



## VALEDICTORY ADDRESS | Friday 22 March 2019

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Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, deans, faculty, families, friends, and my fellow graduands: Good evening to you all! I am beyond honoured to give this speech, on behalf of my fellow graduands.

God made this day possible and to Him be all honour and glory.

A time like this gives us pause for reflection... the fact that we are here tonight, with caps and gowns that represent our final stage of this journey, is a wonderful achievement. We are deeply indebted to the University of Divinity, the various colleges – from housekeepers, faculty administrators, and academic staff for having us reach this destination.

There is a Samoan saying *E au i le tauola, e au foi ile fagota*, translated as “we all get to bear the fish basket, as well as become fisherman too.”

*Tauola* refers to the carrier of the fish basket; *fagota* refers to the fisherman. For tonight, this expression can be correlated with the need to develop skills and flexibility in acquiring the confidence to perform different roles that God assigns to us.

In Samoa in the past, father and son would go coastal fishing. The strategy is that the father walks ahead of his son along the beach, spots a school of fish and then throws the net. The son follows closely behind with the basket (*ola*). As soon as dad casts the net, the son makes sure he is there to help retrieve and haul it in. The expectation is, for the son to watch and observe because sometime in the future, he too, will be the fisherman, casting the net, to feed his extended family.

To our professors, lecturers, tutors and instructors. As fishermen, you walked ahead of us over the last few years, sharing with us your skills and expertise. Equipping us with critical studies especially of Christian texts and traditions. Thank you for your support and the spirit of service. For some of us, we came from afar, even overseas.



And as basket bearers, under your charge, we build informed views by observing and learning from you so that we can go back and share with our people and our communities. Many of you devoted extra hours to make us better at what we do, and you inspired us to reach for the stars. For that, and much more, we are extremely grateful. Please know, that your influence in our lives, will indeed influence those whom God places us, to work with.

Perhaps some of us had sponsors - churches, communities and various organisations those that so lovingly paid for our studies. We would not be here tonight, proudly wearing our caps & gowns, if it wasn't for your financial help. Thank you for putting up with our phone calls, begging you for our allowance to be granted in advance. We hope our achievements tonight are enough to express our immense gratitude of your support in every way.

To our parents, families and friends - those here with us and those who could not make it. Thank you for all your support and encouragement as we took this leg of our journey. You told us to call you whenever we needed help, and yes, we made the most of your offer. You were right behind us, lending a hand whenever needed. At times we felt our fish baskets were too heavy for us to bear - almost giving up - but you lifted our mood –and made us laugh again. Thank you.

And now my fellow graduands, the reason for this celebration. Hard work, determination and focus, has paid off. Well done! You braved the cold of Melbourne weather; survived the rigor of continuous assessment (maybe final exams); you managed to submit those assignments on time; and here you are – receiving the academic reward you worked for. Congratulations!

After today, our reflections will begin to drift onto Memory Lane. We will be left with the memories of many sleepless nights and writing essays and papers while sipping on a cup of coffee. Without a doubt, we will leave our various colleges, knowing that the friendships we have formed on campus are lasting and true. We came as students – fish basket bearers, with empty baskets. We leave here as friends and as qualified colleagues; ready to be of service to God, by serving others. This indeed, is a moment in time to treasure. As we leave tonight, let's remember: What marks the end of our journey tonight is the very beginning of a new one tomorrow.

God bless your new journey!  
God bless University of Divinity!  
And God bless this celebration! Thank you.

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#### **ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

**Dr Samasoni Moleli, Doctor of Philosophy 2019, Whitley College  
Vice-Chancellor's Scholar**

Samasoni joined the University from Malua Theological College in Samoa. He has engaged in international biblical scholarship at the highest level, exploring key questions that arose from the Samoan context yet intersect with the challenges of Indigenous societies across the world. Throughout his study, Sam has demonstrated engaged, interdisciplinary and intercultural research which serves the needs of the church in our regional context.



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