

Acceptance Speech by Rev. Fr. Prof. Innocent I. Asouzu on behalf of all Awardees
On the Occasion of
Award of Honorary Life Membership of the Nigeria Philosophical Association
In recognition of their “enormous contribution to Philosophical research and documentation,
teaching and the development of Philosophical studies in Nigeria and beyond”

At the University of Lagos, Akoka Yaba-Lagos - October 16, 2014

Mr. Vice-Chancellor University of Lagos, Akoka, the President Nigeria Philosophical Association (NPA) and Members of his Executive, the Chairman LOC and his team, Members Nigeria Philosophical Association, All Awardees, Distinguished Guests and all here present: I was asked by members of the Executive of Nigeria Philosophical Association to make a brief speech in the form of a general vote of thanks on behalf of awardees of today and I am very glad to do so. First and foremost, I have to call your attention to the fact that this assignment was given to me after I had written and printed many copies of my own acceptance speech last week. I crave your indulgence to accept and listen, in good faith, to two versions of my presentation that have now been fused into one.

We the awardees are here today to receive awards given to us by our great Association. We accept the awards in our various capacities with gratitude and joy. In the name of all awardees, I say a hearty thank you.

In a clime, like ours, where many awards are easily misused and abused, an occasion like this provides us with the opportunity to reflect for a while on some central themes of this event. This is important because these are some of those little things we easily take for granted: things that can escape our attention in the midst of the glamour, fanfare and excitements surrounding events of this kind. As philosophers though, we are not easily given to such distractions, since we always seek to penetrate and pay attention to what is concealed by and beneath common sense experience. Our orientation notwithstanding, exercises of this kind are, from time to time, inevitable and today affords a good opportunity for such. Our highly esteemed Prof. Chinua Achebe knew how very important such reflections are. He cherished them greatly, and in his meditations he once came to the conclusion that some of these awards have lost their values. He thus refused vehemently to be associated with an award coming from very high quarters here in our country: He did not accept the award. Who can legitimately question his stand? Here we can borrow a leaf from him. Why should we not? That is if one remembers how awards and titles are “dished out” today in our society; and sometimes under very nebulous circumstances. It may not be an overstatement to claim that some of these have become worthless, especially those aimed merely at celebrating and decorating individuals. Of what value are awards when people are simply interested in accumulating plaques to devalue their own characters and not to embellish them? Of what use are awards when they do not actually reflect those ideals for which they are intended? Here we are today; we are not refusing the award you have given us, we treasure it and we accept it with joy because it is worth its significance and is honourable. It is quite different and we thank you immensely. Awards are visible manifestations of some of those things we admire, cherish and believe in. They aim at speaking out loudly and clearly about those things we can vouch for. Here, we recognise the confidence you repose in us, when you select us to be so honoured.

When I mentioned to some people that I am being called to Lagos to be honoured with an award, some went straight to the point - as is often now the order of the day: "How much is attached to it?" Some curious ones desired to know. Here, we can identify very clearly the language and spirit of our time; and one that definitely misses the point. We are aware that not the emblems that denote these awards matter most, even when these are made of gold. You have carefully outlined some of the benefits attached to our new statuses as recipients of award of **Nigeria Philosophical Association**. These are modest but invaluable gifts to us. We acknowledge and appreciate your kindness. There is no doubt that you look beyond these ephemeral values that accompany our new statuses – even when they count greatly. Here, we extol the lofty ideals enshrined in your intentions. It for this reason that we share strongly in your optimism that these awards are intended to mirror, if only approximately, what the recipient stands for and the stuff the awardee is made of. We join you in proclaiming and celebrating those values we hold sacred, cherish and strive towards – values of which these awards are their visible manifestations: integrity, goodness, perseverance, resourcefulness, excellence, love, compassion, patriotism, selflessness and all those qualities that mark us out as special human beings and as academics. Occasions like this are there to reassure us that these are values that persist and endure, and are worthy of aspiration and emulation. Yes, occasions like this give us reasons to meditate more on these values and to reaffirm our resolve that these are not mere abstract and abstruse perfections beyond the reaches of mortals. They are realities that can become manifest in the lives and characters of individuals, who aspire towards them earnestly and honestly, their fragility and insufficiency notwithstanding. Therefore, we are gathered here today to share such life-lessons whose context you have created; and to encourage each other in the face of difficulties. Yes, these are very difficult times marked by excessive quest for honour, awards and titles; worst still is when such titles are neither deserved nor earned – clear signals of a sick society and departure from the philosophical temperament, for which we should be known. We insist therefore that a rediscovery of the philosophical attitude has become imperative: It is an attitude of the mind that seeks to articulate our limited historical experiences within the context of the whole; bearing in mind the intrinsic necessary connection between the absolute and the relative, in the complementarity of their determination. An attitude of the mind that can help in transforming some of the excesses identifiable with the types of divisive, non-complementary mind-set that pervades the place. This philosophical temperament of mutual complementary type deserves a rightful place as we discuss "**Nigeria, Hundred Years After**" in our conference this year. Within this mutual complementary framework, it is imperative to view life sub specie aeternitatis (from the standpoint of eternity) while bearing in mind the fragmentary character of our existence, and seek to relate these to each other thoughtfully: Though, not strictly in that religious sense that has often become very problematic. Unfortunately, some of us are stuck in only one side of this ontological divide. With regard to adhering solely to the relative fragmentary divide, this can become frustrating on the long run seeing how quickly things come and vanish; worst still seeing how past memories recede into oblivion. Within such a philosophical context, we observe that awards know their rightful owners; and will reclaim what belongs to them when the time comes, since as the saying goes, res clamat ad dominum (a things always shouts to its rightful owner). Here, those awards that radiate in our daily encounters, in good character, in mutual complementary services stand to count; and have better chances of being preserved and remembered, since good names are worth more than gold. We realise the need for daily

examination of ourselves in view of proving that we are really worthy of the confidence reposed in us. We make no mistakes about this and we never take anything for granted because we are quite aware that the insignia attached to an award is praising you when you deserve it; it is equally condemning you when you usurp it. Besides, we are fully aware that just as time heals all wounds, history exposes all charlatans, no matter how hard they try in their deceit, since nothing is hidden under the sun. These simple life-lessons are cautionary notes that help us to be more circumspect and careful. It is in this sense that you, members of Nigeria Philosophical Association give us the honour to shine out as symbols of those ideals that have always fascinated and delighted many. We shall try our best to justify the confidence you repose in us. The awareness that we have been selected to be embodiments of some of these hard facts of life makes us understandably proud in our humility; and they make this day shine and worthy of remembering and celebrating.

Now, please permit me to make a few observations contained in my personal acceptance speech that I printed last week, as we examine “**Nigeria, Hundred Years After**”, the theme of this year’s conference. I would say that this is one of the most important reasons for my coming today: This concerns the state of Philosophy in Nigeria today and with special reference to African Philosophy.

Not quite long ago, I asked a student from one of our Universities about the state of African Philosophy in their University. He told me that his teachers don’t take African philosophy seriously, that their attitude is one that discourages the study of African philosophers, themes and projects taken from African Philosophy. His opinion in 2014 reflects that of a student who wrote me a letter in 2010 on similar matters. Among other things, this student writes: “... I saw in complementary reflection an endorsement of the life-long work in synthetic thinking that I have set for myself. I am pleased Nigeria has a deep concerned philosopher like you. From my experience, our professors do not think that African philosophy can be original and fit into world philosophy as a ‘missing link’, to use your beautiful term. I regret that you do not teach in my school. Here I am faced with profound intellectual apathy on the part of my lecturers who ought to mentor the next generation”. These are genuine complaints that deserve serious attention. Such concerns notwithstanding, I am quite convinced that many reckon very highly with African philosophy. I stand here before you today as one of those who believe firmly in African philosophy as an academic discipline that can be executed with depth and style. I am proudly committed to it.

If I’m not mistaken, one of the major reasons I’m being honoured today is due to this commitment; and there are many who share my passion, going by recent positive developments in African Philosophy. African Philosophy deserves more than it is getting at the moment. It deserves a very prominent place in our curriculum. There is need for an overall curriculum-overhaul in Philosophy to accommodate African Philosophers and themes taken from African Philosophy. Here, some are even thinking of mounting full-fledged Departments of African Philosophy in their Universities; something I do not consider completely out of place provided the universal outreach of our discipline is thereby not compromised. In other words, where such realignments do occur, they should largely address the technical issues bordering on underemphasising African Philosophy and how this can be remedied. Attending to Philosophy from this perspective, in this part of the world, is long overdue. Our future as academics, within a wider global context, is inextricably connected with African Philosophy; we shall be known and addressed as African Philosophers, our

methods, and inclinations notwithstanding. This is one of the major reasons I urge very strongly those who are still nonchalant to wake from their indifference; and those sitting on the fence to take the plunge. Doing African Philosophy, doing it well and promoting it is a sacred vocation we can hardly abdicate. Where we attend to it lukewarmly, our colleagues elsewhere will hardly take us seriously: If you do not take your thing seriously and promote it, hardly will anyone take you seriously. What this entails is that it is our obligation to promote African Philosophy, bearing in mind that we are thereby promoting ourselves, our heritage, and some of the important things that give us our identities as persons. We have the resources, we have the manpower. Hence, each of us has to decide how he or she can become a part of the positive changes taking place in this area. What many easily forget is that, as an African, no matter your areas of interest in Philosophy, no matter your claims, you are more likely to succeed and be known doing African Philosophy; and as an African philosopher. Hence, it becomes imperative to identify with the good thing you have; and one around which your academic identity is deeply anchored - African Philosophy. Those who are committed to African Philosophy, I congratulate and salute you, because you are on the right path.

I am very glad to report that my experiences within the last few years, in this area, have been most exciting, and gratifying. This is why, the odds notwithstanding, it is heart-warming to note that **Ibuanyidanda Philosophy (Complementary Reflection)** is enjoying unprecedented patronage; going by the way students and other researchers, in different Universities, choose topics for their B.A. project essays, M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations from this area. Many who have researched and are researching into **Ibuanyidanda Philosophy (Complementary Reflection)** have reasons to be grateful they did and are doing so. Good pieces of literature, books, and booklets, seasoned academic discussions have evolved from some of these excellent academic exercises. Over and above all, many of them have been able to explore and contribute immensely in areas that are of vital importance to our common heritage. Hence, as far as **Ibuanyidanda Philosophy (Complementary Reflection)** is concerned, I would say that we are making some progress. Here, I recognise with gratitude the immense support and encouragement I receive from many: I am thinking here most especially of those, both nationally and internationally, who by way of constructive criticisms, comments, academic conferences and other research efforts have contributed in advancing the cause of our method of philosophising. I thank you immensely. This is why this award is not for me alone. I receive it gladly on behalf of many students, researchers, both nationally and internationally, who are investing their time, talents and energy exploring topics inspired by **the Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection (Ibuanyidanda Philosophy)**.

I thank in a special way the Nigeria Philosophical Association: Through this award, you have greatly contributed in advancing our cause. This award is one of the things that go to demonstrate that the enormous efforts being invested by many, within the last few years to have **Ibuanyidanda Philosophy (Complementary Reflection)** well established as a **Major Current in African Philosophy** is not in vain. I feel greatly honoured to be a part of the movement and I am humbled that members of our great Association identify with our work by way of this singular award.

Finally, in the name of all awardees, I thank the National Executive Council of Nigeria Philosophical Association, and all our members who consider our work and contributions worthy of honour. This recognition would definitely propel us to greater heights in our

endeavours. In the name of my University (the University of Calabar), Universities and Institutions of affiliation of various awardees, I thank you all immensely.