

THE FUTURE OF THE NIGERIAN LAWYER:

POWER, TECHNOLOGY, AND
THE REINVENTION OF THE PROFESSION



By

Professor Olanrewaju .A. Fagbohun, Ph.D. SAN

*Former Vice Chancellor, Lagos State University
Partner, Xentia LP & Recipient, National Productivity Order of Merit Award*

Lecture delivered at the Commissioning of the Tayo Oyetibo Bar Centre, NBA Ondo Branch
donated by Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN, Chief Counsel, Tayo Oyetibo LP.

22nd May, 2026

Commissioning of

Tayo Oyetibo Bar Centre,

NBA Ondo Branch

Donated By

Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN
Chief Counsel, Tayo Oyetibo LP

©Xentia LP and Oyetibo LP

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise or stored in any retrieval system of any nature, without the written permission of the copyright holders.

Published 2026

Xentia LP

5B, Adekunle Lawal Road

Off Mobolaji Johnson Avenue

Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria.

ISBN:

978-978-68-3502-0

Printed by

Swift Sense Branding Ltd.

28/30 Odunlami Street, Shomolu, Lagos

Table of Contents

1.	<i>Preamble: The Lawyer at a Crossroads</i>	4
2.	<i>Lawyers and Nation Building: Historical Foundations</i>	5
3.	<i>Law, Power, and the Crisis of Institutional Trust</i>	8
4.	<i>Technology and the Transformation of Legal Practice</i>	9
5.	<i>Globalization and the Borderless Legal Profession</i>	11
6.	<i>Changing Economics of Legal Services</i>	12
7.	<i>Reinventing Legal Education</i>	13
8.	<i>Ethical Leadership and Professional Responsibility</i>	13
9.	<i>The Profile of the Future Nigerian Lawyer</i>	14
10.	<i>Connecting Vision to Institution: The Bar Centre as a Hub for Reinvention</i>	17
11.	<i>A Critical Sundry Issue</i>	18
12.	<i>Conclusion: Reinventing the Profession</i>	18

1. Preamble: The Lawyer at a Crossroads

I consider it a great honour to stand before distinguished members of the Bench and the Bar, respected colleagues, and esteemed guests at this commissioning of the Tayo Oyetibo Bar Centre, NBA Ondo Branch.

Let me note straightaway that, aside from being an invaluable investment in the infrastructure of the legal profession, today's commissioning of this Bar Centre, generously donated by Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN, marks a significant milestone in advancing the profession in the way it provides a crucial hub for professional development and justice administration. I will say more about this in the course of my lecture.

The legal profession has historically occupied a position of immense influence in society. Across civilizations and centuries, lawyers have served not merely as interpreters of law, but as custodians of justice, architects of institutions, and guardians of democratic order. Yet today, the profession stands at a moment of profound transformation.

Across the world, and increasingly within Nigeria, the traditional role of the lawyer is being reshaped by three powerful forces: the dynamics of political power and institutional accountability; the rapid rise of digital technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, and the growing globalization of economic and legal systems.

These forces are not abstract developments confined to academic discourse; they are already redefining how legal

services are delivered, how justice is administered, and how society relates to law itself.

For the Nigerian legal profession, this moment presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in confronting structural shifts that threaten long-standing professional assumptions. While the opportunity lies in reinvention - reimagining the role of the Nigerian lawyer in a rapidly evolving world.

The central argument of this lecture is that the future Nigerian lawyer must embody three essential identities. First, a guardian of democratic accountability and institutional integrity. Second, a technologically empowered professional, capable of navigating the rapidly expanding landscape of digital tools and artificial intelligence. Third, as a globally aware practitioner, able to operate within increasingly interconnected legal and economic systems.

Only through this reinvention can the Nigerian legal profession sustain its relevance and continue its historic role as a pillar of justice and national development.

2. Lawyers and Nation Building: Historical Foundations

Before proceeding further into this discourse, I consider it necessary at this juncture to pay tribute to Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN, and to also thank his most amiable wife, Mrs. Abiola Tayo-Oyetibo; my learned brother Silk, Mofetimo Tayo-

Oyetibo; and other members of the immediate family for their thoughtfulness in donating such foundational infrastructure to the Tayo Oyetibo Bar Centre. This generous contribution will stand as a lasting testament to your commitment to the legal profession.

If I am to describe Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN, I would refer to him as a cerebral and ethical powerhouse, a silent strategist, a legal architect, an unassuming prodigy, and a conscience of the legal profession. He is intellectually rigorous, deeply analytical, foresighted, and masterful at interpreting complex legal issues. In the face of provocation, both within and outside the courtroom, he remains calm and steady, communicating with clarity and precision. Within the legal profession, Oyetibo has, without a doubt, evolved into a lighthouse – a quiet yet highly cerebral legal strategist, distinguished by uncommon integrity.

We applaud the vision of Mr. Oyetibo in gifting this Bar Centre to the Ondo Bar - a contribution that strengthens our noble profession and provides a conducive environment for legal practitioners.

The legal profession has played a central role in the political and constitutional development of Nigeria. From the colonial period through the struggle for independence, and into the evolution of democratic governance, lawyers have been among the most influential actors in shaping the Nigerian state.

Many of Nigeria's foremost political leaders were trained as lawyers. Figures such as Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Chief Rotimi Williams were instrumental in shaping constitutional debates and political thought in the early years of the nation. In later decades, legal advocates such as Gani Fawehinmi, Alao Aka Bashorun, Femi Falana, Ayo Obe, Dr. Abiola Akiode, Rashidat Muhammed, Adesina Ogunlana among others, emerged as prominent defenders of civil liberties and democratic principles.

This historical role reflects a deeper truth about the profession. Law is not merely a technical discipline concerned with statutes and court procedures; It is fundamentally connected to the organization of power within society.

Law defines the limits of governmental authority. It shapes the rights and obligations of citizens and establishes the framework within which economic and political life unfold. In this sense, lawyers have often functioned as a form of informal fourth estate - an institutional counterweight capable of challenging abuses of power and defending the principles of constitutional governance.

However, the contemporary environment raises an important question: is the legal profession still fulfilling this historic responsibility with the same clarity of purpose and moral authority?

3. Law, Power, and the Crisis of Institutional Trust

One of the defining challenges facing modern democracies is the erosion of public trust in institutions. This trend is evident across many societies, and Nigeria is no exception. Citizens increasingly question the fairness and impartiality of legal systems. Allegations of judicial corruption, political influence in prosecutorial decisions, and delays in the administration of justice have contributed to a growing perception that legal institutions do not always function as impartial arbiters of justice.

These concerns are not unique to Nigeria. Globally, debates about judicial independence and the integrity of legal systems have intensified in recent years. In societies where democratic institutions are still consolidating, however, the consequences of institutional distrust can be particularly severe.

Recent developments in Nigeria have further highlighted the complex relationship between law and power. High-profile controversies involving legal practitioners, public commentary on judicial processes, and debates surrounding proposed reforms to the regulation of the profession have triggered renewed public scrutiny of the legal system.

In this environment, the Nigerian lawyer faces a fundamental ethical challenge. The profession must decide whether it will remain a principled defender of institutional accountability or become perceived as merely another instrument within existing power structures.

The legitimacy of the legal profession ultimately depends not only on legal competence but also on moral credibility. When lawyers consistently demonstrate independence, integrity, and a commitment to justice, they reinforce public confidence in the rule of law. Conversely, when the profession appears compromised by political or economic interests, public trust erodes. For this reason, the future Nigerian lawyer must reaffirm a core professional commitment: the defense of institutional integrity and the preservation of the rule of law.

4. Technology and the Transformation of Legal Practice

While questions of power and institutional legitimacy continue to shape the profession, another transformative force is emerging with remarkable speed: technology.

The rise of artificial intelligence and digital technologies is reshaping nearly every sector of the global economy, and the legal profession is no exception. Traditionally, many aspects of legal practice required extensive human labor. Legal research, document review, contract drafting, and litigation preparation often demanded long hours of meticulous work by lawyers and legal assistants. Today, however, artificial intelligence systems are increasingly capable of performing many of these tasks with unprecedented speed and accuracy.

Modern AI tools can analyze thousands of legal documents within minutes, identify relevant precedents, and assist in

drafting complex legal instruments. Some systems are even capable of predicting litigation outcomes based on historical case data. These developments are already transforming the global legal industry with large law firms in North America, Europe, and Asia investing heavily in technology platforms that enhance efficiency and reduce costs. Corporate clients, in turn, are demanding faster and more cost-effective legal services, pushing firms to adopt these innovations.

For the Nigerian legal profession, this technological shift presents both opportunities and risks. On one hand, technology can significantly enhance productivity. Lawyers equipped with advanced digital tools can conduct research more efficiently, manage complex cases more effectively, and deliver higher-quality services to clients. On the other hand, it raises important ethical and professional concerns. Artificial intelligence systems are not infallible; they may generate inaccurate legal interpretations or rely on incomplete data. Overreliance on automated systems could potentially undermine professional judgment if lawyers fail to critically evaluate the outputs they produce.

Moreover, issues of data privacy, client confidentiality, and cybersecurity have become increasingly critical as legal work moves into digital environments. The lawyer of the future must therefore combine traditional legal reasoning with technological literacy. The profession must learn not merely to tolerate technological change, but to harness it responsibly.

5. Globalization and the Borderless Legal Profession

Another powerful force reshaping the legal profession is globalization. Economic activity is increasingly organized across national boundaries. International trade agreements, cross-border investments, and multinational corporate structures have created complex legal environments that extend far beyond the jurisdiction of any single country. In Africa, one of the most significant developments in this regard is the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This ambitious initiative seeks to create a unified continental market by reducing trade barriers and promoting economic integration across African states.

For the legal profession, AfCFTA represents both a challenge and a remarkable opportunity. As trade expands across African borders, the demand for sophisticated legal expertise in areas such as international arbitration, cross-border dispute resolution, investment law, and regulatory compliance will increase significantly. Nigerian lawyers, given the size and economic influence of Nigeria within Africa, are well positioned to play a leading role in this emerging legal landscape. However, this opportunity will not automatically translate into professional advantage.

Legal markets are becoming increasingly competitive. International law firms and multinational legal service providers are actively exploring opportunities within African markets. To compete effectively, Nigerian lawyers must develop the expertise and global orientation required to

operate within this new environment. The future Nigerian lawyer must therefore think beyond traditional domestic practice and become comfortable engaging with international legal frameworks, cross-border transactions, and global regulatory regimes.

6. Changing Economics of Legal Services

The transformation of the legal profession is not limited to technology and globalization; the economic structure of legal services itself is also evolving.

Clients today expect legal services that are faster, more transparent, and more cost-effective than in the past. Traditional billing models based solely on hourly rates are increasingly being questioned as corporations and institutional clients often demand fixed fees, value-based pricing, and integrated advisory services.

In addition, alternative legal service providers and legal technology companies are entering areas once dominated by traditional law firms. These organizations offer specialized services such as automated document generation, contract management, and compliance monitoring through advanced software systems. As a result, lawyers must increasingly demonstrate value not merely as legal technicians, but as strategic advisors capable of solving complex problems.

The successful lawyer of the future will likely be one who understands both law and business, someone capable of integrating legal expertise with broader strategic insight.

7. Reinventing Legal Education

If the Nigerian legal profession is to adapt successfully to these changes, legal education must also evolve.

Many law schools still rely heavily on traditional pedagogical methods that emphasize memorization of legal principles and doctrinal analysis. While these foundations remain important, they are no longer sufficient to prepare lawyers for the complexities of contemporary practice. Legal education must therefore incorporate new areas of knowledge, including digital governance, cyber law, fintech regulation, and data protection. Students must also develop practical skills such as technological competence, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strategic problem-solving.

The future lawyer must not only understand statutes and precedents but also appreciate how law interacts with technology, economics, and public policy.

8. Ethical Leadership and Professional Responsibility

Despite the profound technological and structural changes affecting the legal profession, one fundamental principle remains constant: the importance of ethical integrity.

Lawyers occupy a unique moral position within society. They are entrusted with sensitive information, responsible for advising clients on matters that may carry significant

legal and ethical consequences and often called upon to represent individuals or institutions in situations of profound importance.

The legitimacy of the legal profession ultimately depends on public trust. That trust cannot be sustained through technical competence alone; it requires consistent adherence to ethical principles such as honesty, independence, fairness, and respect for the rule of law.

In an era characterized by rapid change and increasing complexity, ethical leadership within the legal profession becomes even more important. Lawyers must resist pressures that compromise professional integrity and remain committed to the ideals that define the profession.

9. The Profile of the Future Nigerian Lawyer

The future Nigerian lawyer will likely possess several defining characteristics. First, the lawyer will be technologically literate, capable of using digital tools and artificial intelligence responsibly to enhance professional practice.

Second, the lawyer will possess a global perspective, with a clear understanding of how Nigerian law interacts with regional and international legal frameworks. Third, the lawyer will remain deeply committed to democratic accountability and the defense of constitutional principles.

Fourth, the lawyer will demonstrate commercial awareness, recognizing that legal services operate within broader economic systems. Finally, the lawyer will uphold the highest standards of professional ethics and integrity.

Before I leave this segment of our conversation, permit me to briefly share some perspectives on the ongoing discussions regarding the need to remodel the training of lawyers in Nigeria, particularly at the Nigerian Law School.

A first point relates to the integration of vocational modules into undergraduate curriculum. There have been suggestions to incorporate some modules of the Nigerian Law School into the final year of the LL.B. program. This is a welcome development, as it will produce more practice-ready lawyers and reduce the pressure of compressing the procedural aspects of Nigerian Law in a nine-month period. Currently, several undergraduate courses can be restructured to accommodate core practical courses such as Civil and Criminal Litigation. However, this must be carefully managed to avoid curriculum overload. It is equally important that law faculties are adequately equipped with the necessary facilities and manpower to effectively teach and deliver this practical training.

Another issue relates to mandatory pupillage, particularly in the context of replacing a significant portion of classroom learning with a 12 to 24-month structured attachment in accredited firms. This reform prioritizes “learning by doing,” ensuring that young lawyers are better prepared for courtroom

practice upon entry into the profession. It also facilitates the direct transfer of ethics, discipline and practical skills from senior practitioners to younger lawyers. However, if not carefully implemented, this approach may create a placement crisis. Given the number of graduates produced annually, there may not be sufficient accredited firms to absorb all trainees, thereby creating a bottleneck. This concern is not merely theoretical; it reflects existing challenges, where many law school students are assigned to non-existent law firms for chamber attachments. In addition, the quality of training may vary significantly, depending on the capacity and exposure available within each firm; a young lawyer assigned to a small firm might not get the same exposure as one in a top-tier firm.

Finally, there is the question of adopting a Bar Qualifying Examination model - similar to the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) - for foreign-trained lawyers. Allowing such candidates to sit for qualifying examinations, followed by a period of supervised practice, should not pose any significant challenge. On the contrary, it would align Nigeria more closely with international best practices.

To ensure quality assurance across these reforms, we must put in place a coherent and well-structured framework where universities focus on foundational and basic procedural training, while the Nigerian Law School serves as a final, intensive three-month “bar preparation” and examination hub. In addition, a Pupillage Fund could be established to support the regulated remuneration goal for trainees, particularly those placed in smaller firms or legal aid centers.

In this regard, the Council of Legal Education may consider creating a fund mechanism to subsidize stipends and ensure equitable access to quality training. Furthermore, law firms designated as training centers should be subject to periodic and rigorous audits to maintain standards.

10. Connecting Vision to Institution: The Bar Centre as a Hub for Reinvention

All that I have discussed about the future of the Nigerian lawyer must be considered in light of this gracious donation of the Bar Centre by Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN. A functional Bar Centre serves as a crucial intermediary between lawyers, the judiciary and the public. It has the capacity to transform the legal profession from a collection of isolated practitioners into a cohesive, ethical and progressive community.

When properly utilized, a Bar Centre can foster professional development and excellence, serve as a platform for strengthening ethics, enhance access to justice, and facilitate networking and collaboration. It can, indeed, become the functional heart of legal practice.

My challenge, and call to action, to the leadership of the Ondo Branch of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) is to fully activate this newly donated Bar Centre. Let it not stand merely as a monument; rather, let it function as a vibrant hub for professional development, the empowerment of young lawyers, the promotion of welfare services, and

the strengthening of our collective unity. Let it be a living instrument for the advancement of justice in Ondo State and beyond.

11. A Critical Sundry Issue

The bane of infrastructural development in Nigeria is the poor maintenance culture. That this premises will not dilapidate is not a matter of prayer, but of consistent and intentional maintenance. Consequently, how do we avoid the build-and-abandon mentality with respect to this Bar Centre? I recommend that the NBA Ondo Branch urgently put in place robust facility management and maintenance protocols to ensure the building, and the equipment within it, operate efficiently, safely and sustainably.

When we honor a gift through careful maintenance and demonstrable accountability, we validate the donor's investment, show that their trust was well placed, and inspire them and others to do more.

12. Conclusion: Reinventing the Profession

The Nigerian legal profession stands at an important historical moment. The forces of technological innovation, globalization, and institutional transformation are reshaping the landscape in which lawyers operate. These forces cannot be ignored, nor can they be resisted indefinitely. Instead, the profession must embrace the challenge of reinvention.

The future Nigerian lawyer must be more than a traditional legal practitioner. The lawyer must become a technologically empowered professional, a defender of democratic institutions, and a globally engaged strategist capable of navigating increasingly complex legal environments. The choices made by the legal profession in the coming years will determine whether lawyers remain central to the administration of justice or gradually become marginalized by structural change.

The task before us is therefore clear: to preserve the noble traditions of the legal profession while adapting with courage and purpose to the demands of a rapidly changing world. If this reinvention succeeds, the Nigerian lawyer will not merely survive the transformations of the twenty-first century - the Nigerian lawyer will help shape them. And in doing so, the profession will continue to fulfill its historic role as a guardian of justice, an architect of institutions, and a defender of the rule of law.

Thank you.



**Commissioning of Tayo Oyetibo Bar Centre,
NBA Ondo Branch**

Donated By

Mr. Tayo Oyetibo, SAN
Chief Counsel, Tayo Oyetibo LP