

CONVOCATION ADDRESS BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE
STATE OF OSUN, OGBENI RAUF AREGBESOLA, AS HOST
AND VISITOR, AT THE THIRD UNIOSUN CONVOCATION
CEREMONY, HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY'S MAIN
AUDITORIUM, ON SATURDAY MARCH 29, 2014

Protocols,

RESTORING LOST GLORY TO OUR IVORY TOWERS

Ladies and gentlemen, as the Host and Visitor to the Osun State University, which has made today's events possible, I welcome you most warmly to the State of the Virtuous. The events of today are parts of the series of activities lined up for the week-long ceremonies to mark the University's Third Convocation.

I am sure many of us in this audience are well familiar with the notion of university convocation and what it all entails. University convocation, which usually brings a large number of people together, has different usages in different lands and climes.

These include the election of members of a university's governing body; the election or appointment of a university's Chancellor; the celebration of special events or anniversaries; or the marking of the start of a new academic calendar to induct new students into the system.

However, in our own part of the world, convocation applies to the graduation ceremony that normally marks the end of an academic year during which degrees are awarded by the university to deserving students. That is, students who have proved themselves worthy both in learning and in character.

Hence, this ceremony is an occasion for joy and merry-making to celebrate an important event in the life of the students, their parents or guardians, as well as the university as an institution.

In addition, convocation ceremony provides a platform for mingling between members of the university community and their counterparts from outside that enclave. In other words, convocation ceremony offers one of those formal occasions for meeting between the 'Town' and the 'Gown'.

But notwithstanding the glitz and glamour for which such occasions have become known, the truth is that their true significance is about something much more serious and important in the organisation and functioning of modern society. The higher education, of which the university is an embodiment, is part of the organisational constitution of human society in the modern era. And it is not for the fun of it!

It underlines the need and search for human progress and the proper utilisation of the means to realise it. Of course, one of the fundamental reasons for establishing human society is the realisation that order is an indispensable necessity for the survival of the species. Similarly, for progress to occur in society, cooperation between individuals is essential.

As the paramount law in nature, it is only within the context of ordered existence that human beings can thrive and realise the essence of their being. And in order to achieve those things that bring progress, collaboration and collective effort become necessary.

For all these to be achieved, knowledge and organisation are required. These are the elemental bases for the founding of human society. Thus, the university does not only embody the pursuit of knowledge, it also typifies one of the highest achievements in human organisation.

As human beings, we are all the same in our essential humanity; but as individuals we are gifted with different talents. The interesting thing is that, for us to make progress together, we need all these talents to be pooled together in an organised fashion.

This is where the university becomes a very crucial institution in modern society. Knowledge is indispensable to human progress. The university is a higher institution of learning where research activities aimed at producing and extending the frontiers of knowledge take place. However, whether it is static or continuously improved, knowledge of itself is useless without being made available to humans who would apply it. As John Henry Newman rightly observes in his book, *The Idea of a*

University: 'If its object were scientific and philosophical discovery, I do not see why a University should have students'.

In effect, one meaningful purpose for which universities engage in the knowledge production activity is to make it available to people who would apply it to societal improvement and development.

Consequently, the university is also a place for the impartation of knowledge. It is therefore not an accident that the university is organised into various disciplines or areas of specialised knowledge acquisition and production to which different students apply in order to further develop and hone their different talents and gifts. This affirms the sense in Anton Chekhov's assertion that: 'The University brings out all abilities, including incapability'.

After these advanced trainings the students are thrust into the larger society where their sharpened talents are needed to provide solutions to extant challenges and to bring improvements and advancements to bear on the ways things are done. This is how progress is engendered in society.

Therefore, as an institution of higher education, the university occupies a special place in the continuous stream of organised activities in society that culminate in the general progress of its members. As a result, institutions of higher learning such as a university require well-structured relationships with the other sectors of society where their products go to make concrete and consequential impacts on human existence.

In our country, it is unfortunately the case that such relationships between the academia and the larger society have almost completely broken down. This is in large part due to the precipitous decline that has befallen education at all levels in the country; and tragically more so at the higher level of learning. A worrisome symptom of this is the incident of the so-called 'unemployable graduates'; an anomaly that signifies a failure of the organised symbiotic relationship that should exist between the universities and the other key sectors of the larger society.

A university is strategically placed in the entire social organisation to identify areas of talent deficiencies in other

sectors; bring people in, develop their innate talents and gifts; and then send them back to the society where those talents are required for the overall betterment of society.

In consequence, the economic and industrial sector should for instance be interested and well-involved in the knowledge and skill impartation activities of universities. It is, of course, needless to restate that government has even far greater reasons for involvement in what goes on in the universities, if only for the fact that our higher citadel of learning ought to be the centres for recruiting those who would preside over the affairs of society.

The point of emphasis here is that there should be a systemic linkage between the knowledge production centres and the knowledge-using sectors of society. It is the only way to smooth out the path to progress in society.

Unfortunately, gone are those days in the country when employers of labour invaded university campuses to scout and compete for talents, just as the student made preparations for their convocation. What largely obtains today is that employers

in the country prefer to hire graduates from foreign universities while they reject their counterparts from local institutions as 'unemployable'.

This is a situation we cannot afford to live with as a society. This is especially so when we consider the fact that university plays other roles in society that go well beyond that of knowledge production and impartation; it is also a place for cultural reproduction without which a society loses its identity, its roots, its idea of its being and its capacity for future direction. It is not without reason that the motto of this University is 'Living spring of Knowledge and Culture'.

In addition and perhaps even much more importantly is the fact that education at this higher level is one of the greatest tools invented by humankind for the possibility of the realisation of human perfection.

Given human nature, it requires continuous and progressive refinement to bring its positive dimensions out into manifestation. This requires the disciplined cultivation of the

intellect which is arguably the greatest gift with which the Almighty God has equipped human beings.

In his *Men of Letters in the 18th Century*, Joseph Addison puts this fact in proper perspective. According to him:

I consider an human soul without education like marble in the quarry, which shows none of its inherent beauties, till the skill of the polisher fetches out the colours, makes the surface shine, and discovers every ornamental cloud, spot and vein that runs through the body of it. Education, after the same manner, when it works upon a noble mind, draws out to view every latent virtue and perfection, which without such helps are never able to make their appearance.

Therefore, besides its practical usefulness, university education is a deliberate enterprise in the cultivation of the human mind, as well as the shaping of the human character. Thus, university education is not merely a means to an end, as it is regarded in popular view; it is an end in itself.

As John Henry Newman again informs us:

I say that a cultivated intellect, because it is a good in itself, brings with it a power and a grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number. There is a duty we owe to human society as such, to the state to which we belong, to the sphere in which we move, to the individuals towards whom we are variously related, and whom we successively encounter in life; and that philosophical or liberal education, as I have called it, which is the proper function of a University, if it refuses the foremost place to professional interests, does but postpone them to the formation of the citizen, and, while it subserves the larger interests of philanthropy, prepares also for the successful prosecution of those merely personal objects, which at first sight it seems to disparage.

Indeed, in the view and pursuit of university education as an end in itself, all other purposes of education as a means to an end are easily fulfilled. This is why a university graduate is

deemed to have been certified worthy in both learning and in character. It is such learned and refined individuals that make a civilised society possible.

This coheres with our philosophy of education, which is the development of the new man spiritually, intellectually and morally. This is a man who sees himself and all his acquisitions for the development of society and fellow humans.

This is very important in light of very disturbing news from the universities these days, how the institution has become dysfunctional – a breeding ground for criminals and people of low culture, and an environment of moral depravity and turpitude, where rather than impart virtue to society, it has become a source of corruption of society. In the past, we used to hear of Prof Awojobi's car invention or Prof Mekanjuola's yam pounding machine, but now, we hear of murderous gangsters, examination racketeering, plagiarism, sexual harassment and other unsavoury activities. The university must reinvent itself.

Against this background, it is incumbent on us all to reverse the decline in the quality of the education that our universities impart, if we truly desire progress as a society. And this requires the concerted efforts of all us – the university community, government, employers of labour and other stakeholders. This is why a forum like this is important for us all to meet minds, even as we celebrate, in order to restore lost glory to our ivory towers.

Let me congratulate the university – the staff, the students and especially the graduating students and their parents whose joy knows no bound as their wards proudly achieve a milestone which today's event represents. It is my sincere prayer that they will record resounding success as they face their hopeful future. I thank you all for your kind attention.

Osun a dara!