

AN ADDRESS PRESENTED BY THE CHAIRMAN, CENTRAL WORKING COMMITTEE, MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION ELDER JOSEPH O. ASANGA ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2019 BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HOLDING ON OCTOBER 17 - 20, 2019.

Dearly beloved Brethren, I bring you greetings of love and peace in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is with immense pleasure and absolute humility that I extend to you all a very warm welcome on behalf of the Men's Christian Association of The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. It is not lost on me, the very great and rare privilege to steer the affairs of Men's Christian Association at the National and indeed International level for as we may all know our Association and indeed this Conference covers the Republics of Benin, Togo and still counting. I commend the Niger Delta Synod and the Presbyteries in Port Harcourt who accepted to host this unique biennial international conference of the Men's Christian Association.

This biennial conference offers a very unique medium for retreat for all men. To refresh, socialize, network and exchange ideas with the aim of rebuilding ourselves and the Church through the impartation of the Holy Spirit. The Conference also serves for us to undertake a critical review of ourselves, vis-à-vis our roles as fathers and men in Church. These personal and corporate reviews should engender some modifications in our lifestyles as we pursue our eternal mandates. I pray that these objectives remain our focus as we shall each be accountable for all our actions and inactions someday to a just Judge. (Romans 14:12).

There is no gainsaying or re-emphasizing the fact that Men are the pillars of the Church. The vitality and vivacity of the Men is directly proportional to the state of the Church be it ecclesiastical or temporal. It is in this wise that singularly and collectively, our motives, actions and inactions; in secrets and in the open should be constantly judged against the health of the Church and the furtherance of God's kingdom.

Carrying the burden of furthering the Kingdom of God is by no means painless. It has never been and would not be! This is why we cannot cease to be sober reflecting on the themes of the Conference: ***Strong and Courageous Men at the Gate (Esther 4:2)***; of the Men's Christian Association for the year: ***Men, Be Strong and Courageous (Joshua 1:9)*** and of the Church for the year, ***Be Strong and Courageous (Joshua 1:9)***

These themes are admonishing and could never have been timelier given our prevailing climate. In the course of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, they faced serious challenges, complained and wished to return to Egypt **to maintain the status quo**. They wandered for 40 years en-route the Promised Land. When Moses passed on, God commanded Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all these people, to the land which I am giving to them – the children of Israel" - Joshua 1:2. Joshua 1:3-5 gave a graphic picture of what they were about to possess but Joshua 1:6-9 clearly point out that there are challenges to be surmounted hence, the serious and repeated warnings and admonitions to be ***strong and courageous*** - Joshua 1:9 using the weapon of meditating on the book of the law (Bible) day and night and being careful to do everything written in it - Joshua 1:8.

This, in my mind, is akin to the many promises and blessings that await us if only we are strong and courageous enough to outwit the devil. The myriad of challenges facing the Men and indeed all Christians today are enormous and would appear to have been summarized and foretold by Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 – ***This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good. Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.***

The conflagrations of these vices are here with us and we are all feeling the consequences or repercussions. No one is immune to these vices. Nonetheless, it is on the basis of these challenges that men are urged ***to be strong and of a good courage*** - Joshua 1:6-9. We need to bring to mind Characters in the Bible such as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who faced life threatening challenge but could tell King Nebuchadnezzar that ***our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace*** - Daniel 3:16-18. **The strong and courageous are the ones who change the status quo!**

As Bible Students, we can call to remembrance the story of Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 13-14), in the spying of Canaan, the Promised Land. **The boldness and courageous nature and attitude of Caleb and Joshua changed the status quo.** Need we talk about David's encounter with Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Goliath challenged the Israelites so much so that everyone went into abject hiding. **However, the boldness and courage of David changed the status quo.**

The book of Esther is replete with interplay of power, romance and intrigue. Esther was a captive Jewish orphan reared and mentored by an older cousin, Mordecai. She became a queen in Susa, one of the capital cities in Persian Empire. Queen Esther's boldness and courageous act saved a whole nation of Jews from being annihilated. It took utter boldness and courage for Esther to act and state: ".....And then though it is against the law; I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." (Esther 4:16). **That courage changed the status quo and saved the Jews.**

In contemporary times, the challenges and subsequent glories of Mary Mitchell Slessor, one of our Church Heroes cannot be over-emphasized. **She was strong and courageous and did change the status quo.** She is credited with abolishing the killing of twins and their mothers in South Eastern Nigeria.

The story of William Tyndale, the man who translated the Bible into English and was burnt alive for his efforts at 42 years fascinates me. William Tyndale had a powerful desire to make the Bible available even to the common people in England, in order to correct the Biblical ignorance at the time. Because translating the Bible into English was illegal, Tyndale sought permission to make an English translation of the Bible, but would not get the approval. However, Tyndale would not let the disapproval of men stop him from carrying out what seemed so obviously God's will.

With boldness and courage he decided to complete the translation, have it printed and smuggled it into England. However, news of Tyndale's activity came to the open. While he went into hiding, efforts were made without success to exterminate the bible. He was arrested, jailed and brought to trial for heresy. He was condemned and was executed [burned alive at the stake] publicly.

Today it's hard to imagine the world without an English Bible. But without the courage and genius of men like Tyndale, **who challenged the status quo before them and died for doing so**, it might never have been possible.

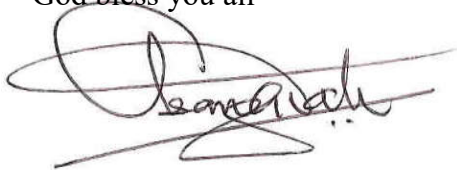
Brethren, in order to be strong and courageous; **in order to be able to change the status quo**, it is pertinent that we continuously soak ourselves with the word of God so that when we are squeezed, out will come the benefits of the word of God; for it is only what we take in that will come out when we are pressured. We must remain faithful and resilient in the face of these seemingly, innumerable and insurmountable challenges. Our good God is unfathomable and bigger than these challenges. He shall not be tired to satisfy all our needs even much more than we expect. Only we need to seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all other things shall be added unto us - Matt. 6:33.

Global events signify that these challenges may not abate any significantly. Nonetheless, the virtuous shall be secured from the anguish by God's grace. It is my fervent prayer that God in His infinite mercies shall continue to keep and proper each and every one of us to fulfill His mandate as men.

Serving God and making a difference demands **being strong and courageous to change the status quo**. It demands being opened to advice and willingness to act. It demands being concerned for others than for our own security. It often demands risking our personal security. God has a purpose for the situation in which He places us. Courage, while often very vital, does not replace careful planning. I pray that as we interact in this conference, we shall be revived and imbued with renewed courage and ability to plan carefully to change the status of our MCA and the Church to the glory of God.

Once again, on behalf of the Central Working Committee, Men's Christian Association, I wish all of us a very wonderful biennial international conference and a very pleasant and cozy stay in the city of Port Harcourt in Jesus Name. Amen

God bless you all

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph O. Asanga', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Elder Joseph O. Asanga
Chairman, MCA-CWC