



Covenant University

Canaan Land, Ota, Nigeria.

2nd Convocation Ceremony Address



Raising A New Generation Of Leaders

**A Keynote Address Presented by
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**AT THE SECOND CONVOCATION CEREMONY
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Generation Of Leaders**
by
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Introduction

I consider it a singular privilege to have been offered the opportunity to establish today, for the very first time, intimate contact with this remarkable institution of learning on the auspicious and happy occasion of the graduation of the second batch of Eagles soon to be released on their flight into the dizzy heights of achievement.

I praise and thank the Almighty God for what is unfolding here through the visionary leadership of the Founder and Chancellor of Covenant University, Bishop David Oyedepo, with whom I had the opportunity of sharing, in the Master's service, the podium a couple of years back at the Ikeja Airport Hotel, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Aize Obayan who, under divine guidance, is running with the vision. Nothing less than the intimidating reality behind the invitation could have compelled me joyfully, even if with some reluctance, to accept to deliver this address within only a month of being asked, given my existing commitments. Besides, I had real difficulty in being persuaded that I would have other than an old song to render since this would be the fifth Convocation related address I would have delivered in the last seventeen years and the third within the last two hundred and eighty- six days, each of the three most recent being, for good measure, at faith-based universities! I am ashamed to confess that I behaved, in this regard, like Moses standing before the burning bush and God. Excuses galore!

Recollection of the seemingly naive question "What is that in your hand?" and the crude shepherd's rod tendered in response (subsequently to be christened "the rod of God") (Exodus 4) did not immediately dispose of my unwillingness. But the urgent tenacity of the telephone call brought to my remembrance St. John's enigmatic resolution to a similar dilemma some 2,000 years ago:

“Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the Word which you had heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.” (1John 2).

An old song can convey a new message.

Need for a New Generation of Leaders

The title of this short address crystallised around the perceived need for a new generation of Nigerians through sustained production and development of a new generation of leaders. Put slightly differently, perhaps more provocatively, it was inspired by a sense of disillusionment with the quality of leadership with which our country has, by and large since independence, been burdened and the desire to challenge the up-and-coming generation and those who offer parental and academic guidance to the former to reject being part of the nation’s problems instead of committing themselves to being part of the solution to those problems.

While any attempt to determine whether the leadership or the followership should bear greater responsibility for the parlous state of our national affairs could lead to a ‘chicken and egg’ conundrum, popular opinion lays it squarely and unequivocally at the door of the former. I align myself with the popular position. It is true that a people get the government they deserve only because leadership is diffused through the ranks of the people and is not confined to the upper echelon of government or society. In every society there are good and bad citizens but it is the leadership at the various levels which defines and sets the tone of the society for better or for worse.

Purpose of Education

Education which Covenant University, according to its founding fathers, is committed to offering, is designed to equip the students and by implication, even its teachers, with leadership orientation and specialised skills in various fields of human endeavour. The orientation and, to a certain extent, the specific skills would

be distilled from, and based on, sound biblical principles. It is no accident, therefore, that the greatest schools in the league of world class universities have their origins and roots in the religious faith and practice of their founders.

Knowledge with Morality

Time will not, however, permit me to attempt anything remotely close to a comprehensive treatment of the role of a faith-based University in supplying what may be missing in the education mediated by a strictly secular institution. It was G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), the British writer who, in 1924, described Education as “simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” Not all souls are having a great time and, certainly, not all souls will make heaven. Those who run our universities should find the statement attributed to Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945), US Democratic President, namely, that “a man who has never gone to school may steal from a freight car, but if he has a University education he may steal the whole railroad” food for thought. The certification recited at graduation ceremonies that a graduand is worthy in character and learning must not be uttered with levity or taken lightly.

Every age and every generation tends to be characterised by the product of its creativity and its attachment to it. Today, the buzzword is “knowledge” — “knowledge age”, “knowledge economy”, “knowledge society” — as if this is something new. Long ago God said “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me”. The neglect, abuse or misuse of knowledge has always been fraught with grave consequences. Mr and Mrs Adam of the Garden of Eden can tell us about that. There has never been a time man could do without knowledge. However, it would be a grave misjudgement, even in this century, to equate knowledge with mere proficiency in ICT without appropriate emphasis being placed on the overriding significance of ethical and moral values. Consider all the crimes being attempted or actually perpetrated electronically. Visit the appropriate site on the Internet, you would find stacks of information about almost anyone or anything. Not surprisingly, for example, less than a month ago, I received an official communication from a highly respectable but agitated Nigerian financial institution that a clearly fake British counterpart had been registered in England by some

shady characters with a “Gamaliel Onosode” as Company Secretary whereas neither myself nor my eldest son who bears the same first name is in anyway associated with that English company!

This University community is patently designed to enjoy a good, if not optimum, measure of autarky. The facilities and the physical environment speak for themselves. The Eagles to be released this week from this controlled environment into the world of work must imaginatively apply memories of the relative comfort and opulence of this environment to their individual circumstances. In the real world, outside the University campus, poverty and crime are pervasive. The vast majority of our people endure privation and our socio-political leaders are yet to demonstrate that they really care for the masses. Thousands who ought to be graduating with you could not gain admission to tertiary institutions not because they were intellectually ill-equipped for it but only sadly because of limitations on the carrying capacity of otherwise available institutions. The limited access is in turn largely the product of inadequate funding of the existing institutions. Yet, at one extreme, in the private universities, substantial fees, necessarily, are payable while at the other, in Federal and State Universities, there is, in my view quite unreasonably, prohibition of tuition fees. Thus, raising a new generation of leaders must confront the challenge of the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria and the limitations on access to it.

Mindset of Servant-Leaders to meet our aspiration for a new generation of leaders

Our graduands must be committed to demonstrating the mindset of servant-leaders. Life that is life indeed is life that is offered in service to others. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20). Given the spiritual and moral tone of this University’s environment, it would not be inappropriate for this institution of learning to feel that you, graduands, are being sent out into the world as “sheep in the midst of wolves”. You would, therefore, need to be as “wise as serpents and as harmless as doves” (Matthew: 10) if you are to live up to expectation and constitute thereby a pride to your Alma Mater. “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12). “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains

alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12). All of you can prosper as servant-leaders provided you remember that God has a distinctive role for each one of us. “They stood every man in his place round about the camp...” (Judge7). God is faithful and He will surely supply all your needs according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus. “There is a lad here”, Andrew despondently disclosed, “who has five barley loaves and two fish: but what are they among so many?” (John 6). Andrew was right and wrong; right in that there were indeed only five loaves and two fish; wrong in that “They gathered up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten.” (John 6). They had more than enough!

For anyone of today’s graduands to position himself or herself for future leadership, preparation for which you have received in terms of knowledge and inculcation of the fear of God, your service must, as I said at Redeemer’s University last October, be offered “altruistically or in exchange for value received”. If you are content to do business with God, you can never lose. Jesus has overcome the world. He is the greatest leader it has ever known. “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps.” (1Peter 2)

Conclusion

Mr Chancellor, Principal Officers of the University, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to thank the authorities of Covenant University for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts with this august assembly. It has been indeed a great privilege. Let me, in conclusion, formally salute all of those, clearly a brilliant collection, who have earned and are going to be receiving, by reason of their learning and character, First and Higher Degrees and other Honours and Prizes. From everything I have heard, read and seen of Covenant University, those of you who have passed through its portals deserve to be congratulated. You have been equipped not just with skills but also with broad-based knowledge and, hopefully, a mindset which has prepared you to take your place as leaders of the next generation. I trust Covenant University has truly passed through you.

You do not have to be an activist to be an effective member of the corps of future leaders who, by virtue of their exemplary life style, are determined to set their face

like flint against injustice and the bastion of corruption and kleptocracy and thereby reinforce the foundations, while erecting in a sustainable manner, the superstructure, of a fairer, more caring and more compassionate society. Though I am old, I count myself, by the grace of God, to be among the new generation of leaders who, regardless of their natural disposition, strive to demonstrate selflessness, courage, perseverance, some humility and the relentless pursuit of excellence. Leadership is not a function of biological age. I have chosen to walk with God. I have lacked nothing. This is my personal testimony. Whenever I ceased to enjoy my work and I threw in the towel I have thanked God that He gave me the good sense and the courage to do so. Whenever I was fired, I was no less grateful that I had been counted worthy to be sacked!

Thank you for your attention and God bless you.

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