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The Power of Education

Aare Afe Babalola^{*1}

1. INTRODUCTION

It gives me great pleasure to be in this Victoria Parks & Gardens in Igbajo, Osun State today to double as the Keynote Speaker and Special Guest of Honour at this momentous occasion of celebration of excellence and rare attainment by one of the shining stars of Igbajo, Prof. Damilola Sunday Olawuyi, SAN, our Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic, Research, Innovation and Strategic Partnerships, ARISP, who joined the Elite Club of Senior Advocates of Nigeria (SANs), on Monday, December 14, 2020.

Before going into my presentation, I especially congratulate the Owa of Igbajoland, Oba Olufemi Adeniyi Fashade, Akeran IV, and all the eminent sons and daughters of Igbajoland for this attainment by our son, Prof. Damilola Sunday, Olawuyi, SAN. I am proud of you all. Special mention must be made of my childhood friend, Chief Olajide Oyewole, a respected member of the Nigerian Bar, a loving, generous, kind person and lover of quality education who I have known for over 60 years now. Chief Oyewole's brilliance as a Solicitor has never been in doubt. It was therefore not a surprise that the Nigerian Law School recognized his brilliance in Solicitorship and as far back as the 1960's he was invited by the Nigerian Law School to teach that aspect of Law that relates to Solicitor's work. My friend, I salute you. Of course, I cannot forget the Asiwaju of Igbajo, our own Chief Solomon Adegboyega Awomolo, SAN and his amiable wife, Chief (Mrs.) Funmilayo Awomolo, SAN, great Alumni of our Chambers, Emmanuel Chambers. I am always thrilled about this family. Thrilled because Mrs. Awomolo's First

¹ Text of a keynote lecture delivered on 19 December 2020 by Aare Afe Babalola, OFR, CON, SAN, the Founder and Chancellor of Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, as the Keynote Speaker and Special Guest of Honour at the reception held in honour of Prof. Damilola Sunday Olawuyi on his conferment with the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), holden at Igbajo, State of Osun, Nigeria.

Degree was in Chemistry, but I encouraged her to veer into Law. I am happy she listened to me. Today, she is a proud member of the Nigerian Inner Bar as a Senior Advocate of Nigeria. I stand to be corrected, I am not aware of any other family in Nigeria today where both husband and wife are Senior Advocates of Nigeria. I congratulate and celebrate the Awomolos.

1.1 About Igbajo

Any time I hear the name Igbajo, it sends some nostalgic messages to my psyche. You may want to ask why? The answer is very simple: this is the town where the Allied Forces of the Yorubas united to fight the Army of the Emperor, Alaafin, and won. The same Igbajo was the place where the white men were able to mediate between the rampaging Alaafin Army and the rest of the Yorubas to bring peace to Yorubaland. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why many Igbajo people are accommodating and progressive with a burning spirit of nationalism.

1.2 A little bit about brilliance

Unknown to many of you here today, my formal education ended at Elementary School. I must emphasize here that that was not because I did want to go further, but the resources to send me to a Secondary School were just not there. But because of the quality education which I had at Elementary School, I was able to study privately to pass my GCE O' Level, GCE A' Level, B.Sc. Economics of London University and LL. B of the same London University by private studies. The point I want to make here is that right from my Elementary School days, my teachers, particularly those who taught me in Standard IV to VI, had special preference for those who were bright in class, like the celebrator of today, my brand-new Brother of the Silk, Prof. Damilola Sunday Olawuyi, SAN. In those days, apart from the teachers praising their bright students, it was common for the teachers to shower gifts on the gifted students. And now this one: the bright ones, like Prof. Olawuyi, SAN, were given the latitude to flog the not-so-brilliant ones.

1.3 My Personal Experience

Those who have worked closely with me in our Chambers and in our University will not equivocate in affirming and confirming that I love bright, hardworking and industrious people, like Prof. Olawuyi. My inclination towards bright and brilliant people has influenced the way I have been running my Chambers over time. I have made it abundantly clear that the senior lawyers owe it a duty to take good care of their juniors. That is one of the ways to ensure quality practice.

For example, in our own Chambers, because of the way we run our affairs, none of our lawyers want to leave and that may account for how we have been able to produce 24 Senior Advocates of Nigeria in our Chambers today. That may also account for how we have been able to produce several Judges, Justices, State and Federal Attorneys-General. I can recall very vividly that I produced the youngest Senior Advocate of Nigeria so far in Nigeria and that was when Lateef Fagbemi, SAN of Emmanuel Chambers was elevated to the Inner Bar at the age of 33. We have again made history by producing the youngest Academic Senior Advocate at the age of 37.

1.4 About Prof. Damilola Sunday Olawuyi, SAN

And now to the reason why we are here today, Prof. Olawuyi. When I met the young man, I saw in him many sterling qualities and the gift of God in him. He is ever so cool, calm, respectful and of course, very industrious. Like those who have the same qualities which he continues to exhibit, I love him very sincerely and encouraged him. I thank him for acknowledging this in the letter of appreciation he wrote to me when he was announced as a Member of the Inner Bar.

Part of the letter reads as follows:

My Lord Sir, in 2016, I was in your living room, at the dining table, when you first encouraged me to apply for the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria. I looked back as I was not totally sure you were talking to me. I was only 33 years old at the time and had just been promoted to the rank of Full Professor at ABUAD, becoming the youngest law professor in Nigeria. I obediently applied and was ecstatic and surprised to have

even been shortlisted by the Legal Practitioners Privileges Committee.

What happened next was more astonishing. I was appointed in 2019 as a Deputy Vice Chancellor at the age of 36, and today I have been elevated to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria at 37, becoming the youngest academic ever so appointed, and the very first from any Nigerian private university. What an astonishing four years! Without your inspiration and support, none of these would have been possible.

I wish I could fully express the depth of my gratitude to you Sir and to Yeye Aare. Since 2012 when I joined ABUAD, you have shown absolute faith and confidence in me which has propelled me to unimaginable heights. Nigeria would be a better place if we had more selfless mentors and transformational leaders like you.

I count myself absolutely lucky to have had the chance of knowing you and learning from you. I will never forget your fatherly love and support for me. I pray that God will continue to bless you with good health, peace, joy and more global accomplishments. I also sincerely pray that this will be the beginning of many more SAN appointments at ABUAD. Amen. With best regards Sir.

2. THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF EDUCATION

Everywhere around the world, education is viewed as an expensive enterprise designed to develop and raise future leaders and indeed, a new generation of leaders that will change the society for the better. It is also a necessity because it is seen and perceived as the panacea to lack, ignorance, diseases and all forms of extremism. It also enlightens and invigorates the souls of men because it is the platform that makes them to become whatever they aspire to become in life. The importance of education is further illustrated by the saying that “if you want to destroy a people, you do not need

a tank, bayonet or bomb: all you need is to destroy their education and that will be the end of such a people”.

I make bold to say that but for education, many of you seated here today would not have known me because my ambition as a young boy, working with my father on the farm, was to continue working with him and eventually inherit part of his farm implements and part of his large farm at *Alayegbe*. But God had something different in stock for me. I am therefore in a position to describe myself as “a personification of what education can do in the life of a man”.

I grew up on the farm, slept on Banana leaves. I did not want to go to school because of the strict regimes of cleanliness, punctuality and corporal punishment enforced in schools in those days. Besides, there was so much food, fun, security and satisfaction on the farm. Nobody would scold you for walking around in your birthday suits (naked) or beat you for not having your bath, but my father believed that I should go to school against my will. I will continually be grateful to him for this. But for the quality education I had up to Standard Six, many of you won't know who Afe is. But today, because of the power of education, when I talk, people want to listen. Indeed, I am a symbol of the power of education. So too is Prof. Olawuyi, a man who is in hot demand all over the world.

2.1 Education and Healthcare

When I was young, it was like we were living in the maedieval age living unclean life as a result of which there was high maternal and child mortality rate due the prevalence of such diseases as malaria (1880), small pox (1492), flu (1889), influenza (1933), measles (1875), yellow fever (1793), polio (1916), cholera (1817) and typhoid (1880). Of course, because nature does not harbour a vacuum, people were quick to attribute the death of many babies to evil spirits, witchcrafts and “*Ogbanje*”. But with the power of education, many of the above-named diseases have been eradicated while deaths of babies at birth is a rare thing now.

2.2 Education and Agriculture

When I was young, our parents were involved in subsistence farming, using hoes and cutlasses. Every family was producing its own food without any means of preserving the surplus. Today however, things have changed for the better. Many people have taken to modern ways of farming. I am a good example of those who are farming the modern way and that is why I am one of the biggest farmers in the world today. Unlike the practice in those days where food items used to rot and waste away, the power of education has led to the invention of various equipment that can be used for the preservation of fresh mangoes, oranges, pepper, tomatoes and various vegetables among others.

2.3 Education and Transportation

When I was growing up, there was a town called Ikole-Ekiti, some 30 miles away from Ado-Ekiti. My father would send us on errands to Ikole-Ekiti and we would go and come back same day, covering a distance of 60 miles trekking! At some point, my father travelled to Ejirin in Epe Division of Lagos State, a journey of four days. But what do we have today? Because of the power of education, one can get to Ikole-Ekiti from Ado-Ekiti within one hour while one can go to Ejirin and come back same day depending on the nature of the business one has gone there for.

In those days, it was inconceivable that a man could go to Cairo because of the Sahara Desert lying between Egypt and Nigeria. However today, through the power of education and the invention of automobiles and aircrafts, people can travel around the world in their exotic cars and conveniently fly to any part of the world either in commercial Airlines or in their private jets for those who can afford such superlative luxury.

2.4 Education and Communication

When working on the farm in those days, the mode of communication with other farmers in the vicinity was to cup our hands and put them on our mouths and shouted “*huu, huu, huu*” with the other party responding in the same manner by shouting “*huu, huu, huu*” too. Today, due to power of

education and particularly the advent of GSM, a farmer can call his wife from another town to tell her the type of food he would like to eat on arrival. The same way a Car owner can call his Mechanic to complain about the mal-functionality of his car.

2.5 Relationship with Others

When I was young, we saw the few white men around as the next things to God. We named the best fruits on our farms after them and so we had “*Ope Oyinbo*” (Pineapple) and “*Osan Oyinbo*” (Sweet Oranges). We even went to the ridiculous extent of acknowledging their superiority in the names we gave our children, thus we had “*Omotoyinbo*” and “*Oguntoyinbo*.” But with the power of education, we now know that the white man is not superior to us. We now intermarry. We beat them in examinations while many of our people are working and occupying leading and important positions in various companies in America, Europe and Asia.

3. EDUCATION PROPERLY SO CALLED

In this my presentation, I have been talking about quality and functional education properly so called and not poor education. Indeed, I mean the type of quality and functional education I had in my Primary School which I am replicating in our University, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, ABUAD.

The common saying is that ignorance is a disease. I agree. Indeed, poor education is worse than illiteracy. Poor education is even more dangerous than ignorance. Due to poor education, Nigeria is today producing graduates whose education makes them more dangerous than uneducated people. Today, Nigeria produces graduates who cannot write simple and correct sentences, graduates who do not understand the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs, graduates who do not know the place and import of prepositions in grammar, graduates who do not know the use of adjectives and verbs, graduates who do not know the place of agreement of Nouns and number and graduates who do not know the import of adjectival and adverbial clauses.

There are graduates who do not know the difference between Tropics of Cancer and Tropics of Capricorn. There are those who do not know Magellan line, that is the line that divides the earth into two. There are many graduates who do not know the distance between the earth and where the rain starts to fall. There are those who do not know why we have day and night or the difference between Neap or High Tide or the fact that what is called heaven consists of billions of stars and different planets.

In short, quality education enables a person to know something about everything. Such a person is invariably humble like Prof. Olawuyi.

4. CONCLUSION

In rounding off Ladies and Gentlemen, I join all of us here today to celebrate Prof. Olawuyi, a young, humble, erudite and energetic scholar of international standard who has taught Law in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East.

Here is a man who has quality education like what we are providing in ABUAD, as a result of which the University has been acknowledged by the National Universities Commission (NUC) the Regulatory Body for University Education in Nigeria, as “a model, reference point and Benchmark” as well as “the pride of University system in Nigeria,” and endorsed by UNESCO as “a world class institution of higher education.” The University has also been certified by the Association of Vice Chancellors of Nigerian Universities, AVCNU, as “the most successful private university in Nigeria.”

Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, it goes without saying that:

You will be better and your family will be better if you have quality education;

Your town will be better if you have quality education;

Your nation will be better if you have quality education; and finally

The world will be better if we all have quality education.

I thank you for listening and God bless you.