



# Covenant University

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## **RISING ABOVE YOUR ROOTS** *(Keynote Address delivered at the Awards Ceremony of the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation Ceremony of Covenant University, Canaan Land, Ota.*

*By*

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## BIO-DATA

Olusola Oyewole, is currently serving as a Senior Expert ( Higher Education Quality Assurance, Mobility and Scholarships) at the Headquarters of the African Union Commission in Ethiopia Addis-Ababa. He is away on a temporary leave of absence from the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria, where he is a Professor of Food Microbiology at the Department of Food Science and Technology. Prior to coming over to the African Union Commission, he was the Coordinator of the British Government sponsored project on the “Mobilization of Regional Initiatives for the revitalization of higher education in Africa” , at the Association of African Universities (AAU), Accra, Ghana.. He has also served as the Project Officer of the World Bank project on “Quality Assurance for African Higher Education systems” at the Association of African Universities.

Professor Oyewole has worked at the University of Agriculture, Abeokuta for twenty five years. He has served as the Head of the Department of Food Science and Technology, the Director of the Equipment Maintenance Centre and prior to his coming to AAU, as the Director of the Research and Development Centre of the University. He holds a B.Sc. degree from the University of Ife (Now, Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Nigeria and Masters and Doctorate (PhD) degrees from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He has served as a Consultant to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, on: “Fermentation of Legumes, Seeds and Nuts in Africa” and “Fermentation of Non-Grain Starchy staples in African countries”. He has been involved in leading various research programs supported by the United Kingdom DFID and the European Union. He is still engaged with the University of Agriculture , from where he is away on an approved leave of absence.

Olusola Oyewole primary research interest is in Food Microbiology and has over sixty publications in various areas covering cassava processing and fermentation, lactic acid bacteria and various other African fermented foods.

He was a former grantee of the International Foundation of Science in Stockholm, Sweden. He was awarded the IFS / DANIDA Award in 1999 which was given to honour researchers from Sub-Saharan Africa who have made noteworthy achievements clearly associated with research work supported fully or in part by the International Foundation for Science. He also received the International Foundation for Science [IFS] / King Baudouin Award for report of research of exceptional merit among IFS funded researches [December, 1992] . He is currently serving as a Scientific Adviser in the area of Food Science to IFS.

Olusola Oyewole was a member of the team that developed the Strategic Plan of the Lagos State University (LASU) – 2005 to 2010. He was also a member of the Caleb University ( Lagos, Nigeria) Planning and Implementation Committee ( 2005 – 2008).

Over the years, Olusola Oyewole has developed interest in the development of Higher Education in Africa. His areas of focus include quality assurance, leadership and management in African higher education systems, research systems. He was one of the moderators of the African Union discussion forum on the Harmonization and ratings of higher education in African. He is a Deputy Board member of the NOMA program of the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU).

At the African Union, Professor Olusola Oyewole is charged with the Coordination of the Mwalimu Nyerere Scheme, which programs include the African Quality Rating Mechanisms (AQRM) scheme, the Mwalimu Nyerere Scholarship program, and the African – EU-ACP Mobility scheme.

## COVENANT UNIVERSITY ANTHEM

We're a Covenant Generation  
Pursuing excellence  
Redeemed to reign  
Learning to lead

We are bound by an oath  
Obeying rules to rule  
Making Kings of youth  
Flying high on covenant wings

Wisdom's call for change Inspired on fire  
With courage  
Marching on in grace

God's own arrow Shot for glory.

Covenant generation arise  
Light and knowledge to shine  
Glorious foundation stone  
Leadership skills to show

Departing from knowledge  
To empowerment Legalism  
To realism

Wisdom's call for change  
Inspired, on fire  
With Courage Marching on in grace

God's own arrow  
Shot for glory.



## **1.0 Preamble and Greetings**

I am personally thrilled and honored to be here today to join you to celebrate the release of another set of eagles, in these extraordinary young men and women of the Class of 2010.

I have a divine mission to challenge these future leaders, our fresh innovators, our future fathers and mothers as well as our future managers of men and nations, for the tasks to which the Almighty God is calling them.

However, before I do this, I want to thank the Chancellor and Chairperson of the Board of Regents of this great University for the grace of God upon his life; for his vision and leadership in setting up this University and commitment to the great gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. I want to thank God for the life of Dr. David Oyedepo.

Thanks also to the Vice-Chancellor of this University, Professor Aize Imouokhome Obayan, for her great faith in asking me to tow the line of great leaders in our continent such as Dr. Mensa Otabil of Ghana who delivered the first congregation lecture, Dr. Gamaliel Onosode, a great role model in our nation, my friend and brother, Professor Peter Okebukola and Prof. Dibu Ojerinde of JAMB. I have never met the Vice-Chancellor before this invitation, but I have been a great admirer of the marvelous development of Covenant University, Ota. Within the past five years, I have been privileged to be associated with higher education in Africa, through my work at the Association of African Universities, based in Accra, Ghana and lately my association with the Africa Union, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

I am sure that our graduates of today will be glad if we spend time to celebrate the parents and families, who God has given the privileges to raise up these eagles of our time. They have not just spent their money and time, but have been used of God to see the vision in sending their wards to this great empowerment and life-building University. Let us therefore celebrate all the parents who are here with a big round of applause.

I am myself a University teacher. I know the joy of being privileged to raise up these young people that are graduating today. I therefore want to seize this opportunity to thank the staff, Board of trustees, Board of Regents and leaders of this great university. Today is your day too.

## **2.0. To the Class of 2010**

Let me now settle to my main focus of today – the graduating class of 2010. To you , I say congratulations, we are all very proud of you. You have worked so hard and you have proved to the world that you can make it. Let me confess that I entered into the University at the era of what is known in Nigeria then as the era of “Ali Must Go”. I remember that I watched as a born-again Christian how the gates of my University of Ife was closed and vehicles were vandalized and many young souls had to confront men in uniform who had guns and tear gas. Your world today is quite different. How I wish I had the opportunity of being exposed to the University like yours where you have a foundation of Godliness at the root of your university education and you are nurtured not just in your subject rudiments, but also in the Word of God Almighty.

I am sure that those who invited me to this occasion never realized that they were not just inviting a Professor and African higher education practioner. I am not sure that they realized that they have succeeded in inviting a child of God with a divine message from the Almighty to the eagles of today. I am therefore happy to let this graduating class know that I have come with a message from the Lord God, Who is the Almighty.



Some years ago, I was privileged to deliver the 15<sup>th</sup> inaugural lecture of my parent University (The University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria). As a microbiologist who has done some research work into the fermentation of the popular African root crop, (Cassava), I decided to title my lecture; “Powers at the Roots”. I commenced my lecture by noting that little did I realize that I was going to be the first Professor in the Department of Food Science and Technology of the University to deliver an inaugural lecture. I told my audience that I knew the reason. It was simple; it was because there was a power at my root, the power of the Almighty God, who saved me through Jesus Christ. I was however surprised when I was confronted with the challenge of delivering this graduation lecture and God asked me to deliver a message to the eagles and it has something to do with roots. So, I have a divine message for our graduating class of 2010. I have been asked to challenge you to rise above your roots.

### **3.0 Rising Above your Roots**

Dear eagles of today, we are here to celebrate you – your success, your smart work, your tenacity, . I however want you to realize that today is also a day of thanksgiving. You have got thus far with God. Let us appreciate the grace of God that has led you thus far. Let this be clear to you, that without God, you are nothing. Without God, your certificate, your wisdom, your knowledge is not as valuable to humanity as it could be with God's direction. However, if there is one thing that the education offered in Covenant University has presented to you, it is your need of GODALMIGHTY in all aspects of your life after graduation.

So, as you graduate from this University today, I want to ask you what you are going to do with God. Will you remember that popular passage from Isaiah 40 vs. 31: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles..”.

This leads me to the main message that God has asked me to deliver to you; the Eagle Class of 2010. God is calling upon you to rise up above their roots.

You are graduating at a very strategic time in our national history in Nigeria. A divine revolution is taking place upon our land. The time of divine eagles has come upon our land. This is the time of the eagles; this is the time of those who know their God. This is the era of change upon our land and the eagles of today have been nurtured through the word and spirit of God, to possess the land and move this nation and our world to new heights.

Our country was once described as falling into the valley of failed nations and our passing generation denigrated to be the wasted generation. This is not so any more, because the future of this nation is bright. It is part of the plan of God for Nigeria that Covenant University was established to give birth to the eagles. When many of you who are graduating today were being born, our world was glorifying itself in ungodliness, corruption, greed, selfishness, self-defeat, and hopelessness. Today, God has raised you up in this great institution to show our world the light. You have to rise up above the evil records of our past and the corruption, greed, ungodliness and waste of the past fifty years. Dear Eagles of today, God is calling you to rise up to build a new nation; a new Nigeria with faith, wisdom and the power of the Almighty God. I therefore charge you all to rise up above your roots.

You have not gone through this University to tread the path of our past. You have gone through this University to make the difference in the land. This University has groomed you through the Word of God and the grace of the gospel to be **“a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” (1st Peter 2:9)**

To be a graduate of this University is a privilege. You have been raised up to build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundation of many generations; You shall be called the “repairers of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in” (Isaiah 58 vs.12).

Dear Eagles of today, there are battles to be fought upon this nation. It is not the battle to be fought with carnal weapons. (“Cor. 10 v. 3-5). It is a battle that can only be won by people and leaders who are going to stand for righteousness, truth, holiness and faith. The education that you have been given in this University is going to be useful in employing truth to defeat falsehood and using the light to defeat darkness. Those who will win in this next frontier are men who will rise above election manipulations, contract over-invoicing, greed, covetousness, intolerance, and tribalism, in the land.

The education that you have received at this University has empowered you with the greatest power that ever existed – the power of the Almighty God. Therefore with this power, I am challenging you to rise up against the ills of our land, and against the barriers of our time; rise up against the evils of our land.

Dear Class of 2010, you are graduating at a time when you are not sure of getting a job easily. However, it is a time when you have an opportunity to create new jobs. You are not coming out of the university to a world where we have a system that makes special provisions for the youths in the land, but God is sending you out as the eagles who will prove to the world that with God, you can fight the odds and find out the way where men have said that there is no way.

Dear Class of 2010, you are coming into a changing world that is just emerging from economic meltdown and economic system failures; a period of heightened international conflicts, climatic change, volcanoes, floods, strange clouds in the sky and unexplainable happenings in the land.

The education you have received at Covenant University here in Ota, will allow you to meet the challenges of our time with the wisdom of the God that gave Joseph His guidance and wisdom. The “*Covenant brand*” which you are being initiated into, is an empowerment to rise above the challenges of the end-times and fulfil your divine destiny, whether the devil likes it or not. You are in the age of “Yes, I can”. Yes, You can rise up, Yes, You can make it.

#### **4.0 Nigeria**

This class is graduating at an important time in the history of our land. It is a time when our party zoning arrangements are giving way to divine arrangements. Dear Class of 2010, rise up to give this nation one very scarce commodity of our land – selfless, visionary, smart, incorruptible, excellent and competent leadership. Rise up, Nigeria is waiting for you. After collecting your certificates today, move out with God to this nation and to this world; create your own niche and prove to the world by action and not just by words, those great things that God can do through the hands of his own true children. Allow God to plant you in your place of destiny, and when you get there rise up above meaningless purposes and powerless Christianity. Dear Class of 2010, Nigeria is waiting for you, rise up as eagles –

- Create new jobs
- Create and build new businesses.
- Invent new things
- Expand our motorways and create new roads.

- Do something to make our railway system work.
- Rebuild our power and energy system and give us electricity.
- Build schools and upgrade schools.
- Build new universities and create centres of excellence in our land.
- Go into politics and show our nation true divine leadership.
- Revamp our hospitals.
- Help the Strangers, Orphans and Widows (SOW) in our land.
- Break down our airports and rebuild new and modern ones.
- Turn our two-lane roads into eight lane road networks.
- Build new bridges and build new cities.
- Help to bring back the lost glories of our groundnut pyramids and
- Help to add new values to our cassava and maize.
- Do not dance to the dance of mediocrity of other youths.
- Give us new songs and new values for the land.
- Do not stop with the foundational education which the certificates you are holding are confessing
- Move forward, and rise up to greater heights.

## 5.0 Africa

Today, knowledge has assumed an important dimension in the world. It is becoming the chief currency of the modern age and a decisive resource for sustainable development. The generation and exploitation of knowledge is now the predominant factor in the creation of wealth.

In its report titled: “Constructing Knowledge Society”, the World Bank (2002) noted that the ability of a society to produce, select, adapt, commercialize, and use knowledge is critical for sustained economic growth and improved standards. Today, the ability to generate, use, and disseminate knowledge, coupled with innovation, which is the ability to develop new ideas about how to do things better and faster is now the deciding factor in the growth of people and nations.

Higher education has important roles to play in the construction of knowledge economies. It is required to serve as a generation centre of the intellectual capacity on which knowledge production and utilization depend.

**Our continent, Africa** is the world's second-largest and second most-populous continent, after Asia . With a total population of 975,330,899 people (appr. a billion), Africa accounts for about 14.8% of the world's population. The life expectancy is about 46 -50 years and the Per capital income ranges from 100 – 2,800 USD. Primary school enrolment is about 76%, while secondary school enrolment is about 26% (UNDP, 2008). Today, these are over 1500 tertiary institutions in Africa, enrolling 6.2 million students. Within the past ten years, Africa has witnessed a high growth in the number of private and distance learning tertiary institutions. This is partly because the public institutions that have been in existence for many years can no longer cope with the increasing population and high demand for education in the continent. This notwithstanding, Africa tertiary gross enrolment, which is just 5%, is still the least when compared to North America with 70% and Europe with over 24%.

Despite the large number of tertiary institutions, research in Africa is facing a lot of challenges. It is known that sub-Saharan Africa spends less than 0.3% of its GNP on research and the region has been identified as the region that contributes the least to research funding in the world. Africa's share of global scientific output has fallen from 0.5% in the mid-1980s to 0.3% in the



mid-1990s. Apart from this, Africa accounts for the lowest ratio of researchers per million inhabitants in the world. Africa, which accounts for 12% of the world population accounts for less than 1.5% of research publications annually.

Generally, the level of post-graduate training is low in many African universities. The staff-students ratio is also very high, making most of the academics to be spending their time mainly on teaching to the detriment of knowledge generation through research. The percentage of university academics with research degrees is generally not high in most of these universities. These have implications for the abilities of the universities to serve as knowledge generation hubs for their countries and regions.

Within the past few years, there have been tremendous improvements in Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Africa. The progress made has been largely with respect to the Mobile telephony system. The same cannot be said with internet access and usage. The average African university has bandwidth capacity equivalent to a broadband residential connection available in Europe, pays 50 times more for its bandwidth than its educational counterparts in the rest of the world

Higher education institutions (HEIs), especially universities, had been viewed as the knowledge base at the heart of the knowledge economy. Many national governments have recognized the crucial role played by universities in the economy as power drivers of innovation and economic change. Universities are expected to contribute to development through the generation of knowledge, the training of labour and the spinning of new business ventures. Unfortunately, higher education institutions in Africa are facing major challenges that hinder their contribution to the Knowledge domain. Some of these include:

**(a) Access:** In many countries of Africa, the resources of higher education are under strain. The higher education system cannot cope with the demand for higher education. Many young Africans who ought to benefit from higher education do not have access to higher education. For many countries in Africa, the higher education space cannot cope with the demand for higher education. Nigeria with a population of 140 million people with over 100 universities today can only provide admission to only 35- 40% of the eligible candidates who applied for university education. Enrolment in Ghana is less than 5% of the eligible age-group.

**(b) Funding and Financing :** Many African countries and institutions are yet to find solutions to the severe financial crisis that has affected the higher education system for many years. Public expenditure on education is still rather too low. Many countries of Africa contribute less than 1% of their GDP to education. Yet, the governments promote a policy of free education without con-committal financial commitments to back it up, in many cases.

**(c) Leadership and Governance:** Except for now, when private higher education is evolving in many countries of Africa, public higher education predominates and these were largely operated like other public sectors of the economy. The major characteristics of these sectors include inefficiency, poor leadership, corruption and low commitment.

**(d) Brain Drain :** A major challenge to human resource development in Africa is that of 'brain drain'. This phenomenon refers to the alarming exodus of human capital from one location to another. The Economic Commission for Africa estimated that between 1960 and 1989, some 127,000 highly qualified African professionals left the continent. According to the International Organization for Migration, Africa has been losing 20,000 professionals each year since 1990. This continuous outflow of skilled labour contributes to a widening gap in science and technology between Africa and other continents. The effect of 'brain-drain' in

Africa is most pronounced in the health and educational sectors. There are more African scientists and engineers in the USA than in the entire continent. The effect of this trend is that Africa is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign expertise for many developmental projects while its first class brains continue serving outside her shores.

**(e) Quality and Quality assurance:** Quality assurance issues have now become important for the African higher education system. The state of the quality of education and educational deliveries in many Institutions is low. Special commendation needs to be given to the National Universities Commission for its effort at promoting quality assurance in our university system. The issue of quality is also of interest to the African Union Commission which is promoting an instrument called the “African Quality Rating Mechanisms”, which has been developed as a self-assessment instrument which institutions can employ to improve the quality of their educational service deliveries.

**(h) Relevance:** We cannot talk about quality of education without being concerned about its relevance. The issue of relevance is becoming an important concern for institutions involved in producing knowledge. This is especially necessary with the challenges of globalization. The relevance of the curricula used for the training of or graduates is an important area that should be of concern to all institutions. African universities have a dual responsibility to be locally relevant and globally competitive. Globalization is demanding that our universities produce graduates that will be useful to their local environment as well as being marketable internationally beyond their geographical location.

**(i) Globalization**

Globalization, which is defined as the “*flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas... across borders*” (Knight, 2006), is an emerging challenge to higher education in Africa.

For the African higher education system, globalization has created the following urgent needs:

- The need to provide modalities for the regulation of new providers and the various forms of transnational higher education.
- the international transferability and recognition of qualifications and credits, including mobility of skilled labour and globalization of the professions, the rather strict national regulations concerning recognition of qualifications create many problems and frequent unnecessary insecurity and suffering for individuals and families.
- The need to improve the quality of higher education, including the input, process and outputs.

Dear Eagles of 2010, let me make a plea to you as you graduate from this University, and the plea is for you to help our continent - Africa. Our past history is bad. We have been ruled by totalitarian leaders who did not fear God. We have been ruled by people who plundered our resources in far away lands. We have experienced powerful rulers who have not made our lives better. Some of them are dead but their stooges and children are following in their footsteps.

But dear Eagles of 2010, your time has come. Let us prove to the world that we are a new and different generation of young men and women who will not sell our consciences for money. Let us employ the power of God and Technology to ring or fence our polling stations and build a new and great democracy in our land.

Let Daniels rise up from among you and tell our governments that we shall not commit ourselves to any evil oath in order to offer our services to our people. Let us be different from our past generations. Let us rise above them. Let us rescue our nation from the grips of marriage and

home destroyers, termites in churches and in ministries, and vampires sucking the milk of our land. Nigeria, the African continent and indeed the world, demand these of you; the Eagles of 2010.

## **6.0 Our World**

You are graduating at a time of great difficulties and a time of great opportunities. It is a world of heightened international competition and a world that offers you opportunities to function beyond your immediate environment. It is a world marked by the internet and its e-mails, websites, iPods, iPads, Play Station and 24/7 television, and yet it is a world where you can impact a large number of people with the gospel of Jesus Christ over a large areas of land. Please, do not consider the limitations of our time, rather, rise up to the possibilities of our world.

Don't be local champions; rise up to be a world citizen. Refuse to be limited to a small enclave but rise up to new horizons which nobody in your family had ever explored.

Fortunately, the education that you have received from Covenant University has empowered you to live out your dreams, have new and great visions, create new jobs and bring life to things that are dying. So as you graduate today, don't be ordinary eagles, rise up about your roots. Rise up above your past, pursue new dreams.

## **7.0 To Rise Up Above Your Roots:**

Dream New Dreams.  
Have great Visions.  
Pray and Think  
Work and work smart  
Fight to win  
Break new grounds  
Fear God; Serve God and Live for God.  
Let today's certificates be nothing  
But the beginning of a new walk with God.  
Dear Class of 2010,  
Don't stop yet  
Until You have moved the mountains.  
Don't stop yet,  
Until you have proved to this generation  
What God can do through your life.  
So, as you graduate today,  
Let today be the beginning of another journey  
To rise up above your roots.

I charge you to rise up like Jabez and ask God for new frontiers, an expanded coast and fresh vision. As I conclude, I pray that your life will be renewed for the challenges ahead. You will rise up to greater heights in life by rising above your roots. This University will surely not stop, it will continue to rise to greater heights and lead our nation, continent and world in conquering new frontiers and raising men and women for this world and for heaven.

Olusola Oyewole  
Addis Ababa.  
July 2, 2010.