic on its own and that is very much needed in our dear country Ghana today.

i. MY ROOTS

Indeed, I am home and I am sure my ancestors will be smiling down at me this very moment.

I am a blue blood Presbyterian and a direct descendant of the Rev Theophilus Opoku. Rev Theophilus Herman Kofi Opoku was the first indigenous African to be ordained a pastor/priest in the Gold Coast by the Basel Mission in 1872. He also wrote the PresbyHymn 395, '*ƆhƆho ne mamfranina me ye wɔ fam ha*' ('I am a stranger and sojourner in this world.'). He was my direct great-great-grandfather on my maternal side.

But it does not end there. My paternal grandfather, the Very Right Rev. G. K Sintim-Misa who was also a Moderator of the Presbyterian Church for 12 years - from 1967 to 1979. He was elected to serve two terms and he had a lot of dealings with Abetifi. I am very sure he will be proud to see what the church has evolved into today.

So, Prof. Chairman, tell Mrs. Mary Abena Agyepong, Madam Registrar, to really look after me – as you can see, '*m'aba ma gyanom fie*' (I am home'). I am like a gold bar in a vault, just where I have to be. I must hasten to add that the hospitality has been great.

ii. MY NAME

My name before installment as a chief was Kwaku Sintim-Misa. Can you imagine, working on radio and TV with a name like 'KSM'. I would never have had my own identity! But God was and has been good to me.

After my installation as a Chief, I became Nana Ansah KwaoIV, 'Oyiakekyire', obviously of the little Republic of Adumasa. So, you see where my pride and confidence come from. It's important that we all study our roots and you will be amazed at how it will boost your confidence and give you a great sense of belonging. Ladies and gentlemen, **Oyiakekyire means 'burden reliver'**

But I have not been invited here to come and plot my family tree.

5. IMPORTANCE OF THE THEME:

I have a much more difficult task for I have come to simply tell the Ghanaian, the African, the black man/woman already in the university, that there is no need to apologize for the excess melanin in his or her skin. I am here to inform you that your culture is not a dark one.

Interestingly, from age 2 we have been taught that '**A**' is for ???
(**Get audience to say apple**).

To date, 'A' has never been for 'aponkye' or 'aboodoo'.

'A' has always been for apple. I know we are in global village, and English is a global language, but I also believe we are in the village to. I perfectly agree that the world is

smaller now, but we are in it too. But what we contribute to it will be a topic for another day.

So back to the theme- **Rethinking our Cultural Identity for Nation Building: The Role of Tertiary Institutions in Ghana.**

When I say I have a much more difficult task believe me. I know I am at a University and every statement I make should be backed by reference or by research. This is not a serial calling platform on morning radio where anything goes. Talking about serial calling. (on a lighter side Sir John once told KwameSefaKai that because the late Former President Mills was in power, the systems were so bad that even pepper had lost its spice)

6. MY FINDINGS

But I will want you to bear with me, because these are my own findings.

(I) Re-educating ourselves

Let us first ask ourselves these important questions, after coming this far in life and in our education:

Do we really have the energy to re-educate ourselves, in subjects that have been neglected all through our time in school and yet we have been widely accepted wherever we go? Indeed, we may even have been praised for neglecting them.

What am I talking about? I am talking about the subject of Ghanaian culture, the subject of blackness and of knowing and accepting who we are.

Most of us have survived perfectly well in the absence of self-realization and not knowing our own culture.

The first role of the tertiary institutions is to face it and accept this bitter truth.

Now these are my findings so they are opened to debate or even rejection. I have not done any scientific research; this is me thinking from my palace at the Little Republic of Adumasa in Akwamu.

Rev Prof. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

(II) THE IRONY OF BORROWED SOLUTIONS

It dawned on me that **most solutions that we borrowed from elsewhere that did not have our cultural influence in it came in to exacerbate the very problem it was meant to solve**

Prof. Chairman, Deans and Heads of department:

Maybe the Philosophy class would want to take it up and look into, research and investigate it some more.

I said earlier that it dawned on me that *most solutions that we borrowed or inherited from elsewhere, that did not have our cultural element in it came to exacerbate the very problem it was meant to come and solve.*

Now here at the tertiary level is where you master the art of the borrowed solutions.

(iii) Education or diseducation?

Prof NaanaOpoku Agyeman came to Joy FM one morning and I happened to be on the show that morning and she said something very profound and maybe even haunting. But maybe no one paid attention, but as for me it has haunted me to this day.

She said **'our educational system is such that by the time you finish university you are diseducated'**.

She was then the Minister for Education. It's just like me coming to tell you that in Adumasa we like kokonte. How would you argue with me? I'm the Chief of the town.

So, if the Minister of Education at that time is telling us this, we should all be concerned.

But back to my observation of 'The Irony of Borrowed Solutions'.

(II) The Irony of Borrowed Solutions: Religion

Let me start with religion since I am here at the bastion of the christian faith.

Africa was supposed to be a heathen land that needed healing from the missionaries. Converting to Christianity was:

- To accept Christ,
- Evangelize,
- win souls and
- Above all do right by god and man.
- Uprightness and civility,
- Love your neighbour as thyself,
- Respect and honor god and man,

One can go further to say

- No stealing,
- No killing,
- Honor thy mother and father and the elderly
- no fighting
- No use of abusive language ...

The list goes on and on.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

But we abided by all of the above, other than the Jesus factor. We lived by these codes, although we did not know Christ. We did so by applying *'cause and effect'*.

Our forefathers told us that for every vice there was an immediate punishment. Our cultural belief in religion was that 'don't mess with me and nature will not mess with you'. Simply put, *'don't mess with nature and nature won't mess with you'*.

Before I go on, let's do a little exercise. Let me ask **'is there any one here who thinks he or she slipped into this world by mistake'**? Maybe you were to be an Indian and when God turned to look at something, you then escaped and ended up here ... *'show by hands'*

I have asked this question many times and I am yet to find someone who believes that he or she is a mistake. That God has no knowledge of their existence here in Ghana. Which means there is a reason why we are here, and as Ghanaians we have a way, we do our things, that is our culture, our identity. Unless again you think God got it wrong.

So, it is not for nothing that we in Ghana practiced *cause and effect*. The Christian faith however, teaches us that, whatever it is that you do wrong, when you regret it, and ask for forgiveness, you will be forgiven.

- So, people now take advantage of the poor and say it's their answered prayer,
- A young man wants a bicycle and so he steals one and says *'forgive me Lord I really wanted it'*.

Whereas in the olden days he would have been afraid of the consequences of stealing, today he believes he has been forgiven.

At the inception of Christianity, our culture was considered evil. Good and evil could not coexist so we had to do away with virtually all things of our culture since, it was seen as evil and therein lies our battle today.

(iv) **Christianity without our culture makes us immoral**

Christianity without our culture is making us too immoral. There is too much blatant wrong doings, because we are no more ashamed. There is no more fear of *cause and effect*, which was the central role of our culture.

V. Cultural codes

So now the solution meant to make us more moral ended up doing the very opposite. The average European lives by a **code of guilt, that is: whether** you see him do it or not

he's most likely to confess, or even resign his post with a deep sense of responsibility and guilt.

(VI) The shame and honour code of the Africans

The average African on the other hand lives by a code of shame and honor, so unless you catch him, then what you don't see won't hurt you.

Professor Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: This shame and honour code of the that is why we have many 'if laws in our culture:

- If you sweep at night you are sweeping your wealth;
- Don't go to sea on Tuesday, 'if' you go you will see the wrath of the sea god
- If you do this - that will happen.

This was because in the divine wisdom of our ancestry, we couldn't depend on people coming to say that 'I'm sorry I went to sea on Tuesday 'when no one actually saw him.

We operate on the **fear of shame** – it's a divine code that every race has, **so as good and as beautiful as Christianity is as a way of life**. If we had just added our cultural checks in there from the beginning as it is happening now, I believe it would have served us much better, in terms of accepting our culture and traditions.

In the little Republic of Adumasa – we hold church services at the palace at least twice a year, we started with the Presbyterian church now we have extended it to all churches since they all live in the town.

I am hoping that the children who attend church at the palace today will grow to know that there's no dark or negative thing about our culture.

Rev Prof. Chairman, I hope you will agree with me that all Jesus needed was a Ghanaian passport.

(V) The justice system! – effects of a borrowed system

Normally in our cultural setting, we settle important issues at dawn and in low voice so as not to alert others. The wisdom in the timing and the tempo was because, at that early hour, how angry and heated could one get? And talking softly as well in the presence of important members of one's family, parties involved had a better chance of reaching a settlement.

Matters that were more serious were brought before the king/chief who will inform his advisers to look into the matter before the case was brought to the court yard to be heard.

Ladies and Gentlemen, under these arrangements it will be hard to hear that a case has been on-going for 5years – 10years and they have not reached a settlement. Can you imagine waking up at dawn for 10years and still no judgment?

This was not possible, but that is exactly what the borrowed justice system was to solve, to make ours better and bring more equity.

Yet the cost of justice, the access to justice and even the spirit behind it sometimes work against us. After adopting the western justice system, we have ended up with a backlog of cases and a general mistrust. Some of the laws do not even apply to us, yet we live with it. Moreover, now if you are not wealthy it is hard to get justice.

Ladies and gentlemen bear with me. I am pointing out these issues so that we realize what it is that confronts us as we ignore our culture.

Education and the effects of a borrowed system

In our cultural setting, we were mostly an educated people and had respect for neighbours and value for nature. This we studied at home, and it was taught by the community, elders made sure the young learnt the crafts of their forebears. The stories of their struggles, the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of the society were told. We tilled the land and had a good understanding of herbs and their medicinal value

(Examples: How did they know that chewing stick has fluoride in it? And that palm wine has antibiotics? the technique of drying of corn so the seeds don't over dry?)

That was education.

Until formal and conventional schooling came in as a solution to educate us all and **yes it succeeded in schooling many, educating a few and leaving too many behind.**

The Shift:

Our focus shifted to numeracy and literacy – because what the colonial master needed was clerks, to count and log goods being shipped out. As for the properties of a nim tree, the uses of charcoal, hwentia, prekese as well as the rewards of loyalty, the respect of a good name? These were not examined in school so there was no need to master them. Speaking eloquent English was a top priority and letters added to our names meant a lot than the substance.

And so you realize that even though we have more graduates now in Ghana than ever before, **this is probably the only country in the world, which is not at war but poison's pollutes diverts and contaminates almost all of its own water. A very strange phenomenon indeed.**

Rev Prof Chairman

Let's think about it. Almost all the polluters of our fresh waters have been to some school, a church or a mosque. So why are they doing this? What really happened? What really went wrong?

One young man who was interviewed on one of the TV channels in the height of the galamsey era said he did galamsey as a means of raising money to pay his university fees. He was interviewed standing in the middle of a river which was now all brown. Ladies and gentlemen, from there he's going to back to university. To do what? I wondered? What an irony!

As Prof Naana Opoku Agyemang said by the time we finish tertiary education, we are diseducated. Let me add '*but highly schooled*'.

Because this young man in the galamsey business and destroying our freshwaters can probably work out Pythagoras theories and probably define Archimedes principles. But sadly, he has no knowledge of how to protect his own environment.

(VI) Cement!

Yes, common cement used in construction. Let me ask this burning question: '*before cement was introduced to our construction industry, who was homeless and slept outside*'? Now we have mentally sound and physically fit individuals sleeping outside because they have no rooms?

But we had the knowledge of building with laterite and thatch as our roofing with at least one room to shelter us within the court yard architectural design. Most of our family homes in our villages still stand to this day. But then came limestone and cement followed by corrugated iron sheets, we adopted it wholly and threw away our God-given knowledge and technology. *Currently in our schools today our children are taught that to build with clay is inferior.*

However according to the Ministry of Works and Housing, as at December 2018, there was a 1.7 million housing deficit in Ghana. This is just to break-even. It is worthy to note that the population of Ghana is also growing by about 850,000 annually, according the national population council (NPC). The question to ask is 'when are we ever going to catch-up, if we do not go back to the use of clay? The amazing properties of clay is such that it takes a longer time for heat to travel through. So, during the day it's nice and cool inside and by night time, it becomes warm. Moreover, it is timeless, durable and needs very little maintenance. It is very suitable for our tropical climate.

But a great number of us are sleeping roughly, on the very laterite material that we need to build a room and a roof over our heads. Our forefathers say that "it is only ignorance that makes a chicken sleep hungry on a sack of corn".

So, this is where you as the university, come in to "*rethink our cultural identity for nation building*". Can you research into the use of clay for building?

The university should be thinking very seriously of '*branding and marketing*' and also '*partnership*' not only with the government but also with private and foreign investors who will make things happen if the profits can be justified.

Our current governance versus contemporary governance

In the wisdom of our ancestry, it was thought that it was dangerous to give absolute power to an individual, because power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

To check this abuse, *authority and power were separated*. The chief has absolute authority of the state but power was divided amongst the sub-chiefs. What a clever idea!

In traditional governance, the second highest office holder is the opposition leader, who is the Mankrado. This is to ensure transparency.

Chiefs are also selected from families so that one has no choice but to work with all other office holders.

What we have now with the *borrowed solutions which is to come and serve us better* is that one person is given imperial powers and we wonder why things don't work out.

In the same country there is a great majority who are praying for the down fall of the government so that they can also '*chop the post some*'. I know there is no perfect system but how can we develop when the house is so sharply divided?

So, whereas the traditional model was governance for all, today, government is physically present in about only fifteen thousand (15,000) out of about the sixty thousand (60,000) communities in Ghana. Yet the powers and authorities of the chiefs have been taken away and one may wonder the replacement for governance. I am not saying we should have a chief as a president, but can we look at the spirit behind our principles of leadership?

Rev Dr. OpuniFrimpong, is a former General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana and the author of the book *Indigenous Knowledge & Christian Missions*.

In this book, Robert Sutherland Rattray, who was an early student and interpreter of Asante Indigenous Knowledge and Systems has expressed a lot of concern about us as Ghanaians, that is you and I.

Rattray says and I quote from the last paragraph of page 23 of the book:

'The educated African, however has been cut off from, and is out of sympathy with the life of his own people. He has learned in nine cases out of ten, if he has not actually been taught, to despise his own illiterate brethren and the unlettered past of his race. Concerning that past, he really knows little or nothing and generally cares less'

On page 29 of the same book and in response to building the African confidence and contribution to being players in this global world, this is what Ratra says and again I quote:

'In this book, Robert Sutherland Rattray, who was an early student and interpreter of Asante Indigenous Knowledge and Systems has expressed a lot of concern about us as Ghanaians, that is you and I.

Guard the national soul of your race and never be tempted to despise your past. Therein, I believe, lies the sure hope that your sons and daughters will one day make their own original contributions to knowledge progress'

Which means instead of the tertiary educated leading and championing the cause of our identity, we are the ones fighting against it. We mostly think it is primitive, and to us those who did not get the opportunity to be here should just make way for us to teach them a thing or two of how it is done elsewhere in Europe or America.

It is sad to note that till now we have not been able to come up with a creation like the original kente cloth. And worse still in spite of all our letters to our name, we have not even branded Kwaku Ananse.

Let me share a story it about a young man by name George Danso a citizen of the Republic of Adumasa. This young man, helps me a lot with finding sponsorship, so offered to give him the role of Sanaa here, to which he said he needed to consult his pastor. He came back a few days later to say that, when he takes up the position, he will be expelled from church. So I asked him 'how about marketing and finance secretary'? That he said he will do. So if I change the title to English he will take the position. But note that 'Sanaa' is the twi for finance and marketing.

Ladies and gentlemen, the spirit behind borrowed solutions cannot be all bad. The mistake is throwing away your identity and taking a foreign one.

Greatest taboo: shame and dishonour

The greatest taboo as a Ghanaian or an African is shame and dishonor, and not the lack of material things

That is why a university student can poison his own water in search of material things, literally destroying life to gain wealth.

Different cultural codes

Anthropologist who study race and culture, have said that different race live by different codes and its almost divine.

- The Asians live by honor
- The Europeans live by guilt
- The Africans live by shame and honor, with a bit of fear.

But we were schooled and taught by people who live by guilt, so by the time we leave school and get into important positions and taking life changing decisions that affect the nation we do so with no shame or guilt. The reason is that we have lost our fear of shame and have not adopted the sense of guilt either.

Rev prof. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, should we fail in all aspect of finding our identity, we should not fail in going back for the code of 'shame and the fear of dishonor'. Let us go back for this code. Let us go back to the days when they asked which home you came from and not how much money you have in your pocket or which model iPhone you use. So, the university student will stop polluting water, and think of guarding his family's name.

The loss of identity has over-materialized us. The source of one's money, is not an issue just get the money.

If you have followed current affairs, you will see and hear of leaders who have no shame nor guilt,

- 56 ambulances in the whole country, unthinkable. We are waiting for the 275 more promised us the citizenry to arrive. This is to serve all 30million of us and we have to be grateful. Yet we have more of luxury v8 Toyota land cruisers imported for leaders from the same shores where the ambulances are made and with the same state funds that could have bought the ambulances for the masses. **But no, shame no guilt!**
- Leaders flying first class and business class, to the very same 'rich countries' who help us. Yet those who give us aid fly economy class unless the flight is over 8hours and they won't dare drive V8s. **They will feel guilty.**
- But guess what we don't feel guilty nor do we feel ashamed, too many 1000s die or get maimed as a result of painful neglects- like a pot hole or an empty oxygen cylinder or no bed-things that can easily be solved if one treasured their family names as an office holder. **So please do not take your identity lightly, it is divine.**

Just imagine a Ghana run by people who had shame and honor as we should as Ghanaians:

- They will feel ashamed to live in excessive luxury while women give birth on the floor;
- They will feel ashamed to send development to areas just for vote;
- They will feel ashamed about vigilantism;
- They will feel ashamed about the filth we are engulfed in;
- They will feel ashamed to wake up late and use their sirens to disturb us in traffic.
- They will feel ashamed that Dubai a desert city, is greener than Accra;
- They will feel ashamed of collecting 10%.

How honorable will it be for example the roads minister, or the national road safety boss or the MTTD boss to come out and say “with alarming number of deaths on our roads, I feel I have let the nation down I resign”.

The university should make sure even though the student might already be formed in character, they should make sure that at least each student graduates with a diploma in a ‘**sense of shame and honor**’ in addition to the degree they earn.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the tertiary institution should, as a matter of policy, make issues of culture and identity an emotional subject and not with the usual sympathetic approach.

As a country we are currently developing largely on foreign cultures and this leaves a **huge gap in the market** for us to explore.

The tertiary institutions should instill in their students the good cultural values and dispel the negative perceptions that we have grown to believe. This is important for our graduates to be able to defend whenever their culture is misinterpreted,

Rev. Prof. Chair, this is very important because *until the lions have their own historians, the tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter.*

The least you can do in addition to your very impressive sense of order and the environment of the university is to send your graduates out from here with a sense of ownership, a sense of belonging, filled with pride, bursting with confidence and fully Ghanaian.

Let me end by reminding us of one of the most powerful songs of our time by EphraimAmu entitled *YaanomAbibirima*.

You are the generation to change Ghana, don't be in a hurry to join the system we have created, it will consume you.

Compared to Nkrumah and J. B, Danquah, who had to write letters and newspaper articles to rally up a nation to get independence, with the power of technology that you have you should do more to rescue the now perishing nation.

Thank you.

NANA ANSAH KWAO IV
CHIEF ADUMASA, AKWAMU