



# Covenant University

6th Convocation Ceremony and Award of First and Higher Degrees  
and the Presentation of Prizes holding at Covenant University,  
Ota, Nigeria, on Friday, July 22, 2011

## **CONVOCATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

# Go Forth and Soar ...

**By**

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## **Introduction**

I wish to thank the Proprietor and Chancellor of Covenant University, Dr David Oyedepo, Bishop and Founder of Living Faith International; the Board of Trustees; the Vice-Chancellor; Principal Officers and the Senate of this University for the invitation to give this keynote address today. I bring you greetings and felicitations from the Association of African Universities (AAU), a Pan African Organization that is 43 years old in the business of representing African Union as the apex organization for higher education in Africa. Above all, I wish to pay gratitude to God for ensuring that I come here today even though several competing urgent and important matters gave me some hassle in rescheduling this visit. There are two ceremonies I always love to witness in the university. They are matriculation and convocation as they brighten the faces of students, parents, families and friends of the celebrants and by implication reinvigorate the management of the university to stand firm and pat themselves at the back for the great job they are doing. These are great opportunities I thought I would miss as I completed my seven-year term, nine months ago, as Vice Chancellor of the one and only National Open University of Nigeria. But it has pleased God that I could literarily attend thesetypes of ceremonies every day of the year and still not cover all the universities in Africa. I appreciate that time is of essence, so let me go straight to the role I have been invited to play here on this day that the Lord has made in which we are rejoicing!

### **A Covenant Well Kept**

Just as the Biblical David at Hebron made a covenant before the Lord with all the elders of Israel when he ruled over Judah from 1010 to 970 B.C. (1Chr 11: 1-3), our very own Dr David Oyedepo, Bishop and Founder of Living Faith International, on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2002 had a Covenant with God to 'raise a new generation of leaders to restore the dignity of the black race'. Today, nine years after, we are witnessing the exceeding blessings of the Lord and His pleasure with this well kept Covenant by the graduation of the sixth set of graduands who have passed through the gates of Covenant University.

At times we are faced with many questions about ourselves, about our family, about our community and perhaps, in the case of Bishop David Oyedepo, about

the decadence in our nation. We often wonder where God is. Or ask why isn't God doing something about it? Habakkuk put the same question to God when it seemed that God was inactive with Judah's condition, and received this answer, similar to the conviction which Bishop David Oyedepo had about four decades ago that: *"The just shall live by his faith."* (Habakkuk 2:4). Three times in the New Testament that passage is repeated, with each emphasising a teaching that although God's ways are mysterious, the just shall live by faith. First, in reference to **the Just**, Romans 1:17 says, *"as it is written, the just shall live by faith"*. Second, in reference to **shall live**, Hebrews 10:38 is another of the passages in the New Testament that reveals another dimension to living by faith, *"Now the just shall live by faith..."* Look at the word, "Now!" What does "now" mean? Not past, not future, but present. Third, therefore, in reference to **by faith**, Galatians. 3:11 says *"...it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith."* Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, it is glaringly evident that our congregating this morning to formalise the graduation of yet another generation of successful students provides the ample confirmation that the covenant which the indefatigable Bishop had with the Lord anchored by his total belief that the just shall live by faith, has paid off.

## **The State of Higher Education in Africa**

A major reason why the Association of African Universities (AAU) has taken some interest in Covenant University is her active engagement with the community as an integral part of its civil roles and social responsibilities in higher education. According to Lawrence Bacow, chair of the Talloires Network Steering Committee at the recently concluded conference on *Building the engaged university*, held last Month at the Autonomous University of Madrid in Spain, community engagement "act as an amplifier for all of our scholarship and teaching and in the process they make us better universities. Public service is not a marginal activity; it is an essential way that our faculty and students can do their job." Community engagement is an area in which more and more universities around the world are situating themselves. Covenant University is emerging as being amongst the top bracket of universities seeking for excellence within the emerging global shift in the higher education paradigm. I have no doubt that if she continues in the track it has paved for herself; it would not be too long before

it is seen within the top 100 universities in the world. I must congratulate the Proprietor, Chancellor, Board of Regents, the hard working and unassuming Vice Chancellor and her dedicated staff and students in pursuing this vision.

Developments in higher education in Africa continue to be as tremendous as they have been challenging for the continent, to various governments and all other stakeholders. However, the challenges have never been as profound as they now are in recent times. The catalysts for educational reform, which include massification, equity and social justice, inclusiveness, expansion, employability, globalisation, skills and competencies shortage, and national development, have continued to multiply. At the same time within the continent, between countries and within countries, differences in areas such as demography, funding, physical infrastructure, levels of academic support, qualified academic staff, and local challenges have continued to increase rather steeply. This is not to mention the double-edged effect of brain drain which stands apart as an issue of major occurrence affecting higher education in Africa. All these are occurring in an environment which demands that higher education in Africa must focus on global competitiveness while it strives to be locally relevant and centrally placed to contribute meaningfully to sustainable total development of the continent, countries and individuals.

The emerging global landscape being drawn by recent developments, has shown very clearly that knowledge capability and capacity, rather than natural resources, is the greatest determinant of a country's entry into, and effective participation in global competitiveness. It goes without saying; therefore, that higher education contributes significantly to the political, scientific, technological, economic, social and human development of any country. This is even more so for the developing countries of Africa, a continent of over 900 million people characterised by the poorest countries in the world, with the world's highest illiteracy rates, lowest participation rates in higher education, huge capacity development needs, with over 10million seeking employment annually with the youth constituting 60% of the unemployed, and a massive demand for tertiary education.

All these have contributed to altering the balance of power between the State and the university system in many ways. In the face of continuing dwindling government provisions of fund to universities and higher education system as a

whole, a number of changes are taking place. Africa has over 600 universities in which the percentage of private universities is on a sharp increase especially in the past couple of years; the indication is that in 5 years Africa could have more private universities than those established by governments. Faced with the huge unmet demand in higher education, governments' inability to properly fund higher education amidst the opening up of the terrain of higher education, Africa is faced with students seeking admissions in institutions with varying and many with questionable quality profile. Stakeholders including businesses will increasingly demand for better and relevant curricula, state-of-the-art infrastructure and graduates better prepared for the job markets. In addition, the social and economic dimension of providing education for all and laying solid foundation for sustainable development will face serious threat.

Needless to say that all the above would have significant impact on universities' local and international agendas, including their responsiveness to the demand of delivering quality higher education to Africa. As African universities struggle to become notable players in the global arena, they must grapple with a number of salient issues which include the need to rethink what higher education means to Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, address issues of balance between enrolment and quality of education, consider the shift from and tension between existing model of fixed campus environment and emerging concept of ODL, vigorously embark upon curriculum change and review key skills to be acquired in undergraduate studies, properly situate postgraduate and research studies, and reassess the place of private universities and comparability.

## **Private Universities**

AAU calls upon all governments of Africa to give serious thought to the place of private universities as it becoming increasingly evident that they will be a force to reckon with in tackling the issue of access to higher education on the continent. Although many of them are merely for profit and their quality is questionable, we cannot ignore that, if properly channelled and nurtured, private universities will be part of the solution rather than be scorned as the 'unwanted kid on the block' in the street of higher education previously populated by government-funded institutions. Private universities are tremendously assisting government by shouldering some of its responsibilities to the community and the teeming

population seeking placement in universities. Records and experiences abound in various parts of the world showing that private universities can be as good if not better than government-funded ones. The experiences of Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Oxford, Cambridge, are living witnesses. And closer home, Covenant University has demonstrated excellent signs of rising up to be one of such quality private universities.

As a way to redirect attention and show case the best in our private university system in Africa, AAU plans to hold the first-ever continental conference on the role of private universities in higher education development in Africa in the first quarter of 2012. We have chosen to make this information public for the first time at one of the best private universities in Africa as an invitation to Covenant University and other similar private universities on the continent to partner with AAU and play significant roles in the historic conference to show case the best in our system. Private universities need to stand up and be counted at this critical development phase of the re-emergence of higher education as a priority within Africa and the world.

## **Nigeria and the enigma of managing education**

Difficulties in identifying the beacon of light for national development and lack of focus in the effort to govern Nigeria as effectively and appropriately as expected impact seriously on other sectors of the economy. Bad governance and chasing irrelevancies exert their effects on a country's political, social, economic, health care and other sectors. Unfortunately, the damages it does to education only become visible after a number of years had passed, leaving everyone to wallow in ignorance and immeasurable decadence. Nigeria is no more reckoned with world wide in education, as was our pride several decades ago when even our NCE graduates got admitted to pursue postgraduate programmes abroad. Graduates of our universities hardly come out with any employable skills, they find communicating in English an uphill task, and those with master degrees cannot define what research is or means to a nation, let alone to themselves. Our educational system is driving in reverse full throttle without the use of the back or side mirrors. In the same vein, our secondary school graduates can best be described as half-baked illiterates who constitute a danger to the society and to themselves. Nigeria has regressed into a nation where mediocrity is the rule and

being allowed to lead where we have intelligent people. I am told that faced with lack of gainful employment and other avenues to get education, our youth have taken to the three most popular careers they have created for themselves. Ask any child what they wish to become in the future, s/he says footballer, comedian or a local government chairman – the easiest way out with illiteracy and make easy money in Nigeria!

Education is the best legacy a nation can bequeath its younger generations. Yet, we seem to be playing politics with establishing universities and no concerted effort is made to completely redraft from scratch our national policy on education, as the one we are currently panel-beating has outlived its usefulness. It is like using 19<sup>th</sup> century tools to solve 21<sup>st</sup> century issues and concerns in nation building. To add insults to injury, the nation has driven our youth into the hands of ‘militancy’ and ‘Boko Haramism’ – two perfect examples of a rudderless nation ridden with bad governance, lack of incisive accountability and breeding illiteracy and lawlessness faster than the rate maggots reproduce.

Let me use the analogy of volcanic ash to illustrate the educational cul-de-sac Nigeria has driven herself into. You would have heard on the news regarding the periodic eruption of the volcano in Iceland, throwing its ash all over Europe and beyond and making it impossible for airlines to operate their flights. The last time this occurred, up to six million passengers worldwide were affected by the effects of volcanic ash from Iceland. Some of Europe’s busiest airports had to close. Several precautions have now been taken on this matter because of the similar experience that occurred over Indonesia 19 years ago. According to the Weekend Australian Newspaper, “Eric Moody was the pilot of the BA Flight 09, a Boeing 747 that was flying over Indonesia when volcanic ash put all four engines out of action. After 14 minutes of silence, and aiming to ditch in the ocean, Captain Moody and his two flight officers managed to relight the engines and landed in Jakarta. The incident in June 1982 was the first such encounter with high-altitude ash. Captain Moody’s announcement to the passengers after losing power has become part of airline wisdom. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We have a small problem. All four engines have stopped. We are doing our best to get it under control. I trust you are not in too much distress.”

There is a greater and more serious problem affecting Nigerian educational system today; it is no small problem; and one – sadly - that seems to be of little

distress to us, especially those who rule and govern us. It is the failure of government and her people to seriously and honestly tackle the challenges of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other activities, like volcanic ash, have endangered our journey to nationhood. Our economy is in shambles, our roads and railways are an eye sore, our hospitals still record that 2 out of every five expectant women in the labour room never return alive, and where 3 out of every 7 children die before they reach the age of 6years. Nigeria must declare Education a disaster area needing emergency rescuing strategy. Without seriously addressing our educational problems, Nigeria will be like Captain Moody's jet with its engines out of action in mid-air and heading for disaster. All is not lost because God always has a way for His creatures. God says that "at times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. Then, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. My eyes will be open and my ears attentive to every prayer made. But you must faithfully follow and obey all my commands, decrees, and regulations" (2 Chr 7: 13-17). God has asked us to seek truth, knowledge, understanding and wisdom through Him without which we can neither serve Him appropriately nor serve humanity effectively. Education is the main industry for the acquisition and nurturing of these life skills, which I believe Covenant University has instilled in our fellow citizens graduating today.

### **To the Graduands: Go forth and soar like eagles'.**

Let me therefore now turn my address to the graduands who are all bubbling with excitement, grinning from ear to ear and wishing this occasion comes to an end sooner than planned for them to party and celebrate with their friends and families. I am sure you cannot believe that it has all ended. The daily lectures, gruesome laboratory sessions, endless tutorials, conformity to the rigid rules of the game, waking up at the wee hours every morning in readiness for boring lectures and months of struggle in the library and data collection and analysis. It is unbelievably over because everything that has a beginning has an end. After today, you will be as free as the air, ready for NYSC or to go brandishing your glittering certificates for employers to consider. You are a pride to your country,



university, community, family, friends and, indeed to yourself! In the face of all the celebrations, I would like you to pause and consider at least 100 points I have in mind. But due to time I will mention only **three** of them.

The first point is that you did not do it all alone. Covenant University has made you what you are today and what you will become in the future. Your parents, relations and friends and even your communities gave all they have for you. Even the cleaners, drivers, cooks, gardeners, etc., have contributed to moulding you at this university. Just look around at the huge crowd to confirm what I have just said. Above all, God has decreed and made it possible for you to graduate today. Only a fool says there is no God(Psalm 14:1).But the wise don't make a show of their knowledge, but fools broadcast their foolishness (Proverbs 12:23).

The second point is that in spite of your degree you are collecting today, (be it Bachelor, Master or even Doctorate), you need a lot more knowledge to deal with the larger society. In short it must be continuous or what is now known as long life learning. The degree you received today has a used by date of less than five years. In fact we are told that the halve life of all the knowledge we have in our brains is only 18months. Without going back to school and learning daily, you will quickly be out of date than you think. More over in today's world, a first degree now measures more like the West African School Certificate of some decades ago. You must make it a point of duty, even at great discomfort to yourself and family, to acquire more knowledge on a daily basis through several channels including the internet.

The third and most important point is that you need much more than the daily acquisition of knowledge to deal with all the issues and concerns we are daily faced with at home, work, community or at learning centres. You require a daily walk with God to skilfully meander through the obstacles and challenges of life. As a matter of fact, this is your most guaranteed insurance against failure or disenchantment with the world.

You must reciprocate God's promise. God kept his promises to you. He promises to love you, accept you, and forgive you each time you falter. He promised you this degree. It is your turn to keep your promise with Him.It is called your covenant with God. Whatever it is, you must not fail to keep your promise. To support the ability to keep your promise with God you must add obedience.

Obedying God restores our relationship to Him. The only way to enjoy the benefits of God's promises is to obey Him. Keeping your promise and obedience to God brings the fruit of prosperity. Prosperity goes much deeper than mere material wealth. True prosperity and fulfilment come as a result of obeying God. When people obey God, they find peace with him, with others, and with themselves.

Additional to all this, you must know now, if your lecturers have not already told you so, that you are going into the world to continually fight battles and wars. Consequently, you must prepare by arming yourself with what you need to fight wars on a daily basis. Fortunately, you need not go beyond the Word to get all the arsenals you require as your tool-kit. You need the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6: 10-17) so that you can stand firm against all strategies of the devil. This is because the Word says once you go out into the world your fight begins not against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

I don't want to sound as if I am preaching to the choir, but let me remind you that the armour of God consists of six very important arsenals. They are (i) truth – waist gird (ii) righteousness – breast plate (iii) peace that comes from the Good News – shoes (iv) faith - the shield (v) salvation - helmet, and (vi) the Word of God - sword. These are all that you need. Nothing more! They will be your protection as you plan to serve humanity. If you adhere to all these, soon people will begin to marvel at your wisdom and they will question just as they said after Jesus preached in Nazareth, "Where did he get all his **wisdom** and the power to perform such miracles? He's just the carpenter!" (Mark 6:2-3).

I hate to repeat this, but be rest assured that once you are so well armed, you will never be tired because unlike 'the youth who get tired and weak or the young men who crash in exhaustion, those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint' (Isaiah 40:29-31).

## **Conclusion**

Let me conclude with the wise words of the sage, Mahatma Gandhi, who said 'the best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of humanity.' If you belong to God and not of the world, the Lord will always renew you with unimaginable strength. 'And you will sprout fresh feathers and soar almost effortlessly like an eagle'.

Go forth, therefore, into this sinful and fallen world and soar beyond your imagination. The Lord is your strength. Congratulations and God bless.

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