

Go forth... replicate Atiku Abubakar's story

When your name is Pastor and you have a priest such as Bishop Matthew Kukah, the Bishop of Sokoto Diocese as well as an eminent royal personage such as the Lamido of Adamawa, Alhaji Muhammadu Barkindo Aliyu Musdapher, Ph D, who is also chancellor of a federal university, not only in the highly cerebral audience but also sharing a unique platform with you, you cannot but deliver a message that is almost a replica of the Sermon on the Mount. More so, if your direct target audience are young men and women commencing a journey "to a more fulfilling life" after four years of uninterrupted education in a world-class development university.

It was the Commencement Day at the American University of Nigeria (AUN), Yola, Adamawa State, on Saturday May 19, 2012. On the dais was Robert A Pastor, a professor of international affairs at the American University, United States of America, who also had the good fortune of being the leader of the group from the American University who in 2003 undertook the feasibility study of setting up AUN, known at its birth as ABTI-American University. That day, too, he, the Lamido and the Bishop were recipients of the university's honorary degrees. Makes it "a blessed day," says Pastor.

In fact, Pastor had something in his Commencement Address for almost everyone present but more for the stars of the event: the graduates of the Class of 2012, numbering no fewer than 300: it was after all their day.

In 2011, the purpose-built canopy meant for the graduation of the Class of 2011 was destroyed by windstorm. That led to the decision to build a hall dedicated to commencements and other functions. It was ready for the 2012 Commencement, and Pastor had a few words in tribute: "Is this not a remarkable cavern of a building? Very few thought that the North of Nigeria could have a building this large, and even fewer thought it could be built in one year. They were wrong. They underestimated the American University of Nigeria. ...It's a monument to determination, a legacy to the Lamido, and a demonstrable statement that the Graduates of the Class of 2012 have a

special destiny."

Yes, they do.

Charges Pastor: "Graduates of 2012, and I include myself since I now have a class ring and a diploma: Let's resolve together that you will go forth from here, the American University of Nigeria, with a new idea. You will be the agents of a modern, progressive, and ethical Nigeria. When you see the flaws in this country, and when you face setbacks in life - you will say: 'I will never get used to it.' And you will change it."

Here's the story about the phrase - I will never get used to it - as told by Pastor.

"When I was in the Peace Corps, a palm-reader came to my village, and he read the palm of one of my young students. He said: 'You will be poor and powerless until you reach the age of 40.' My student's face turned pale, but he had the wit to ask: 'What happens after that?' And the palm-reader said: 'You'll get used to it.'"

For a minute, let's assume that Atiku Abubakar, AUN's founder, was that young student.

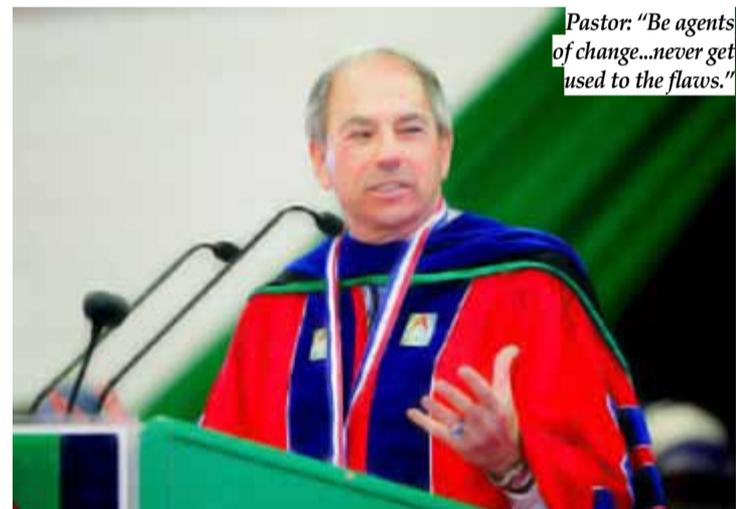
Hear Pastor: "Born poor in Adamawa State, the chances were that he would die poor and powerless, but he refused to get used to it. He walked barefoot for 20 kilometres to get a good education. Some of his teachers were American Peace Corps Volunteers, who stimulated in Atiku, a curiosity, a spirit of inquiry, a determination never to 'get used to it.'"

"Atiku went into public service, then busi-

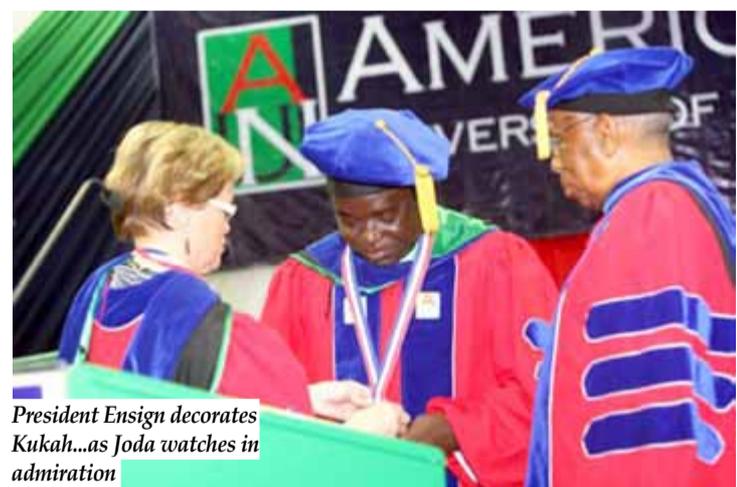
ness, and then electoral politics where he won the Governorship and finally Vice President (of Nigeria). None of these steps were easy. He faced formidable (obstacles) at each turn in the road, but he always persisted. He had a dream of creating a great private university in Yola, and he turned to American University in Washington for advice because Jamiilah Abubakar had just received a PhD there. Louis Goodman, then Dean of AU's School of International Service, and a Board member of AUN since its beginning, visited and convinced me to come.

"I had just been appointed Vice President of International Affairs at AU, and President Benjamin Ladner asked me to lead a team to Nigeria to determine the feasibility of establishing such a University. When I arrived here, the land was dry, the heat was oppressive, and the poverty was pervasive. It was hard for me to see how a University could grow in this soil. I suggested a different location. 'How about the French Riviera?' (Atiku) laughed. 'Or how about Abuja?'

Atiku had a different vision. He saw a University that could lift Yola and Adamawa up like Stanford University lifted Silicon Valley in California. He saw a University that would attract the very smartest students in Nigeria and Africa and give them an education that was better than anything they could



Pastor: "Be agents of change...never get used to the flaws."



President Ensign decorates Kukah...as Joda watches in admiration

get on the Continent.

He persuaded me and my team, and we convinced American University. President Benjamin Ladner strongly favoured the partnership, and his successor, Neil Kerwin, asked me to convey to all of you how proud American University feels at the partnership that developed and matured between AU and AUN.

Together, all of us worked 24/7 to build the institution we see today, which has 1400 students and 100 faculty and today graduates its fourth class.

- AUN is the first wireless university with a fiber-optic connection.

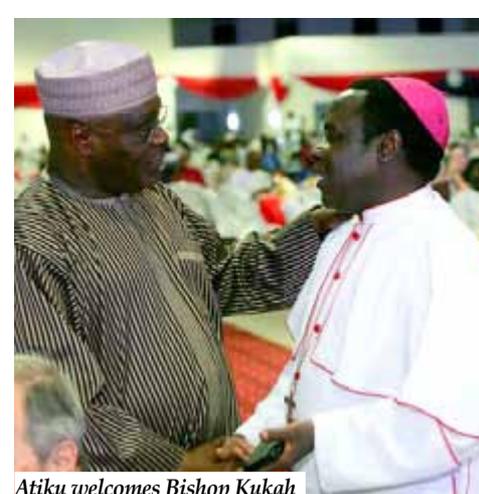
- AUN has had uninterrupted education since its doors opened. Its graduates have gone to some of the best graduate schools



The Lamido of Adamawa's turn....



The Founder...and the President



Atiku welcomes Bishop Kukah



And Pastor too...



Atiku and Princess Ruqayyat Abubakar



The Bishop and the Founder



Blessed day: Prof Kaha BOT Member, Alhaji Ahmad Joda and Atiku Abubakar

whose energy, creativity, and infectious enthusiasm inspires the campus and gives it a smile. You should also thank Dr. Ensign's two predecessors as President, and Chairman Al-Haji Ahmed Joda and the Board of Trustees, who have loyally given their time, advice, and financial

His life was not always charmed, but when he had a setback, he did not allow himself to be depressed or discouraged. He picked himself up and moved forward.

yourself and, then, for others.

- If people dispute western education, tell them that education is not eastern or western, it is universal, and every person has the right to learn about everything.
- If people exclude other views or religions, remind them that the greatest era of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and all other religions occurred when they opened themselves to all ideas and religions. The greatest scholars of all religions agree that the path to heaven is through enlightenment and education, not violence and coercion. True liberation is possible only for those who open their minds to education every hour of every day.
- If people say Nigeria is corrupt, and Africa is poor, remind them that change has started. For the last six years, Nigeria has sustained an annual economic growth rate of about 7% - one of the highest in the world. And change will keep coming because you will be the agents of that change.

support to establish AUN. **Graduates, if you feel tall today, it is because you are standing on the shoulders of so many.** But none of this would have been possible without the vision and the astonishing generosity of His Excellency Atiku Abubakar. No one in all of Africa has given more than he has to promote education. Mo Ibrahim created a great Prize for freely-elected, clean and competent African Presidents. Regrettably, there is a short list for that prize. But with the exception of Ibrahim, no other African businessman has contributed a small fraction of what Atiku has done for decades. His Excellency Atiku Abubakar is unique among African leaders in establishing a world-class private university."

Let's call the rest of his message to the graduates, er, The 10 Commandments.

- If you can't find a job, try to create one for

in the world. American University has hosted 49 AUN students, and they have scored at the top of the class at AU, and some are enrolled in AU's graduate schools.

But, this day is for the graduates....

So, Pastor returns to them: "You have made it this far not just because of your talent and hard work but because of your family and friends, your professors, Administration, and the staff, and especially to President Margee Ensign,

- You have much to do to ensure that the entire country benefits from its petroleum. Other countries -- from Norway to Brazil -- have shown it can be done. Nigeria can too.
- You have much to do to diversify the economy so that agriculture, manufacturing, and innovation will replace oil and gas as the source of sustainable development. Other countries have shown it can be done. In 1980, 80% of Mexico's exports were oil. Today, 80% of Mexico's exports are manufactured goods. Nigeria can also diversify.
- You have much to do to build power lines and roads. China and Turkey have done that, and so can Nigeria.
- You have much to do to unleash the entrepreneurial energy of Nigeria.
- It used to be said that Nigerian government officials gave the state an honest day's work. The problem is that it took a week. The World Bank has estimated that Nigeria ranks 133 of 192 nations in allowing its entrepreneurs to set up a business. Filing permits and forms could take a year. These rules too can change. You can change them.
- There are two kinds of people in the world. People who think they can, and people who think they can't. They're both right. AUN thinks you can, and so do I.

Just in case any of the graduates felt some "heavy burden to bear," Pastor reminded them: "Atiku didn't get used to the poverty of Nigeria's past or to a dry field in the middle of Yola. Others saw an insoluble problem. He saw a breathtaking opportunity. I hope every graduate will try to replicate his story and show his perseverance. His life was not always charmed, but when he had a setback, he did not allow himself to be depressed or discouraged. He picked himself up and moved forward. Africa needs a million people like Atiku."

For a man who allows that in his career - working at the pinnacle of American power in the White House; teaching thousands of students from all over the world; written 17 books and at least 800 articles; developed the techniques for election observation and election mediation and applied them in 40 different countries - the "most rewarding was to work with Atiku Abubakar, Ahmed Joda, and many others to establish the American University of Nigeria in Yola, Pastor's attestation can be taken to the bank. Yes.

