

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Archbishop, distinguished guests, staff, fellow graduates, family and friends.

When I was seventeen, my mum asked what I wanted to do when I grew up. My response was to go to university and study forever! Reflecting on the past twenty years, I realise that study has been my mainstay—no matter my other pursuits, I always come back to it. Outside of God and family, study is where I find my creative drive activated and my greatest personal satisfaction.

I became a Christian at nineteen, and my hunger to know God coupled with that desire to study led to the completion of my Master of Theology and this graduating day. I chose this path because of a constant yearning in my spirit. I knew it was something I had to do. It didn't always make sense on the outside: raising a young family, working, and living life kept it challenging, but Anselm of Canterbury's motto of 'faith seeking understanding' has become my own. In seeking to understand God through Scripture under the tutelage of multiple great scholars, this day has become a reality.

Completing my master's has pushed me beyond myself and what I believed achievable. My critical thinking has been honed and sharpened; my faith challenged, stretched, and strengthened. My worldview has broadened, and I believe, my picture of God, become fuller. We also cannot forget those writing skills – they have been through the mill!

Like discovering the facets of a diamond though, the more I think I understand God, the more I realise there's more to understand. With that in mind, the questions and wondering continue to grow. My hope is to pursue further research in ecclesiology and that any small contribution I bring might add to conversations that enrich the Church and world.

Study may seem frivolous to some and a challenge to others, but my encouragement to those who do so is to remember that the dedication and commitment shown through our quest produces fruit in the growing body of knowledge that is necessary to propel humanity's growth. Your contribution to this knowledge is of immense value. Faith seeking understanding is never lost.

On that note, my immense gratitude is extended to the University of Divinity and my wonderful lecturers, especially at Whitley College, along with a massive congratulations to all graduating students today. Your work is significant.

Thank you.

Sarah Emma Oliva, MTST 2024

