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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION PLUS*

2012 Graduation Remarks

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Allow me to congratulate first the LST faculty and staff whose labor led to this graduation, this beginning for our graduates, and most of all, you, the 2012 graduating class of LST's ecclesiastical program, the Baccalaureate in Sacred Theology. These congratulations are especially well deserved, as it appears that your class has the highest percentage (47%) of honor graduates in recent memory.

But this happiness is, for me, tempered by the increasing realization of the complexity of the world whose "joy and hope, grief and anguish" are, in the magisterial words of Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, those of the followers of Christ, and therefore also of the corresponding complexity of preparing you to be ministers of and in that world.

The world that most of you graduates were born into, from the youngest born in October 2, 1984 to the eldest born in Nov. 21, 1966, is no longer the world you will minister to and in. Just roughly twenty years ago, real-time connectivity through mobile phones and in cyberspace was non-existent; few among you then had family who were overseas migrants or immigrants; torrential tropical storms were rare in Mindanao and earthquakes virtually unknown in western Visayas. These changes, among many others, have affected not only

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[the] external landscape but, more importantly, the interior world of persons and peoples, how we understand and express ourselves in relation to others, the cosmos, ourselves, and, inevitably, God.

Against such a universe, we measure the program that you just completed and that sought to prepare you for ordained ministry. You may not be aware of it, but that program is built on certain presuppositions borne out of the often-messy paths of the Church's living Tradition as well as of the historical vicissitudes of our constantly evolving world. One such presupposition, put in simplistic terms, is that solid theological knowledge is the primary element in the preparation for ministry.

You may question this stark presupposition and point to the many other elements that constitute your formation, such as the psychospiritual and the pastoral or apostolic. But I challenge you to calculate the time spent in these other elements and compare it with the four-year, 97.5-unit STB program, not including time outside the classroom in the library or during discussion groups. Indeed, your theological education ate up the lion's share of your time and, hopefully, your energy [in] preparing for ministry.

Thus we cannot avoid interrogating this presupposition that theology, of course of good quality, is the primary, that is, the most crucial, element in the preparation for ministry. No one will dare say that it is the only element; in fact, we all recognize the other elements mentioned. But to say that solid theology is the most crucial element in preparing for ministry is further based on three other presuppositions: 1) that ministry is primarily the communication of content, 2) that this content addresses each and every context within which ministry is undertaken, and 3) that we humans are primarily cognitive, and therefore act on the basis of what we know.

Let us examine each of them. After reviewing for and passing your comprehensive examinations, you would see the fallacy or, at least, the inadequacy of these contentions. Thesis 1 on revelation as "God's Self-communication", thesis 2 on faith "by which one entrusts one's whole self freely to God", and thesis 3 on tradition "through which the Church,

in its doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that it is itself, all that it believes"—all these undeniably declare that divine revelation, the human response to it in faith, and the means by which both are transmitted faithfully are all more than content, knowledge, [and] doctrine. Please do not get me wrong: this is not to say that revelation, faith, and tradition have no or only inconsequential content, but simply that they are more than content.

Furthermore, whatever be the content of consequence in them, their relation to ministry is not what is common-sensibly understood as "application," as when the category "mammal" is applied to you and me. As Hans Georg Gadamer has eminently demonstrated in his hermeneutics, "application is not the mere 'application' of understanding but the true core of understanding itself."[1] The relation of theology to ministry, then, is not that of theory to practice in the natural sciences, or even of the user's manual to the actual use of the latest gadget. It is rather that ministry is the locus of theological understanding.

Finally, the presupposition of the human as primarily cognitive is shattered by our contemporary obsession with whatever we consider integrative and (w)holistic, spelled with or without a "w". Our intellectual accounts as well as the social practices of ourselves and our identities all seek to overcome the various dualisms that we have been subjected to, whether homegrown or foreign. We are indeed more than our minds, and we act accordingly.

Dear friends, you may be thinking by now that this interrogation of the presuppositions behind the program you have so successfully completed to prepare you for ministry is inappropriate, if not downright subversive, especially coming from the president of your school of theology. I hope not. If I raise these questions at all, it is not to demean theology itself or our school, but to challenge all of us, and I mean all of us, to reflect critically on what we do and to carry on with deliberation what we do in this school of theology.

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[1]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1983), 129.

Perhaps we need to consider the teaching and learning of theology in the light of the multiple intelligences that are at work in human life and activity. After all, multiple intelligences are not just for pre-school kids. Perhaps we should pay more attention not to pedagogy as we are no longer children (remember pedia as in pediatrics), but more accurately andragogy, that is, adult-learning. We are adult learners after all, student as well as faculty. Perhaps we must develop a new paradigm for theological education, [one that is] not based on the presupposition that theology as content, knowledge, [and] doctrine is the primary element in preparing for ministry. May we not imagine what we do in this school of theology as capacity-building—literally, building your capacity as ministers in whatever context you are missioned in, and further building the capacity of those you minister to?

My dear graduates, pardon me if I [begin] and end with questions. This is not intended to diminish your accomplishments as graduates, but to speak honestly about what we have given you. Solid theology, we can say with pride, but in all humility, given what our world has become and continues to be, we can also say, not enough. We trust that, given your resilience and your commitment, you will be able, with God's grace, to grow into the ministers that the world needs. We promise you that LST will pursue more soul-searching and effective reform in the spirit of *magis*, so that its partnership with students and their communities will bring forth worthy ministers to and in a 21st-century universe.