



Stewardship and Responsibility: *Outline for a Commencement Address*¹

Ted Ward

We are gathered in solemn assembly to honor this magnificent, smiling, yet obviously weary Graduate School Class of 1998. This is a memorable event: the *first separate graduate school commencement*. But for each of you it is *memorable for other special reasons*—personal and family aspirations and values, career choices, and, in general, just a solid accomplishment. A worthy accomplishment, a valuable investment, a personal and professional achievement. Although school-going is becoming commonplace and too easily taken for granted, make no mistake about it, this is a significant occasion.

For many, it is the first *significant excursion into highly purposive intellectual exploration*. For others it is a *clear stepping stone to yet greater intellectual accomplishments*. For all of you, I trust that it is start of something big!

To develop as a human, and especially, to develop in fulfillment of the intentions of God is a wonderful thing. “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12: 48).

Which brings us to the real purpose of learning.

Beyond all the pragmatic values we can think of, beyond the practical usefulness of skills, theory and data; beyond the valuable exercise of learning and the personal satisfactions that it brings, for a Christian there is something far more important. Often in a doctoral seminar, at Michigan State University and later at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, it has been my habit to ask participants why they are there. I tell them that I don’t want to hear about academic requirements, or anything even more trivial. *No, get to the basics*. What do you intend to learn and *why*? Quite frankly, I use this question to make a judgment about my students, to see how far along each has already come. *Today I share with you the key to that quiz*; the way this researcher of higher education sorts out his students.

In simplest terms, there are three levels of motivation to learn, some parts of each of these will be familiar to you. I encourage you to do a self-evaluation as we go along. What better way to celebrate this memorable day than to reflect back on what learning has become for each of us, and to think through our commitments to continuing to learn at yet higher levels.

What do you intend to learn and why?

Ordinary Motives

1. *Seeking knowledge to enhance one’s skills and capabilities.*

Shaping and refining raw talents and abilities.

¹ Ted Ward. Stewardship and Responsibility. Geneva College Graduate School Commencement Address, May 14, 1998

- Accumulating, storing and systematically retrieving information.
- 2. *Gaining competency in a more scholarly style*
 - Responsibly handling knowledge.
 - Connecting information with other information to get the bigger picture.
 - Becoming more careful, precise, and thorough.
 - Finding ways to put knowledge into action.
- 3. *Achieving credentials.*
 - Establishing eligibility for making a mark in the technological society.
 - Developing accountability to colleagues and communities of knowledgeable people.
- 4. *Gaining responsible flexibility.*
 - Opening up to new ideas.
 - Becoming more discerning and discriminating in terms of good and bad.
 - Gaining capacity to stay faithful and steady while engaging in constructive change.

Getting a *Good* Graduate Education: (Developing Sustainable Habits)

- 1. *Inquiring systematically (mature curiosity).*
 - Seeing how things are put together (analysis).
- 2. *Reading for coherency of ideas (synthesis).*
 - Connecting ideas to ideas in order to build bigger ideas.
- 3. *Relating to colleagues as to a community of inquirers.*
 - Seeing learning at its best—as a social experience (interpersonal, valuing dialogue and interaction, not competitive, not conflictive, not privatized)
- 4. *Worshiping God through Learning*
 - Focusing deeper, beyond the apparent object of study:
 - What is its origin? What is its claim on truth?
 - Discovering the *hand of God* in everything that has been made, and the *heart of God* revealed in everything that is true.

Wholeness as the Basis of Christian Spirituality

- 1. *Embracing the grandeur of Creation.*
 - Psalm 19: 1 “The heavens are telling the glory of God . . .”
- 2. *Entering into acquaintance with the Author.*
 - St. Augustine: “All truth is God’s truth.”
 - God, as revealed in Christ, communicates truth in a way of life: “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)
- 3. *Valuing the creatures (the creations) of God.*
 - Respecting the creation and its responsibilities.
 - Respecting people
- 4. *Humility*
 - Psalm 19:13 “Keep your servant from willful sins; may they not rule over me.”
 - Psalm 19:14 “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Service Defines Discipleship

Service—doing something with knowledge

Discipleship—following Christ

Thus *learning that fulfills godliness and leads to service is indeed worship*. Respect it as such.

Summation: The community that is God's people, the church of Jesus Christ, needs communities of scholars, researchers, educators, and social innovators. Welcome to your rightful place in such a community.

Respect yourself, God does.

Respect learning, it is a fulfillment of God's intentions in your life.

Respect your future—you will be amazed to discover what God has in store for you.