

# Covenant University

8th Convocation Ceremony and Award of First and Higher Degrees  
and the Presentation of Prizes holding at Covenant University,  
Ota, Nigeria, on Friday, July 26, 2013

## CONVOCATION KEYNOTE ADDRESS

# **Transformational Leadership and the Quest for Global Relevance**

**By**

**Prof. Chinedu o. Nebo, PhD, OON, NPOM**  
The Honourable Minister of Power,  
Federal Ministry of Power, FCT, Abuja

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## **About Keynote Speaker**

Chinedu Ositadinma Nebo born was on June 3, 1952 in Kafanchan in Kaduna State of Nigeria to Mr. Christopher and Mrs. Ifeyinwa Nebo of Udi in Enugu State. He was appointed on the 4th February 2013 as the new Minister of Power for the Federal Republic of Nigeria by the President, His Excellency, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan GCFR. Prior to this appointment, Professor Nebo was the Vice Chancellor, Federal University Oye-Ekiti (February 2011 - February 2013), one of the nine (9) new start-up Federal universities in Nigeria and prior to that he was Vice Chancellor, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), between 2004 and 2009, serving meritoriously and successfully with several awards to his credit.

Professor Nebo, a diversified and detribalized Nigerian in every sense, had his primary education in Ibadan, Kafanchan, and Port Harcourt; a result of the nature of his father's work while engaged with the Nigeria Railways Corporation. It was during this period that he passed the First School Leaving Certificate Examination with Distinction. He attended the prestigious Government Secondary School Afikpo and shortly thereafter, Government College Umuahia with scholarship before proceeding to the United States for further studies. His decades of knowledge, expertise and experience building in transforming institutions in Nigeria and abroad are assets that have distinguished him. He served as Deputy Vice Chancellor in the Enugu State University of Science and Technology from January 2000 to January 2004. In June 2004, on appointment as Vice Chancellor of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, he successfully rejuvenated the university and completing several projects and programs that had been left uncompleted, reviving the wounded lion and living up to his name "Ositadinma" meaning "from henceforth it is well," restoring hope, healing, and beauty to UNN. For his remarkable achievements and noteworthy accomplishments the national body of the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) elected Professor Nebo in 2006 as the Best Vice-Chancellor in Nigeria, the following year brought the conferment of the same award by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), and the next, A Most Outstanding Vice Chancellor Award and induction into All Africa Students Union Hall of Fame. As Vice Chancellor at the Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Prof Nebo's visionary leadership and management came to the fore. Despite meagre resources and faced with social and environmental challenges, Professor Nebo successfully created a convivial environment that promoted an enabling environment for increased harmony between the two host communities of the university and transformed a virgin forest into a university campus within 6 months, which many now term "the six months miracle."

Professor Nebo is committed to the service of his community and has demonstrated this through chairing, supporting, managing, and advancing causes, NGOs, conferences, and workshops that advance human capacity development, nation building, spiritual and character development, education and healthcare. He served as Member of Governing Board of the National Primary Healthcare Development Agency, National Steering Committee on Vision 2020, Governing Council of Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), and Enugu State Development Committee (on the inception of Enugu State), as well as Chairman of Enugu State Committee for the Eradication of Cultism. He serves as Archdeacon in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Diocese of Nike.

Professor Nebo is a graduate of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology where he bagged a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mining Engineering (First Class Honours and University-wide Prize for Outstanding Student). While an undergraduate, he was listed in the prestigious Who's Who among Students in American Universities and Colleges. He obtained a Master of Science Degree in Metallurgical Engineering, and a Ph.D. in Materials Engineering and Science, all from South Dakota School of Mines and Technology U.S.A. He served as visiting Professor of Metallurgical Engineering at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology and the University of Nevada, Reno, in the U.S. and has authored and produced several publications in reputable international and local journals.

Professor Nebo's recognizable and towering profile stands him out as an intellectual giant, a quintessential technocrat, an administrator par excellence, a man of stellar qualities, and a man of visible candor. His passion and commitment to excellence, servant leadership, and integrity to any and every organization or cause he is involved makes him a value-adder, unrepentant crusader, and insightful contributor to national building and transformation. He has been nominated to numerous prestigious biographies which include Who's Who in the U.S., International Youth in Achievement, Who's Who in Finance and Industry, International Book of Honor, etc. He received the Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 2009 and the National Productivity Order of the Merit Award (NPOM) - conferred by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2009 and 2012 respectively. He is happily married to Ifeyinwa, his heartthrob with whom he is still deeply in love and they are blessed with four children and several grandchildren.

Ladies and Gentlemen, would you welcome with me our most distinguished keynote address Speaker to make his speech.

# COVENANT UNIVERSITY

## ANTHEM

We're a Covenant Generation	Covenant generation arise
Pursuing excellence	Light and knowledge to shine
Redeemed to reign	Glorious foundation stone
Learning to lead	Leadership skills to show
We are bound by an oath	Departing from knowledge
Obeying rules to rule	To empowerment Legalism
Making Kings of youth	To realism
Flying high on covenant wings	Wisdom's call for change
Wisdom's call for change	Inspired, on fire
Inspired on fire	With Courage Marching on in
With courage Marching on in	grace
in grace	God's own arrow
God's own arrow	Shot for glory.
Shot for glory.	



### Our Vision

To be a leading World-Class University, committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of Human endeavour

### Our Mission

To create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a Human Development Total Man Concept driven curriculum employing innovative, leading-edge teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated, life-applicable, life-transforming education, relevant to the context of Science, Technology and Human Capacity Building



# Transformational Leadership and the Quest for Global Relevance

## Introduction

I am deeply honored to be invited to Covenant University to be the 2013 Convocation Keynote Speaker. I highly cherish this invitation because of the uniqueness of Covenant University, amongst universities in Nigeria, as an institution founded on the core values of spirituality, hard work, and integrity. Covenant University has rapidly gained the reputation of a place that produces God-fearing, hard-working, well-rounded and well-grounded graduates. Earlier on, one of my hosts was thanking me for honouring Covenant by being here. My response was, “believe me, *being here, the honour and pleasure are definitely mine*”.

Let me start by congratulating the graduates of 2013. To get here, you have had to make huge sacrifices and hard choices, including those sleepless nights you spent preparing for those tough exams or finishing homework and class assignments for those demanding lecturers. Be assured that those were times well spent. What you have earned is a degree from a fine university that has also instilled in you the best of values. Such unique educational experiences should last a lifetime. You are not guaranteed success, but you have earned the necessary foundation for effectively and productively engaging society as a leader, if you chose to. You need to recognize, however, that this is not the end of learning. Indeed, this is the beginning of a new phase of learning – lifelong learning. If your choice is to be a driver of progress and change, then you have to buckle-up and realize that much is expected of you. Shaping the future is your responsibility, not others.

I want to especially congratulate the mothers, fathers and

guardians of the graduates, who helped to support and mentor them through years of Covenant University and education in general. You are too often the forgotten. Graduates, do yourselves a favor, look around, identify your parents and family in the audience, look in their directions and say 'Thank You'. Your family put so much time, effort, prayers and money into laying the foundation for your future. Graduates, remember this always. You could not have done this without them.

### **Importance of the Topic**

As convocation speaker, I face a big challenge. That is, few graduates ever remember anything from their convocation speaker's address. Unless I do something different, most of you are not going to remember most of the things I say and few will remember anything at all. My goal, therefore, today is to say at least one thing you will never forget. After all, why do universities keep inviting us back, year after year, if no one remembers what we say.

In inviting me to speak here today, the leadership team at Covenant University thought it important to guide my thoughts by suggesting to me a topic or theme. The topic we settled on is: *“Transformational Leadership and the Quest for Global Relevance”*. You know, as I was preparing this address, I got to reflect on the topic, which I think is a great one to be giving to people who have just completed their education, have benefitted from an excellent institution like Covenant, have the right orientation and moral foundation, are going on into the world at a very tumultuous time, and that need motivational parting words to encourage them to be leaders, agents of change and drivers of prosperity in society. So, I see this lecture as an opportunity to build on the great foundation that Covenant University has given you by delivering a message that you will never forget.

### **Transformational Leadership**

The best way to define transformational leadership is to define its antonym, transactional leadership.

According to Vera & Crossan (2004), a transactional leader sees the future as the outcome of a set of transactions. Transactional leaders "Set goals, articulate explicit agreements regarding what they expect from others, establish how they will be rewarded, and provide feedback to keep everybody on task". Transactional leaders focus on increasing the efficiency of established routines and procedures and are more concerned with following existing rules than with making structural changes. They operate most effectively in large bureaucratic organizations that have evolved beyond the chaotic entrepreneurial state, which is more like the stage Nigeria is in now. They work well in stable and predictable environments.

Transactional leaders are administrators. They are not looking to change the future. They just are looking to keep things the same. Transactional leaders are concerned with processes rather than forward-thinking ideas. These types of leaders focus on contingent reward or positive reinforcement and contingent penalization or negative reinforcement. The great leaders of all times were certainly not transactional. They were transformational.

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, enhances the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through various mechanisms. They connect to the followers' sense of identity and self to an initiative and the collective identity of the organization. They are role models who inspire followers, challenging them to take greater ownership for their work. While transactional leaders are responsive, transformational leaders are proactive. While transactional leaders work within an established culture, transformational leaders seek to change the organization's culture by implementing new ideas. A transactional leader ensures that people will achieve objectives

through rewards and punishments set by the leader. However, employees of transformational leaders achieve objectives through higher ideals and moral values. While a transactional leader motivates followers by appealing to their own self-interest, a transformational leader does so by encouraging them to put group interests first. Transformational leaders tend to have no personal ego, but they have institutional ego. It is therefore obvious that it takes transformational leadership to take responsibility for others that are less fortunate. To grow our country and the employment base for the future, we need transformational leaders.

### **Interesting Times, New Economy**

What does leadership have to do with global relevance or the future? I do not need to tell you that you are graduating into society at one of the most interesting times in world history where the only thing that will be constant is change. This is a period when new leaders are needed who can adequately balance speed, a rapidly changing world, uncertainty and leadership to evolve the future. Since the advent of advanced information and communications technology (ICT) in the early 1990s, the world has changed drastically and it is ever changing daily.

The world economy is now global. We now live in a global, highly competitive village driven by knowledge. The world has evolved into a global knowledge economy that has no patience for ignorance and indolence. The advent of ICT has made it possible for individuals to become economically relevant in ways that were not even possible before. In this new economy, talent, entrepreneurship, creativity, adaptability, innovation, the ability to network and the capacity to develop, nurture and master complex dynamics drive personal economic success and the success of nations. New information and communications technologies (ICT), which have made previously impossible tasks and functions now possible, while accelerating the pace of

accomplishing tasks, have brought about a whole new economy. In this new world, it is the stock of what people have between their ears that matter most in value creation, not what they can do with their hands.

The new economy will level the playing field. The advantages that industrial nations had over others will likely erode if developing countries ensure that their educational and knowledge infrastructure are up to stuff. The challenge to developing countries is to ensure that they embrace the principles of the new economy – invest in knowledge and entrepreneurial infrastructure, encourage creativity and innovation, and foster tolerance, flexibility and adaptability. Which type of leader are you going to be?

### **African Nations on the Move**

Indeed, as Thomas Friedman asserts, “the world is flat”. According to the globally renowned financial firm of Goldman Sachs, Brazil, Russia, India and China, the BRIC nations, have found new relevance. They have overtaken western nations in growth and are competing with them frontally with respect to economic scope and size. Goldman Sachs has also identified the Next – 11 countries, which include Nigeria. Along with the BRICs, these are expected to grow rapidly and become some of the largest economies in the world in the next 20 to 30 years. For the first time in documented history, Sub-Saharan Africa is featuring robust growth and Nigeria is one of the growth leaders. Indeed, Sub-Saharan Africa is enjoying the longest period of sustained economic growth in her history. Around the globe, Africa is being looked at as a ray of hope, the next big opportunity, the place to invest, and the bastion of growth. These opportunities promise to come if we are able to bring about transformational change in the way we do business – transformational change in our educational system, in our focus on entrepreneurship and in our quest to promote creativity and

flexibility.

Despite these opportunities, you are also graduating at a time when the global economy has slowed down and most western nations, whose economies were the epitome of prosperity, are almost grounded to a halt. Countries such as the United States, Italy, Greece, Canada, the UK and France, who were previously bastions of prosperity, went through grueling recessions and their resurgence has been lackluster. Many are exploring new economic paradigms having realized that the industrial economy, which offered them huge competitive advantage, is now contestable and waning fast. In contrast to the traditional growth philosophy, which was rooted in the traditional production and industrial economic framework, they are now realizing that the so-called “new economy” is real. Again, it is into this dynamic global market, where the focus could possibly shift to Africa, that you will have to function. You can, in-fact, make a huge difference in this new emerging world.

Nigeria's middle-class is just getting-off the ground. Millions of Nigerians will be buying cars, TVs, microwave ovens, gym equipment, and other goods that were previously associated with prosperity for the first time. A growing number of people will attend university like you. They too can eventually demand advanced goods and services. Africa is spewing new billionaires, including women and young people. In contrast, the US, which previously dominated the billionaire space, is seeing places like Nigeria producing new wealth. Vision 20/2020 being championed by President Goodluck Jonathan is designed to usher in what some of our best thinkers around the globe already believe. Nigeria will be prosperous and so will Africa. It is in that world and in that Nigeria that you are going to operate.

### **Challenges in Nigeria**

But the future will not be that simple. You must also realize that

the new global economy presents major schisms and Nigeria is a good example of that. Nigeria's growth rate is high (above 6%) and it has remained so for at least a decade. So, the overall economy is growing fast. Those aspects of the economy that are tied to creative knowledge workers are also growing fast. The problem is the rest of the economy is struggling. Many adults in Nigeria are unemployed, especially the unskilled and uneducated. Depending on your level and type of education, getting a job could be a challenge.

Youth unemployment is staggering, and that includes university graduates. Some of you have no clue what you are going to be doing in four months or one year, but the Nigerian economy is growing very fast. I hate to say this, but a university education has now become just like a visa. Visas don't guarantee you success at your destination. With your education, you still have to decide which economy you want to key into. I think it was the great motivational speaker, Dale Carnegie, that once said that "All men are created with an equal opportunity to become unequal."

You can key into the new economy of leaders, doers, makers and employers, who create opportunities for themselves and others. Or you can key into the other economy where people offer little uniqueness, sell their time and energy for simple wages, do not control the means of value generation and work mostly 8 hours a day. The question is: as new graduates, are you going to be knowledge workers who are part of the emerging Nigerian and global prosperity, or will you be one of the people on the long list of chronically unemployed or unconnected. It is all in your hands. You have enough education to allow you to choose. Before I go any further, let me further describe these two economies. Indeed, the inability to effectively balance these two is the reason many of our western economies have waned in recent years. This ability or inability will also decide Nigeria's success in growing a prosperous economy.

### **The Old Economy**

In the old economy, the ideal individual is a hard worker. His tools are his basic education, managerial skills, historical rules and procedures, history, tradition and protocol. The individual detests risk and clearly does not like change. He will continue to earn rent from what he/she learnt in school way in the past. He/she will have a 35 year carrier and then will probably retire. He is Mr. Organization and he spends a lot of time in society of this and society of that. He will always be at an Old Boys Association meeting to meet and chat with all the friends he went to secondary school with.

The highlight of the year is the trip back to the village. He is defined by where his grandfather or great-grandfather came from, not where he is going. He is defined by his own culture. He is constantly looking into the past. He thinks about what is, not where things need to be. His origin defines where he chooses to work, play and live. He lets his budget drive his vision and life, not the other way around. He is afraid of failure. He takes jobs from the economy, and adds little to it. He definitely does not create jobs, except for his housemaid and driver if he has. The average Nigerian has this personality. Indeed, the average human being has this personality. These are indeed good solid people, but these are not the people that will transform our world.

### **The New Economy**

In the new economy, the individual is a knowledge worker. His tools are creativity, innovation, ideas and entrepreneurship. The individual is a risk-taker who is constantly adapting and growing. He/she surrounds himself/herself with talented people and other risk takers. The individual is a life-long learner whose degree is only the starting point of his education. He/she constantly seeks global connectivity. Culture and tradition are things he/she cherishes, not things that define him/her. He/she is constantly

looking into the future, not just into the past. They think about what ought to be, not what is. Her quest for quality of life is a primary consideration in where she and her husband choose to live or what they choose to do. Their vision drives their budget and activities, not their budget driving their vision.

You will find such people emerging as great leaders in the community, in business, in the church, or in government. The great successes of our times, of all times, had that personality. He/she is constantly looking for solutions to new problems. He is not afraid of failure, but learns from it. You all know people who are made out of such fabric. Your Chancellor, Bishop, Dr. Oyedepo is an example. But some are less wealthy, less well known, but successful people. You only need one of these people to balance off 10,000 others that cannot be like them. Someone has to create the jobs and opportunities for others. These are the players that are going to connect Nigeria to the globe and grow our next economy. We only need just a few thousands of them. The shortage of these types of people can be used to explain Nigeria's woes. Will you be one of them?

### **Transforming Nigeria**

Much of the challenge of transforming Nigeria is our national resolve to balance these two economies, these two types of individuals. Given the current state of our economy, we have to create or seed more of the former in order to create enough opportunities. Education alone is not the solution, as many educated people can't transcend the old economy. When you graduate from a University, you are well prepared to enter the old economy. But University education does not train you for the new economy. You have to personally transform yourself to be relevant in the new economy. In the past, university education gave you enduring skills. It was like building a home from which you continue to derive rent even without much renovation. Other

than occasional conferences, which are akin to minor renovations, your education lasted a lifetime.

Today, a university degree must be supplemented by continuous learning and new skills development. Lifelong education is the name of the game. When I graduated from university, you would expect one career and two jobs. I am on my third job. Today, experts are saying that a graduate should expect 7 careers and 13 jobs. This is because the world is changing fast. Unless you continually renew yourselves, marketability will be a challenge. Today, you have to continually learn new things in order to be relevant. Again, today, you have to continually learn new things in order to be relevant. This is one of the key messages I want you to remember.

So, my dear graduates, when I think about what it takes to be relevant in the new economy, I recall the core values of your university, which are Spirituality, Possibility Mentality, Capacity Building, Integrity, Responsibility, Diligence and Sacrifice. You had the benefit of graduating from Covenant. So, you are probably better positioned than others to be a player in the new economy. On Covenant's website, the Chancellor, Dr. David O. Oyedepo states:

*“We are committed to raising a new generation of leaders who will positively impact their nation, the African continent and the world at large”.*

Dr. Oyedepo was talking about you. He was prophesying about you. You have been armed with the persona of a responsible person who is willing to take risks and make sacrifices. You have the potential to be key players in ushering in a new Nigeria. You have the potential to be innovative champions of new ideas and to be the people on whose shoulders others will lean. As new graduates, this new world of possibilities is your reality and market place. As Margaret Meade wrote, 'Never doubt that a group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world.

Indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.'

### **The Work Begins Today**

Changing the world begins today. One of the great things about being a university graduate is that you start making real decisions. The choices that you make in the next few years will set the course for your future. Your choices about those you surround yourself with, the place you choose to start your career and live in, the way you choose to treat people, how bold and strategic you choose to be, whether or not you choose to be a hard worker, whether or not you choose to be a leader or a follower, your choice of a life partner, and your decisions to be engaged in your community to serve God and country, all matter. Success is all about choices. My message to you is be careful, diligent, and strategic in those choices, as they will set the trajectory for your life. Again, let your vision and energy drive your strategies and do not let your life-plan stand in the way of great opportunities.

The leadership style that is relevant in the new economy is transformational. To reposition our economy and develop such new sectors as entertainment, service, IT, green jobs, etc, we need transformational leaders. To build globally connected businesses that leverage our IT capabilities, we need transformational leaders. To build a Nigeria that will be globally relevant and competitive in the future, we need transformational leaders. In essence, I am telling you that you have been well trained to retrain yourselves to be transformational players and leaders.

It is critical at this point to add that a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ is an added impetus to the drive for excellence and transformational leadership. Jesus Christ was in every ramification a transformational leader and His disciples should follow in His footsteps. Faith in God, the Creator of this vast, incomprehensible Universe that houses our little planet Earth is crucial to understanding the true meaning of

life and success in life. Besides, divine providence often undergirds the greatest strides we make on earth. Therefore, keep faith with God. Serve Him in spirit and in truth, and strive to be a transformational leader like our Savior Jesus Christ.

Let me do a recap on my key messages, and these are:

1. “The future starts today”.
2. “Be careful, diligent, and strategic in your choices as these will set the trajectory for your life”.
3. “Go on to the world and be transformational leaders”.
4. “Do not let your life-plan stand in the way of great opportunities”.
5. “Let your vision and energy drive your strategies and your resources”.
6. “You have to continually learn new things in order to be relevant and impactful”.
7. “Keep faith with God and serve Him with all your being.”

Please remember as many of these as you can and turn them into your motivational mantra. In fact, you only need to remember one of these to ensure full utilization of the gifts that God gave you—the training that Covenant provided. In closing, I again want to congratulate the Class of 2013. We are so very proud of you, but we also expect so much from you.

Goodluck as you embark on this new chapter in your lives.

