TOWARDS THE WAY OUT
FOR A NATION UNDER TRIAL

An Address by the Chancellor, Covenant University
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On the occasion of the Nineth Convocation Ceremony for the
Award of First and Higher Degrees of Covenant University

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INTRODUCTION

It is with thanksgiving and deep appreciation to God that I welcome us all to the 9\textsuperscript{th} Convocation Ceremony of Covenant University, dubbed \textbf{the Release of Eagles 2014}. I also invite you with excitement to connect with the spirit and symbol of what the convocation ceremony holds, which is indeed a commencement to higher levels of responsibility and a testimony of the goodness and faithfulness of God in seeing the vision of raising a new generation of Leaders realized. This is indeed a time to mark the validation of Covenant University's total substantiation and credence to the
pursuit of learning and character worthiness, in the actualization of her vision of being a leading World-class University, as we have vowed to see demonstrated, in the quality and overall disposition of the graduates of Covenant University. We have every assurance that they have satisfied all the quality assurance criteria to ignite the change we all desire. We are indeed happy to release to world, an army of reformers, fresh from the stable of our University. On this note, I again welcome everyone to this august occasion of the 9th Convocation Ceremony of Covenant University.

I have continued to explore the relevance of University Education as a platform for addressing the issues of the day and I have come to the realization that Universities do not just exist to teach and graduate students, but rather to provide a platform for rigorous
intellectual discourse that aims at providing solutions to the bugging issues in the society. This is what has informed the topic of my Convocation Address today, captioned: *Towards the Way Out for a Nation under Trial.*

As we are all aware, the state of Nigeria today speaks of restiveness and unrest. It is therefore with a deep sense of responsibility as a stakeholder, a patriot, as well as one of the leaders of the day, that I will, in communicating my thoughts on this issue, be constructively pungent, responsibly factual, patriotically objective, positively futuristic, as well as passionately optimistic (Oyedepo, 2012 & 2014)

At this point, I want to believe that a detailed diagnosis of the current state of our nation is vital. Medical doctors as we all know will always demand the running of series of tests before embarking on any treatment; this is
the process of diagnosis. To disregard the result of diagnosis, is to expose a patient to the risk of death. I believe it is high time we began to x-ray and explore the root cause of the prevailing issues in our nation in order to come up with applicable solutions to the grave situations bedevilling our great nation Nigeria.

It is glaring that in Nigeria today:

- Danger is looming, but there is hope
- The nation is fast drifting towards disintegration, but there is hope
- Nigeria is facing challenges that openly threaten her existence, but there is hope
- Some are bent on religious war for whatever their reasons, but there is hope
- When a people become hopeless, they become helpless
Faith will not produce when hope is dead

To keep hope alive is to stay alive (Oyedepo, 2012)

The story of the biblical prodigal son is apt here and we can therefore draw a corollary and applicable lessons for weaving solutions for the current predicament we are faced with as a nation in mapping out the process of restoration, peace, stability and prosperity.

Firstly, the prodigal son came to himself, told himself the truth about himself, when he came to his wits end. We must come to ourselves as a nation and tell ourselves the truth, no matter how bitter.

Secondly, he outlined the steps of action towards the restoration of his dignity.

Thirdly, he rose up to action, and overnight, his frustration and devastation was turned to restoration and celebration.
This is what this Convocation Address is set to accomplish, to bring Nigerians to see the facts of the situations and engage with the issues in order to outline the way out.

Now, let's look at the problem.

In a recent article, captioned: Boko Haram Led Pogroms, Ethnic Cleansing and Medieval Bestiality in Nigeria's North East, Co-written by Dr. Pogu Bitrus, Rev. Ibrahim Dauwa, and Rev. James Yaga, JP, and published in the Guardian of June 10, 2014, the following issues which should be of grave concern to every responsible Nigerian, were outlined:

Firstly, the writers asserted;

“In 2012, in a widely publicized video recording that is easily accessible on the internet, Abubakar Shekau, the late
erstwhile leader of Boko Haram announced the mission statement of his sect. Among other things, he said 'this war is not political. It is religious. It is between Muslims and unbelievers (arna). It will stop when Islamic religion is the determinant in governance in Nigeria or, in the alternative, when all fighters are annihilated and no one is left to continue the fight. I warn all Muslims at this juncture that any Muslim who assists an unbeliever in this war should consider himself dead', as confirmed by the writers of the article.”

Secondly, the writers stated;

“As communities in the defunct Northern Region we are not unaware of the inspiration of Boko Haram and their
sponsors. It is no news that the average Northern Muslim thinks that Nigeria is his to dominate, and its riches his to dispense. In October 1960, the late Premier of the defunct Northern Region and Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, had declared: 'The new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great-grandfather, Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities of the North as willing tools and the South as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us, and never allow them to have control over their future.' (Parrot Newspaper, 12th Oct. 1960; republished on November 13, 2002, by the Tribune Newspaper, Ibadan.)”

The above statement is quite pregnant and portends a political time bomb should the present generation of the defunct Northern
Region dare to pursue this stance.

**Thirdly the writers further stated that;**

“Before the late Sardauna made this very revealing statement, the Conference of Northern Chiefs, in response to a letter from the UK-based West African Students' Union (WASU) to the Northern emirs asking them to support the constitutional evolution of Nigeria into an independent nation, had declared *'holding this country together is not possible except by means of the religion of the Prophet. If they want political unity let them follow our religion.'* (Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, London: Faber and Faber, 1947, p.51.)”

Again, I see another bomb shell here, which is more of call to a religious war.

Most disturbing, is the reported raid of the **Boko Haram sect** across 26 villages in Borno State which are predominantly Christians; where homes and churches
were razed down and thousands scattered. The data from this article indicated that well over 500 people were killed in twenty of these villages, while the number of deaths in the six others was not determined. Also, over 50,000 were reported displaced and fled to neighboring Cameroun and other parts of the country. It is disheartening to note that Boko Haram sect is reported to have brought down the Nigerian National Flag in the raided communities and hoisted their own flag in its place.

From all the forgoing and without mincing words, the nation is already at war. The leader of the Boko Haram openly claimed that the sect is an Islamic Jihadist group and they have proved this over and again by their heartless atrocities to date. They have declared, and that openly, a total war
against Christianity, Western Education, with a vow to drag Nigeria back to the Stone Age.

Furthermore, certain painful thoughts can be gleaned from all of these; a religious war is looming, in fact, in some parts of the nation, that war in my view has already broken out. To pretend not to see this simply amounts to hypocrisy. We must therefore not politicize this issue. Action is not only needed but timely action.

Taking a cue from the case of Iraq, I want to believe that, if the Iraqi Government had taken timely action, the catastrophe that now plagues that nation, may not have arisen. We must indeed wake up to the truth that we have a deadly battle in our hands as a nation; we must therefore rise up to speedily address this grave situation, before it becomes too late.
THE COST OF INSURGENCY

Let us take a cursory look at the cost of some major wars in Africa, and see how foolhardy it is to go to war.

Sudan
Nature of Conflict: Ethnic and religious
Duration: 1955-1972; and 1983-2005 (almost 50 years of conflict)
Casualties: About 500,000 killed; over 2 million displaced

Sudan/Darfur
Nature of Conflict: Religious and ethnic (Darfur Genocide)
Duration: 2003-Date (9 years of conflict)
Casualties: Over 400,000 killed; 3 million displaced
Somalia
Nature of Conflict: Religious and ethnic
Duration: Ogaden War, 1977-1978; Civil War, 1991-2003; Islamic War, 2003-Date (22 years of conflict)
Casualties: 550,000 killed

Ethiopia
Nature of Conflict: Power struggle
Duration: 1971-1984 (12 years of conflict)
Casualties: 500,000

Rwanda
Nature of Conflict: Ethnic
Duration: April-July 1994 (just within 100 days)
Casualties: Over 800,000 killed

Democratic Republic of Congo
Nature of Conflict: Power tussle among political gladiators, and resource struggle
Duration: 1996-Date (6 years of conflict)
Casualties: 800,000 killed

**Liberia**

Nature of Conflict: Ethnic and political (class, personal; ambitions of warlords)
Duration: 1990-1995; 1999-2001 (7 years of conflict)
Casualties: 220,000

**Sierra Leone**

Nature of Conflict: Political, resource (diamond) struggle, ethnic
Duration: 1991-2000 (9 years of conflict)
Casualties: 200,000

**Uganda**

Nature of Conflict: Power struggle, class and personal ambitions of Political leaders
Duration: 1969-1979; 1989 (11 years of conflict)
Casualties: 300,000; 30,000
Nigeria
Right here in Nigeria, the Civil War, an ethnic-induced conflict of only 30 months claimed over 800,000 lives.
The above gory picture of destruction, disruption and desolation of lives and property, is the reason why we need to think and re-think. All of the statistics above should provoke our commitment to timely engagement in a quest to finding solutions to this looming danger, by finding the way out of our current events before it degenerates to a calamitous situation. May we not experience another war as a nation forever!

THE PLACE OF THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT IN ALL OF THESE
Generally, education in my view is a platform for empowering Man's intellect to think solutions, while University education is all about empowering Man to create solutions to the challenges besetting humanity.
Putting in context what a University should offer and the contributions it must make to society, let us examine a statement made by John F Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States of America, who noted that:

"We live in an age of movement and change, both evolutionary and revolutionary, both good and evil. And in such an age a university has a special obligation to hold fast to the best of the past and move fast with the best of the future."

These thoughts should help us reassess the role that Universities must play today in Nigeria, particularly in the current times, in addressing the issues of the looming danger and the concomitant repercussions, if not nipped in the bud!
In my view, a University is a place where solutions to societal problems are found and value added to humanity. A University is not a place for hermits so that people there live as recluse, but a platform that defines values and inspires research. The real worth of a University is only determined by the problems it solves and the solutions it proffers.

In order to be relevant as Universities, we must continue to engage in research that will help solve the challenges and problems our societies face. Robust thinking that comes with quality education must be the reason behind the stability, security and economic empowerment of the developed nations of today. As long as we remain regimented, we will continue to be relegated. As embedded in our Departure Philosophy in Covenant University, we must continuously advocate new ways of thinking.
The mind of the Nigerian should be transformed into new minds that can conceive a new Nigeria into existence, indeed, minds that can resist the indoctrination of evil. This is why I believe that developed nations are far more politically stable, economically buoyant and far more futuristic in their perspective and engagement, all of which is traceable to their solid educational infrastructures. The fact is, wherever goes education, there goes civilization. When Egypt was leading in education, she was also leading in civilization. For example, Greek historians, artists and Mathematicians went to Egypt for their education between 2900 – 2400 BC. This is why university education has been a vital platform for national development all through human history.
THE WAY FORWARD

It is my expectation that this Convocation Address will serve as a wake-up call to all those who believe in the Nigerian Project, to rise up to give hope in these trying times. We can therefore create the tomorrow we desire by creatively engaging our diverse resources—cultural, intellectual, human, and natural, etc. We can indeed create the tomorrow we desire by creatively engaging our intellectual resources towards its realization. This is where the University Context in Nigeria comes in and indeed Covenant University. Universities in Nigeria, and I dare say, in Africa, must drive relevance by continuously addressing and proffering solutions to the challenges of the day. If a University is to be the bastion and a place for the creation of ideas and ideals, the current saga of Boko Haram and all the associated challenges, including the bewildering disappearance of over two-hundred (200) plus Chibouk Girls are issues that should engage the
University platform in intense discourse, debates and solution finding workshops, etc.

The University System in Nigeria must become responsive to the issues and challenges of the day. It should no longer be business as usual. University education should be beyond certification and must seek application in real life context for improving the lot of humanity and driving causes for the good of all.

It is high time that government began to partner with universities in searching out answers to bugging issues such as we have on our hands today. Likewise, universities should engage in relevant topical research, exploring time tested truths with demonstrable futuristic engagements as they champion the expansion of the frontiers of knowledge. This will be a step in the right direction in tackling the current
challenges as this will benefit the society immensely. New programmes can be evolved in areas such as, Security Science, Management of displaced persons etc. These along with similar programmes can come up as new subjects of study and research in our Universities.

For example, only last month, 26\textsuperscript{th} -28\textsuperscript{th} of May, 2014 to be precise, Covenant University's African Centre for Leadership Development (ALDC), (a Centre committed to nurturing transformational leaders for Nigeria and Africa, hosted a Conflict Management and Resolution workshop aimed at seeking indigenous solutions for contemporary socio-political, economic and cultural issues affecting Nigeria and Africa at large. Many of such initiatives should become the order of the day in our universities.
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

It is pertinent at this point in the course of this lecture to critically examine the options at our disposal that can be employed in putting a halt to this impending holocaust.

I have always believed in finding indigenous solutions to indigenous problems. You will agree with me that in the animal kingdom, all animals find local solutions to their local problems. They do not travel neither do they import goods and services, yet they succeeded in providing solution to all their problems. It is also common knowledge that in the plant kingdom trees do not move, yet from the same position they are able to access all they need. But man is the most intelligent creature of all of God's creation, yet because he will not take responsibility, he has not succeeded to find solution to his own local problems. Someone once said, you are not a failure until you start looking for who to blame for it. There
is no amount of foreign interest or support that will be a substitute for our indigenous engagement in finding solutions to the issues of our day.

I have always believed that no solution can be more enduring than home-grown solutions.

I am therefore putting forward the following thoughts which should inspire both the citizens and those in government to engage in the process of finding lasting solution to these unfortunate issues.

It is therefore important to note the following:
1. Definitely not talking about the issues at stake is not the solution
2. Ignoring the facts before us will not make it falsehood
3. Wishing the challenges away is not the solution as wishes never change situations. For instance, it will be sheer madness to wish that Boko Haram does not exist. The facts and figures are evident.
4. Poverty can not be adduced for the reason for the Boko Haram Insurgency. As recently reported in international media, Two Syrian brothers born of same parents who are citizens of Belgium joined the jihadist fighters in Syria. They were young men who had good jobs but chose to join the jihadist.

5. It is not class discrimination either, otherwise other villages being raided should not have come to play; because their inhabitants are poor people, living on subsistence farming.

6. It is also not about oppression of the high and mighty, otherwise, the issues of the abducted Chibok Girls should not have been part of the fight. The issues here are raised for us to search deeper. It is against this background that I am calling on our Universities to look into the issues staring us right in our face and with every sense of urgency, proffer home-grown solutions.
In addition, it is my expectation that the Nigerian Government at all levels, National University's Commission, the Leadership of Universities at various levels, stakeholders in education and other sectors of development will respond to this clarion call.

Pretense has always been a failed ideology and it must have brought us to where we are today. As I once noted, you cannot not fail with facts. We must come to understand where we are and the issues at stake and how to deal with them. From the information available in the media—print, electronic and social, Nigeria is fast becoming a breeding ground for a potential, religious and ethnic war. We either stop it now or it stops us later. The destiny of our nation Nigeria is hanging in the balance. This means therefore that all men and women of substance and courage should rise up and speak up. Before our very eyes, Abuja has been hit several times. The seat of Government in the nation has constantly been threatened by
insurgencies more frequently in recent times. Only two days ago, 25th of June, 2014, Banex Plaza, a commercial centre in Wuse, Abuja was hit. In addition, many villages in the North-East of Nigeria have been turned to ghost towns overnight as their inhabitants had to flee for safety! This is why all Universities across the Nation should create platforms for intense discourse and publish widely for Nigerians to know what our findings are.

Enough of these pretenses, we are face to face with a looming holocaust. This is a call to take up intellectual arms, Nigerian Universities must arise and speak up, and individuals in the nation must rise up to this call! It is time for all of us to start seeking the way forward.
CONCLUSION

Having examined and presented the issues of the day in our nation, we must not despair but with every sense of hope and faith in God, look forward to a future we desire with great optimism as there is no irreversible situation with God. We must therefore keep hope alive, for a better, peaceful, stable and prosperous tomorrow for our Nation Nigeria.

May I at this point congratulate the Parents of our dear Graduands, hearty congratulations! I salute your tenacity and commitment and celebrate your role in this process. May you live to enjoy the fruit of your labour. Amen.

Finally to the Graduating class, the Elite Set, our soon to be released Eagles, we are releasing you as Eagles. If there ever was a time, that your world needed you, that time is now. Everybody will admit that never has the world faced the kinds of challenges it faces today, but challenges are stepping stones to championship, and only
the challenged end up a champion. Go forth therefore and take the Covenant University vision to the uttermost parts of the world at large and be the world changers that you have been raised to be as you see all the challenges on your path as opportunities; as you continue to build on the foundations of **Character, Courage and Capacity** and you can be sure you cannot fail. Remember that Life is a race not a sprint but a marathon and will always require patience and endurance to make the most adventure of life!

Let me leave you with these rules which are sure to make prize winners of you in the race of life:

1: **Recognize that Life is a race and only runners ever win the prize**
2. **Life is work and the worth of every life is a function of the quality of its work**
3: **Life is a seed time and harvest adventure; and whatever a man sows that he shall reap. Therefore, every good thing a man does the same he shall receive from the God.**
4: Life is warfare; and it is largely spiritual warfare;

5. Jesus is life, and taking Him along in your journey makes the journey great.

Therefore, we release you today as Covenant Eagles, the Elite Eagles, spread your wings and soar, your world is waiting for you. I love you with passion and I cannot not wait to see you manifest as the Eagles you have been raised to be! Be blessed, every one of you in Jesus Name. Amen

May I on this note ask us all to appreciate the faithfulness of God in bringing us to this point in time in the history of our University, culminating in this 9th Convocation Ceremony. I deeply appreciate everyone who is here today to celebrate the release of the 9th batch of Eagles, thank you so much and God bless you.

God bless Class of 2014, the Elite Eagles,
God Bless Covenant University,
God bless Nigeria, and
God bless Africa!!!

Thank you all for listening.

David Oyedepo, FNAE
Reference:

1. **Oyedepo D. O (2012).** Towards The Rescue Of A Nation On The Brink Of Collapse: Necessity For A New Generation Of Thinkers. Text of Chancellor's address at the 7th convocation ceremony of Covenant University, Canaanland, Ota.