

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, University staff, guests, and fellow graduates,

It is with gratitude and a great sense of privilege that I stand before you today, as we acknowledge and celebrate the many years of hard work and dedication in the pursuit of theological education, of all those graduating this evening.

Some have come to be involved with the University of Divinity out of curiosity, some out of a thirst to deepen their knowledge of their faith and others out of a need to equip themselves with the tools necessary for ministry.

For myself, however, it was a moment of pure fangirling over the Very Rev. Prof. John Behr coming to St Athanasius College in 2016 that sent me head first into this six-and-a-half-year journey – Six and a half years, so far.

While at the time I thought I would enrol just to sit in on a Fr John Behr class in person and meet him and then be on my merry way home, satisfied that I met a man I was internet-obsessed with, I am truly ever grateful that this was my first foray into the world of formal theological education.

Fr John challenged me to learn to read. To actually read, rather than read things into a text. Learning to read, and continuing to learn to read with every text we encounter, provides a freshness to theological education and a simple freedom to enjoy what lies before you, even if it convicts and challenges you.

Texts, therefore, become not just mere tools to prove a point, but rather to learn from, to humbly sit and listen to those who have come before us and find value in the past, value for our modern world and life.

So I thank God for his providence and his direction throughout my life which has constantly challenged me to question and reflect.

I thank St Athanasius College and the University of Divinity for the opportunity and the space to learn to read and explore without bias.

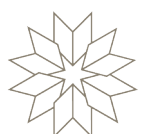
I thank all the staff at St Athanasius College for their support, approachability and professionalism and I would like to thank in particular Dr Lisa Agaiby and Fr Michael Salib for their consistent encouragement and grounding both in and out of the classroom. They have, throughout this time, become such dear friends and an inspiration to me.

I thank all my classmates at St Athanasius College, who have always brought stimulating and engaging discussions to our classes that made them well worth attending, even when I was not enrolled in them for credit!

I thank my family, my wife Silvana and my children – Ignatius, Genevieve, Sebastian, Felicity and Penelope, who are back in Sydney whose unwavering pride, support, love, excitement and curiosity for what I was doing, have made all the time away from them worth it.

Finally, I thank my home parish of the Virgin Mary and St Merkorious in Sydney for their support and encouragement who have also had to put up with my absences.

Oh! And I would also like to thank the University of Divinity Extensions Policy, without which a full-time parish priest and a father of five would have never been able to complete his studies.



And on that note, I would like to leave my fellow graduates with my heartfelt congratulations for all your hard work and effort throughout the years.

I also congratulate the Colleges and the University of Divinity for another wonderful cohort that has flourished and blossomed within the space that you have so generously provided.

May God bless us all and continue to aid us, as we venture out in the vineyard which is his, to work as unprofitable servants doing what is merely our duty to do to further the Kingdom of God on earth.

Thank you again.

Alexander Aziz, Master of Divinity 2023

