

**REMARKS BY THE FOUNDER, DR. GARY S. MAXEY,**  
**ON THE OCCASION OF THE TWENTIETH**  
**ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION AND THE**  
**NINETEENTH GRADUATION CEREMONY OF WEST**  
**AFRICA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,**  
**SATURDAY, 23 MAY 2009**

**Our Guest Speaker, Professor Pat Utomi, Lagos Business School,**

**The Chairman of the Governing Council, Rt. Rev. Emmanuel B. Gbonigi (rtd), Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion,**

**Dr. C. O. T. Ugwu, Chairman of the Religion Faculty, University of Nigeria, Nsukka,**

**Members of the Governing Council of West Africa Theological Seminary,**

**Members of the Administrative Council of West Africa Theological Seminary,**

**Our special honorees,**

**My Dear Graduands,**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning. I am very honored today to welcome each of you to our nineteenth annual graduation exercises, this year combined with our twentieth anniversary celebrations. I am also quite pleased that I am giving you my last annual greetings as the Provost or Acting Provost of WATS. My remarks this morning will be relatively brief and to the point.**

**Today WATS is celebrating twenty years of history. For that reason I would like to begin my remarks by saluting some of those who have made this awesome journey with us over our twenty years of WATS history. It is gratifying that several are with us today who were with us either from the very first day in 1989 or at least from the first year. I hold each these people in deep respect and with great love. And my respect is to a significant degree because while there have been great joys and rewards from time to time on this journey it has often been one of toil and difficulty and even what we could properly call suffering. Yet through of it all these very special people have excelled in love and good works. The tough things have only served to make them better. Oswald Chambers once said, “We all know people who have been made much meaner and more irritable and more intolerable to live with by suffering: it is not right to say that all suffering perfects. It only perfects one type of person, . . . the one who accepts the call of God in Christ Jesus.” Yes, that is the key—these people have understood that they are with us because of a deep divine calling. And I warmly salute these good people.**

**By God’s grace we have succeeded in some wonderful ways, and we can quickly agree with Adoniram Judson in one crucial statement he made many years ago. Judson, who served as a missionary to Burma for thirty-seven years in the midst of intense persecution, imprisonment and chronic disease, once said that “There is no success without sacrifice. If you succeed without sacrifice it is because someone has suffered before you. If you sacrifice without success it is because someone will succeed after.”**

**The persons I am talking about are chronicled to one extent or the other in our WATS history printed in our program for today. But I want to take time this morning at the outset to first and foremost salute my beloved wife, Emma Lou Maxey, who is regrettably not able to be with us today. She toiled as much as anyone to give birth**

**to and nurture West Africa Theological Seminary, and I wholeheartedly salute her for that. I also believe we will yet live to see her stand with us to receive the honor she deserves for her efforts across the years. Others who have been with us from our early days and continue with us in one way or the other include Kofi Obiako, whom we are very specially honoring today, Oumar Coulibaly, Pius Usenu, Emmanuel Ogunyemi, Acha Goris, Kalu Okechukwu, William Udotong, David Njoku and Eugene Ukaoha. All of them have labored long and hard, and have found the grace of God very sufficient through the tough times. And no doubt they have at times felt like Mother Theresa, who once said, “I know God won’t give me more than I can handle. I just wish he didn’t trust me so much.” May God bless all of them very richly!**

**In the second place I would like to salute those who are graduating today from our various programs, as it happens, on our twentieth anniversary. I deeply trust that you graduands here today have received at WATS something that has not only changed your perspectives about yourself, about God Himself, about the word of God and about the world around you, but that has ignited an inextinguishable heavenly fire within your soul. Plutarch said more than two millennia ago, “The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” How much more should we expect that those who have not only been transformed in mind but also in spirit should go out and set their world ablaze with a vision for righteousness and holiness! May you go from here truly with fire in your bones and in your souls.**

**I would like to remind each and every one of you who are graduating today that everything you have gained during your journey through WATS will continue to carry you forward for God especially as you cultivate the secret of Christian humility. St. Augustine said once, “If you plan to build a tall house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility.” I believe all of you are standing tall today, and in the coming days I expect to see you rise**

**even taller, yet I strongly appeal to you to take to heart the advice of St. Augustine.**

**A special word is also important today, in the third place, to those who have supported this seminary financially and in other material and spiritual ways over the years of our journey. There is no way I could give an exhaustive list of such people. Recently I received a message of congratulations from a fellow missionary with several decades of experience in francophone Africa, Dr. Jack Robinson. Jack and Theo Robinson have labored for many years especially at Bangui Evangelical School of Theology, in Central African Republic. In his recent message, Dr. Robinson said to me, “I have been amazed at how the Lord has brought you and WATS through so many seemingly impossible situations. I think our own lives are pretty monotone compared to yours, and I am so glad you have been able to make so many contributions to the strengthening of African men and women as they prepare for life and service.” Yet as I read those words I immediately reminded myself that our journey could never have happened without the continual helping hand we have received from those who deeply believe in the vision and ministry of WATS and who have registered that conviction by giving generously of their financial substance.**

**I would like to begin by paying tribute to the men and women of Friends of WATS, USA. Friends of WATS was incorporated in 1995 and over the past fourteen years has faithfully encouraged the work of WATS by sending us financial, material and personnel support. I regret deeply that Dr. William Sillings, chairman of Friends of WATS, is not able to be with us, because of the acute physical problems his wife is presently facing. However, another member of the Friends of WATS board is with us, Rev. Donald Plemons, and as a matter of fact he has served longer on that board than any other member. Without question, WATS owes a lot of gratitude to our supporting arm in the US. I have been amazed every single year, usually in the month of January, when a faithful**

**band of men and women have continued to gather from virtually all geographic sectors of the United States, totally at their own expense, for the sole purpose of planning how they can continue to support the ministry of an institution thousands of miles away on another continent, and which at least some of them may never have the opportunity to visit in their lives. I salute each of them today for helping us on this journey, which by now has included somewhere around two million dollars of financial help since they first started fourteen years ago.**

**Yet I am also happily aware that we do not have to turn our minds only to the US to find those who are faithfully getting behind the financial support of WATS. Increasingly, even in these times of global economic recession, we are seeing more individuals and churches who are recognizing right here in Nigeria that investment in WATS is a critical investment in the future of this country and this continent. We give a very special and deep note of thanks to the Victoria Fellowship Church, to the Lagos Christian Fellowship, to Elim International Church, and to the Fountain of Life Church for their very substantial help to WATS in recent times. On an individual level, the absolutely unparalleled and unflagging enthusiasm of Brigadier General Samuel Teidi continues to fill us all with amazement and gratitude. It appears that WATS may never have had a better Nigerian friend, and putting General Teidi at the top of our list of special honorees today was not a difficult choice. Our only regret is that he is unavoidably absent from us today in faraway London in what I might describe as medical detention, though we will surely welcome him back with fanfare at the appropriate time. And at the same time I also thank God that others are beginning to follow suit. The way that Ernest and Ndali Ndukwe have come alongside us financially in recent months has been nothing short of amazing. The highest compliment that I heard of Ernest Ndukwe recently by one of our WATS administrators was simply that “He’s another General Teidi!” I commend all of these, and a host of others who have also helped in**

**perhaps smaller yet very significant and appreciated ways. God bless all of you!**

**As WATS concludes its first twenty years and heads into the second twenty, there are challenging and exciting tasks that lie before us, and without the continuing support and indeed the expanding support of our friends on both sides of the Atlantic we will not be able to rise to our potential as we should. There has never been a time in our history when it has been more crucial for those who appreciate the great impact this institution is making on the African Church and on African society to stand with us in faithful financial and moral support.**

**It is high time this institution move beyond its very often distressing hand-to-mouth existence, too much of the time with our staff salaries woefully in arrears. The establishment of a more significant endowment for this purpose is long overdue. And we have learned during this time of global economic distress that ultimately we must rely much more significantly on help from within Nigeria than we can from uncertain sources of help in other countries. WATS is facing its greatest opportunities ever these days—our potential for shaping leadership in Nigeria is huge and growing. But in order to rise to these opportunities we must redouble our efforts.**

**For example, over the course of the next twelve months we are welcoming back to our campus at least five residential doctorate holders, and with their return WATS will now have the capability of moving to significantly higher levels of academic and spiritual achievement. Yet the financial implications are very significant to fly these people home, along with their families, and resettle them appropriately in Nigeria. At the same time, the continuing expansion of our student enrollment is demanding that we gradually expand our physical facilities. We have already begun the construction of our new chapel, and before the year is out we must also make strong progress on the doubling of our library space and**

**building of modern classrooms on the floor above it. And while all of this eventually tallies quickly into N100 and N200 million and beyond I can confidently say to our donors—there may not be any place in Nigeria where your heavenly kingdom investment can yield more exciting, positive and abundant results. I say again what I have said for many years: West Africa Theological Seminary is one of the absolutely greatest opportunities for investment I know of for the future of Nigeria.**

**After twenty years, WATS has a very clear and carefully-honed vision for the survival, revival and expanded scope of Africa’s burgeoning Church. I do not hesitate to say once again that the Church in Africa will set the agenda for worldwide Christianity in this century. The African Christian destiny is truly to lead the world. More than ever we need to grasp that reality and that vision. Antoine de Saint-Exupery once said, “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” That is where we are at WATS. We are not just engaging in the mundane tasks of academia. Rather, we are looking out on the great ocean of this continent and saying that God has called us to make a significant difference. And by His grace we are doing it.**

**To those who have dreamed with us of the great things that WATS could and will be in the future I encourage you to never stop dreaming. Do not allow the storms of discouragement to short-circuit your enthusiasm or idealism. Let me remind you that life isn’t always about waiting for the storm to pass; sometimes is about learning to dance in the rain. I believe we’ve learned to do that at WATS, and that God has been glorified in the process. And again and again we have collectively pulled ourselves together and have forged ahead even in the midst of tough times.**

**Today I encourage us all to enjoy this time together as we celebrate the presence and help of Almighty God. And in closing, with the permission and blessing of the Chairman of our Governing Council, I would like to report that after a twenty-one month search for the next African provost of West Africa Theological Seminary, including the examination of numerous candidates from near and far, the Governing Council yesterday chose as our next WATS leader Pastor William Udotong. Pastor Udotong has been a part of WATS for the past fifteen years, serving faithfully as a lecturer and administrator. He is currently completing his PhD studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in the USA, and over the coming few months will be visiting WATS intermittently while Rev. David Njoku and I continue to provide the interim help that may be needed to make Pastor Udotong's transition into full leadership as smooth as possible. I declare unequivocally that Pastor Udotong has my full confidence as the new leader of WATS. I believe there is no more befitting way to enter our second twenty years than to usher in this type of leadership with whom we can travel the road ahead. I give my warm congratulations to Pastor Udotong, to his family, and indeed to all the WATS family.**

**To God be the glory, great things He has done!**