

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, University staff, guests, and fellow graduates. I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we meet today: the Peoples of the Kulin Nation. I also pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

Midlife crisis. It is real. It happens. Do not knock it. It can be a good thing.

About 8 years ago, I faced a midlife crisis. I was at a crossroads. What did I do? To cope with a midlife crisis, some people buy a Ferrari, others get a nose job. I enrolled in a theology degree. I signed up for a master's degree at the University and YTU was my home college.

Why study theology? I was asked this question often. Many of my family, friends and colleagues have not visited a church in a long time or they outright reject religion. They were puzzled by my choice. The usual questions were asked: "What was I going to do with a theology degree? How was the degree going to help me with career progression in the law?" This context is relevant to my conclusion and illustrates that my choice to study theology was counter-cultural in my world.

I credit my father for instilling in me a sense of wonder in the world and a deep faith in God from an early age. I wanted to study theology to answer questions about life and faith I had mulled over for a long time. Bolstered by my husband's unwavering support and my parish priest's encouragement, I decided to take the plunge.

It was the best decision I could have made. I owe the University and YTU a huge debt of gratitude. I have grown as a scholar and a person of faith. I learnt a great deal from wise teachers - many who are world renown scholars; and I met inspiring fellow students. I felt accepted and supported. There was a place for me at the table of learning.

As I approached the end of my degree, I became more convinced that there is a great deal theological studies can offer the postmodern world, that is relevant. To many in my circle, studying theology was an inexplicable decision - out of left field. I wondered if my contemporaries have thrown out the baby with the bath water – so to speak. I also noticed a great deal of spiritual hunger and malaise. A void. I explored in my research thesis the role of Christianity in 21st century Australian society. I concluded that there is definitely a place for Christianity in our society, but to prosper it needs to recognise the cultural and social milieu. I am not saying anything extraordinary here. Christian theology and practice have evolved in the last 2000 years. It is one of Christianity's strengths.

Where to next? My midlife crisis led me to study theology. In a similar way, I suggest that the crisis of the global pandemic may also yield unexpected positive change and renewal. It seems the right time for my voice to be heard, to bridge the gap and acquaint my contemporaries with Christian wisdom and thought in a way and in a language that is relevant and meaningful to them.

The details of how I am going to do this, I am currently working on – so watch this space.

Thank you.

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