



Covenant University



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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

LEADERSHIP BY PRODUCTS: The Role of Universities

By

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Ms Cecilia Akintomide 12th Convocation Keynote Address



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Keynote Speaker

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.0 The Chancellor, Chairperson Board of Regents, Covenant University, Bishop David Oyedepo, our own very dear Mummy Faith Oyedepo, Members of the Board of Regents, Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission (represented), the Vice-Chancellor of Covenant University, Professor Atayero, visiting Vice Chancellors, members of Faculty, family and friends, and certainly not the least, the ones who are the reason why we are here today, the honored

graduands, very soon to be graduates, ladies and gentlemen.

1.1 I count it a great privilege to be here this morning to share in the joy of the students who have successfully arrived at the end of a long journey. This is a rite of passage to becoming a true responsible, and fully engaged citizen.

1.2 I will not be expounding anything new or groundbreaking in my keynote address today, but will take us through a short time of reflection. The title of my keynote address, as you are aware, is Leadership by Products: The Role of Universities.

II. WHAT IS A UNIVERSITY

2.1 The word university refers to an institution of higher learning, providing facilities for teaching and research and is authorized to grant academic degrees. It is made up of undergraduate and graduate divisions. This is the most common dictionary definition – actually Merriam-Webster’s definition.¹ We should recall that the word University is from the Latin word *universitas*, meaning ‘a whole.’ This reflects the completeness and balance that is to be found in the knowledge acquired in these institutions of higher learning. In a

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary

modern society, Universities are to play the following roles:²

1. Be a repository of knowledge for the benefit of current and future generations (an academic has referred to this as being a knowledge vault);
2. Generate knowledge through research;
3. Transfer knowledge through education thereby providing an educated and skilled workforce;
4. Disseminate knowledge to society; and
5. Generate economic development.

² The Role of Universities in Modern Societies by Per Holten-Andersen, President Copenhagen Business School, March 2015. See also The Role of the University in a Changing World, President of Harvard University, Drew Faust, June 30, 2010.

III. HISTORY OF UNIVERSITIES

3.1 A little bit of a history lesson, we are always better for it. The first University recorded in history was founded in 859 AD, in Fez, Morocco; Qarawiyyin University. It was founded by a woman **with the objective to make life better for her community.** Students of the University include: (i) Al-Idrissi a student of Geography who became a famous cartographer whose maps greatly aided the Spanish and Portuguese naval conquests; (ii) Pope Sylvester II, the first French national to become Pope, who was a student of mathematics and introduced the decimal (10 digit) numeral system using Arabic numerals to replace Roman numerals; in particular, he introduced the digit 0 to Europe and the rest is

history³. He changed the way we calculate forever; and (iii) Rabbi Moses ben Maimon also known as Maimonides, the acclaimed Jewish scholar described as one of the most influential Torah scholars whose influence and works continue to be celebrated. He was also an astronomer and physician, and many hospitals are named after him.⁴ The existence of that university has forever impacted Fez, and from Fez the whole world. Knowledge generated from the University also played a definite role in the political evolution of the Kingdom of Morocco.

3.2 The second University recorded in history is the University of Bologna in Italy in

³ A House in Fez: Building a Life in the Ancient Heart of Morocco, by Suzanna Clarke 2009. Page 14.

⁴ The Rambam, A Biography by Nissen Mangel

1088AD. This was actually the first institution of higher learning to use the term University. On its website, **it states that "its history is intertwined with that of the great names of science and literature, [and] it is a keystone and a point of reference for European culture."** Its famous scholars include: (i) Thomas Becket, a 12th century chancellor and archbishop of Canterbury; (ii) Erasmus of Rotterdam known as one of the greatest thinkers of Europe, and who prepared the *Novum Instrumentum omne*, the first published New testament in Greek, and started a theological revolution, the effect of which continues to impact the world; and (iii) Ulisse Aldrovandi considered to be the father of Natural History Studies.

3.3 The oldest University in the English-speaking world is Oxford University, which was founded before 1167. **It describes itself as the world-leading centre of learning, teaching and research.** The University has produced the highest number of U.K. Prime Ministers, 27 out of 54, including Theresa May. In the field of medical science, Oxford Endovascular, which is an Oxford University spinoff has discovered a potential brain aneurysm treatment. Most notably, Sir Tim Berners-Lee who invented the World Wide Web in 1989 is also a product of Oxford University.

3.4 Many years later, the first institution of higher learning was founded in the United States of America, in 1636 --Harvard

University. **On its website Harvard describes itself as follows: devoted to excellence in teaching, learning, and research, and to developing leaders in many disciplines who make a difference globally.** This University, true to its word, has produced: (i) the highest number of U.S. Presidents, (ii) the most successful college dropout Bill Gates of Microsoft, who left after 2 years, (iii) one of the greatest disruptors of our time Mark Zuckerberg –the founder of Facebook, and (iv) America’s first black President, Barack Obama. Even some of Nigeria’s best are Harvard Alumni, for example Adebayo Ogunlesi, a renowned investment banker, financing infrastructure globally.

3.5 A common thread within the early universities, which continues to date, is the positive impact of their educational activities on the nation, and even the world at large. Each university is transformational, and has been part of the growth story of the country and its people.

3.6 As you may recall, the oldest University in Nigeria, is University of Ibadan, founded in 1948, before independence. Its vision is to be a world class institution for academic excellence geared towards meeting societal needs. Its mission is to expand the frontiers of knowledge through provision of excellent conditions for learning and research. Its alumni include: (i) Wole Soyinka, a nobel laureate and prolific writer, (ii) Chinua Achebe, a globally celebrated author and poet, (iii) Olufunmilayo Olopade, a world renowned

Hematology Oncologist, and a Professor at University of Chicago, (iv) Emeka Anyaoku, the 3rd Commonwealth Secretary General, and (v) Professor Grace Alele Williams, first woman with a PhD, a Professor of Mathematics, and first woman Vice Chancellor of a Nigerian University.

3.7 Our University, Covenant University, established in 2002, has as its objective, the raising of a new generation of leaders for the African continent on the platform of a holistic, human development and integrated learning curriculum, in order to raise total men who will go out to develop their world. This is a young university, however it is fast distinguishing itself consistent with its vision and mission statement. It has introduced Entrepreneurial

Development Studies, a Leadership programme as well as a Total Man Concept and Towards a Total Graduate programmes. These are distinctive programmes consistent with the vision to raise new generation leaders. Notable graduates of Covenant include (i) Olumuyiwa Oludayo, Covenant University Registrar; (ii) International Artist Bez Emmanuel Idakula; (iii) Film Director and Screenwriter Ishaya Bako; and (iv) International Artiste Simi.

IV. WHAT DOES A UNIVERSITY PRODUCE, OR SHOULD IT PRODUCE?

4.1 I heard the phrase "leadership by product" for the first time during a sermon by

the Chancellor, Bishop David Oyedepo. He mentioned that it was from a Samsung advert. I must say that it has since then been a watchword for me. Generally, each university has its vision/mission statement. However, these statements neither define nor are taken into consideration for ranking purposes. In this regard, the Bible is spot on! **In Matthew 7:16, Jesus gave us this quote that forever remains true. "Ye shall know them by their fruits."**⁵ Not by what they say, but by their product. Not by how they describe themselves but by what they produce and contribute to society. I guess someone in Samsung had been reading the Bible!

⁵ The Holy Bible, Authorized King James version, Holman Bible Publishers 1998.

4.2 So what is the product or should be the product that defines the leadership of a University. Universities (i) **produce graduates**, (ii) **generate knowledge through research**, and (iii) **disseminate knowledge**. **All of these activities are carried out for the ultimate objective of improving lives**. In my view, these are the 4 products (including the impact on society) that define the leadership of a University. You the graduates; the research conducted by the university; the knowledge that is disseminated from the University; and the impact of the University on society. These 4 defining products should be differentiated from the indicators for the ranking process, which really is to facilitate choice of universities for admission purposes.

4.2.1 The Graduates: You the graduate are a product of the University. You have spent at least 4 years and traded the currency of life, which is time, in exchange for being groomed and prepared. You are the product that Covenant University is sending to the world. Your achievements will also be part of the products of Covenant University. This ceremony is a declaration that you are now fit for purpose. That purpose, and I hope you agree with me, is changing the Nigerian Story. With a population of 186m, we generate 4518Mw of electricity. To put this in context, the Kingdom of Morocco with about one/sixth of our population generates nearly double. Unemployed Nigerians at 11.55m exceed the population of Benin Republic next door at 10.87m. We are 136th out of 175 countries on the transparency international corruption

perceptions index and we are 169th out of 190 countries on the World Bank Ease of Doing Business Index. We have 152 Universities and not one of them is in the world's top 800 or in Africa's top 10. Yet we are Africa's largest economy. After having been in a recession, the economy is expected to grow 1.3% this year on the back of increased oil production, significantly improved agricultural sector and strong public capital spending. When you read the papers, the narrative is about ethnic and religious intolerance, breaking up the country etc.

4.2.1.1 However, each of these challenges presents huge opportunities. I trust that you will be part of the solutions and change team and not the doom team. As a Covenant

University graduate, you are in a privileged position compared to other graduates. Your University is ranked second in the country after University of Ibadan. It has a lecturer/student ratio of 1:16, while certain universities in Nigeria have as high as 1:363. Your training, unlike others, has focused on ensuring employability or work readiness, and character. In addition, not every one of you will be an employee. Some of you, as entrepreneurs, will create your own business and even employ others, and you have been trained for that option. You are being sent as a change agent. It is important that as a change agent, you do not conform to that which you are to transform. Do not accept mediocrity, low standards because it is Nigeria. Do not accept corruption as the norm. Some of you may be concerned that there is just yourself and you

neither have the numbers nor the influence to make change happen. Remember catalysts do not come in large numbers or volume. One person is enough to start a change. The Arab Spring, which spread like wild fire through North Africa, started with one person in Tunisia, a fruit vendor. **Remember Galatians 5:9, A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.** Dare to be different. Each of you should continue to commit to the core values of Covenant University, Spirituality, Possibility Mentality (Can do), Integrity, Responsibility, Diligence and Sacrifice. We are in a democracy. Please make sure that you are registered to vote. Exercise that right. Others have died or are dying to have that right. Remember you are released as an eagle, not a chicken and not a pigeon.

4.2.2 Research: This is another product that defines a university's leadership status. While the pursuit of knowledge should not be restricted, resources need to be used wisely, and priority given to issues of relevance, that will impact lives positively, solve current problems and help the country leapfrog in development. The world has been evolving through Industrial Revolutions, the first which was based on water and steam to mechanize production, the second, which was based on electric power to create mass production; the third, which was based on electronics and information technology to automate production, and now a fourth, a digital revolution, characterized by a fusion of technologies blurring the lines between the physical, digital,

and biological spheres.⁶ In Nigeria, however, we are still struggling with electric power. So for research to be effective has to not only help us develop, but speed up the pace of development so we can catch up and overtake. Research and its application is one of the ways that the University transforms the world. The University should explore collaborations and partnerships with institutions and private sector in this regard.

4.2.3 Dissemination of Knowledge: A silent or muzzled University is an ineffective University. Universities are founded to transform society. Make it a better place, through the generation and dissemination of

⁶ The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond. Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum

knowledge. The results of research should be disseminated widely. Government policies should be debated and the result disseminated. Academia is becoming too quiet. Professors should freely discuss current affairs and engage their students in these discussions. Investments in dissemination and communication is important.

4.2.4 Societal Transformation and Economic Development: This is the 4th product that defines a University. This looks at how the University contributes to economic development and societal transformation. Universities, throughout history, have been important players or even the fulcrum for societal transformation. The state of a nation is a reflection of its academic strengths and

weaknesses. Universities such as Harvard and Oxford, have produced the highest number of Presidents and Prime Ministers, respectively. Our Universities in Nigeria, have had very little influence in this regard, given the long history of military governments, and the fact that certain of the leaders were trained outside of Nigeria. Stanford University has perfected the art of advancing economic development and transformation, with its relationship with Silicon Valley and its active leadership and support for innovation. The University created the opportunity for collaboration between private sector and academia. It built an industrial park for private sector to lease space. The presence of these cutting edge companies in the same location and with direct access to the knowledge base of academia was

transformational and the world has not recovered!

4.2.4.1 Nigeria Inc, needs help. Given the limited resources of public universities and the huge needs, private universities are well placed at this time for game change. 2009 figures reveal that total enrollment in all 30 private universities at that time was 38,514 students, while enrollment in just Ahmadu Bello University same year was 39,219.⁷ It will take some time and huge resources to better address the challenges of public universities, and the tuition free policy for all does not appear sustainable or advisable. It is important that Universities encourage innovation and provide opportunities for incubation. Innovation

⁷ Salvaging Nigerian Universities, Ladipo Adamolekun, NNOM, April 2017.

is a divine gift. It allows you to leapfrog, and that is what we need as a nation. In addition, increased attention needs to be provided to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. These courses are the bedrock for an industrial revolution and gamechanging innovation.

V. CONCLUSION

5.1 Leadership of a University should be based on its products. Those products necessarily must include the quality of graduates released; the quality of research conducted, the knowledge disseminated; and the contribution to societal well-being and economic development. Effective universities will require innovative funding strategies, strategic partnerships and cooperation,

and a commitment to excellence. Nelson Mandela said "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Obafemi Awolowo is also quoted to have said "unless you develop the people you cannot develop the nation". Recognizing the importance of education to development, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 is on quality education. Specifically, the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. In evaluating progress of the SDGs, the Secretary General of the UN observed that increasing efforts will be required especially in Sub Saharan Africa.⁸ Nigeria cannot continue to maintain the status quo in the education sector. The continued creation of private universities with

⁸ Report of the Secretary General of the UN, António Guterres "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals", E/2017/66.

inadequate funding for public universities will generate inequities that will haunt our future.

May I take this opportunity to once again congratulate the Class of 2017! Go for Gold in all that you do, be tenacious, be resilient, be excellent, be humble, always remember God, always remember a kind deed, do not compete with others but please compete with yourself. Yesterday's success is history! When you fall get up, and do it fast. July 21,1969, a gentleman called Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon. Make your life count so that July 21, 2017 will be remembered in history, because it is the day you graduated from Covenant University.

Thank you.