

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

From the first Divine Commonwealth Conference
Held at the National Christian Center, Abuja, Nigeria
7th – 11th, November 2011

In the name of God: the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

The first Divine Commonwealth Conference was held at the National Christian Centre, Abuja, from Monday 7th to Friday 11th November 2011. It was an international, non-denominational spiritual conference initiated by the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) under the leadership of the Most Reverend Nicholas D. Okoh, Primate.

We, the participants, numbering over 5,000 Bishops, Clergy and Laity, deeply appreciated words of encouragement and goodwill from notable leaders from Nigeria, other parts of Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, including the retired Primate of the Church of Nigeria, the Primate of West Africa and Kenya, the Methodist Archbishop of Abuja and the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

- 1) We gathered as the People of God and members of the Divine Commonwealth determined to celebrate our oneness in Christ and reaffirm our unity around the fundamentals of the Christian faith; recognizing that we have been called into “One body ... one Spirit ... one hope ... one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”¹ We reaffirmed our commitment to uphold our faith, loyalty and obedience to the Sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth, and to prove ourselves faithful in season and out of season as His worthy disciples in all places and circumstances.
- 2) We are thankful for our Christian legacy established through the European missionaries who brought back the Gospel to Africa and the many African Evangelists who, like Bishop Ajayi Crowther, spread it far and wide. We hereby renew our own commitment to make disciples of all nations and our determination to reach out to the ends of the earth with the Good News of God’s transforming love through Jesus Christ our Saviour, the Sovereign Lord of the Divine Commonwealth.
- 3) We applaud the commitment of the GAFCON Primates to hold fast to “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints”² and to stand against the erroneous teachings that have infiltrated our beloved Communion. We also join them in declaring our refusal to be bogged down by relentless debates about matters we consider settled. Instead we move forward in proclaiming the whole counsel of God and doing all that we can to establish His Kingdom throughout the world. We reaffirm the faith articulated in the Jerusalem Declaration and its reminder that we have a rich heritage in Scripture and the historic tradition of the Church.
- 4) We came together as members of the Divine Commonwealth, not identified with any secular order but founded by God - what our great African theologian, Augustine of Hippo, called the *City of God*. It is described variously in Scripture as

¹ Ephesians 4:4,5

² Jude 3

the Kingdom of God, the Body of Christ, the Church, and the Communion of Saints on earth and in heaven.

- 5) We recognize that in the Divine Commonwealth, all worldly distinctions are rendered secondary. We assembled as women, men, youth and aged, ordained and lay, from different tribes and regions, rich and poor, to celebrate and reaffirm our citizenship in the one Divine Commonwealth and to chart ways that promote that Commonwealth in the wider society and in the Anglican Communion.
- 6) We gathered to recall the principle features of the Divine Commonwealth as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We maintain that all humanity is made in the image of God, is loved by God and is created for society, for relationship, and especially for marriage between one man and one woman. Yet due to sin and the Fall, “profound moral issues arise from the outrageous paradox of human dignity and human depravity.”³
- 7) We grieve with those of our own community who have witnessed this paradox first hand as they have experienced the outrageous and murderous behaviour of some who seek to terrorize, maim and kill Nigerians in defence of a misguided religious perspective. This shedding of blood of innocent Nigerians in Plateau, Bauchi, Kaduna, Yobe, Gombe, Borno States and parts of the Federal Capital Territory, especially that of Christians, is intolerable. It has been carried on with impunity for far too long. It demands decisive and immediate action from the Federal Government.
- 8) While we are grateful for the words of concern expressed by some national leaders we call on the Federal Government to rise to the challenge set by the terrorists, by giving solid and sustainable protection to the lives and property of all vulnerable and dispirited ethnic and religious groups in these places. This is the time for the Federal Government to act if we are to save the Nation from further bloodshed.
- 9) We know that the Divine Commonwealth is distinct from the “City of this World”, and yet it intersects it in our social and political life. We are “in the world but not of the world”⁴. As Christians we are called not to avoid or oppress unbelieving people but to meet them lovingly and to present them with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. In the light of the Church’s transformative agenda⁵ we call on our leaders and all Nigerians to challenge corruption and greed in our society and to live their lives in obedience to God’s commands.
- 10) We are convinced that no community without the living God at its centre is a true Commonwealth. Neither is a “Commonwealth of Nations” a true commonwealth if it does not stand for righteousness. In this regard, we were shocked by the recent statement from the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the Right Honourable David Cameron, to the effect that his Government would aid only those countries that adhere to “proper human rights”. It is clear that his true agenda is to force the normalization of homosexuality and gay marriage as a

³ Professor Jerry Gana address

⁴ John 17:13-18

⁵ Luke 4:18

“human right”. While acknowledging the sacred worth of every human being we reject this erroneous notion as contrary to God’s intention for humankind and harmful to those he claims to protect. Another implication of this is that the “Commonwealth of Nations” is still being treated as a body of unequal partners, where, because of economic status, some nations are still vulnerable to manipulation. We urge the Federal Government of Nigeria to resist any such intimidation on this matter.

- 11) We believe that the family is an essential building block of the Divine Commonwealth and the institution of marriage worthy of our full support. We stand with those who are working to protect marriage, family life and values pastorally in local congregations. We also support the National Assembly in its efforts to protect marriage as between a man and a woman.
- 12) Finally, we proclaim that the Divine Commonwealth is not only a present but a transcendent reality, as “our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,”⁶ We have been reminded that the Second Coming of Christ is an essential teaching of the faith and we eagerly look for Christ’s return. We recognize that Christ will come unexpectedly and that it is futile to set human timetables for His appearing. We do know that His coming will be a time of distress, where the forces of order and religion will be utterly perverted by Satan and many will be persecuted for their witness to Christ. Many of these signs are present today and thousands of Christians have been martyred for their faith. However, the end is not yet.
- 13) As members of the Divine Commonwealth we heed the Prophet Micah’s counsel, “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God,”⁷ until the time when the Saviour will come with a shout of command and the events of the end-time – resurrection, judgment, reigning with Christ, a final Commonwealth, the new Jerusalem, and a new heaven and earth - will come to pass, and God will be all in all.

To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy — to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! AMEN.

⁶ Philippians 3:20

⁷ Micah 6:8