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VALEDICTORIAN
2014
Angelique Gardener

Reverend Rennard White, Chairman of today's proceedings and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Jamaica Theological Seminary, other members of the Board of Governors, Rev. Dr. Noel Erskine, distinguished guest speaker, Reverend Dr. Garnett Roper, President, Jamaica Theological Seminary, Mr. David Pearson, Academic Dean of the Seminary, members of Faculty and Staff of the Seminary, other distinguished persons in the audience, graduands and their family members, well-wishers and friends, good evening.

Aesthetically cursed, unpalatable, visually reprehensible, the cactus is an abnormality among its more delicate and eye-catching counterparts. Yet it strives, it strives with a tenacity that allows it to forge an existence in the most arid and inhospitable conditions. Though we do not reflect all what may be deemed negative features of the cactus, there is, encoded in the genetic construct of every human being, a desire to achieve, to actualize, to excel beyond the limitations of personal expectations. It is this desire which infuses man with the energy and fortitude to embark on voyages for self-growth and optimization.

Among the most prominent of these journeys is the scholastic expedition—an expedition fraught with challenges and frustrations, but one that yields immense gratification upon completion. It is therefore with an indescribable sense of elation and euphoria that we the members of the graduating class of 2014 stand in this most privileged position. We have successfully executed our agenda for conquering the academic challenges posed by the Jamaica Theological Seminary and achieving a Bachelors Degree.

The Jamaica Theological Seminary emerges out of the tertiary landscape with little flourish and flamboyance, a seemingly small edifice among the skyscrapers of renowned and distinguished universities. Hence, it would not be implausible to assume that the acquisition of degree qualification would require miniscule effort. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the Jamaica Theological Seminary has constrained us with challenging research papers and projects that have resulted in weeks of intense agony before emerging triumphantly from the fiery ordeal.

Not foreseeing such affliction, we entered through the gates of the Jamaica Theological Seminary with breathless anticipation, particularly those of us who knew that our attendance here was providentially orchestrated. Preconceived notions of what the tertiary experience was supposed to yield peppered the minds of those of us attending a tertiary institution for the first time. For others who were on a mission to augment their academic qualifications, the thought: “A weh mi get myself inna” has reverberated through their minds and spirits like a well rehearsed song.

Those who opted for the dorm experience did so with an appreciation for the independence it granted. Residents who had not yet been emancipated from their cradles were jolted to reality with their first pot of burnt rice and accidental inventions such as rice and peas porridge. The adage that practice makes perfect rang true for many residents, however, as cooking skills became exceptionally good as time progressed. I can personally attest to my culinary dexterity in the preparation of stew peas, with pig’s tail, absolutely delectable, if I must say so myself. I am available for consultation after the graduation exercise, for a small fee, of course.

A succinct description of the dorm experience could not be completed without giving honourable mention to our peals of

laughter which have pierced and disturbed the serene ambience of the JTS campus due to rigorous wrestling matches.

Another feature of being at the Jamaica Theological Seminary was mandatory attendance at chapel sessions and though many of us have been converted and washed by the blood of Jesus, for some of us this was particularly burdensome. Our perception of these chapel sessions changed, however, as we grew to recognize and appreciate the vital messages delivered in these gatherings, their applicability to our lives, and their capacity to transform our outlook and perception. The invitation to attend was made ever the more enticing with the injection of more Jamaican songs into the praise and worship sessions which led to some proficient dropping of the foot. These sessions also provided a platform for social networking as we had the opportunity to interface with those from more prominent circles within the Jamaican society, such as, The Leader of the Opposition, the Minister of Security, and the Governor General, among others. Chapel also provided an avenue for exploration of the various social issues plaguing our society and appropriate responses that could be employed to remedy such ills.

To our delight, JTS not only catered to spiritual development but provided a creative outlet for its students through the ALL4Him Ministry which allowed for an extraordinary blend of talents. This included musical compositions or melodious vocal performances from the Music and Media Department, riveting dances and inspiring and theatrically adept performances executed in the annual drama production put on by this creative arm of the institution.

Worthy of note is the 2013 Moses drama production which catapulted the ALL4Him Ministry into the public arena and led to repeat performances as per the request of visitors. The creative leverage and emancipation granted through this avenue were embraced by all participants.

Sporting activities such as cricket, football, and volleyball were also injected into the life of JTS to liberate us from the shackles of boredom and lethargy. It was delightful to see the vibrancy with which cricket in particular was played, and the never ending shouts of “How is That?” when a player had just struck out a wicket.

No sporting activity provided as fertile an opportunity for laughter, however, as when a lecturer or student, who was not prodigiously talented in the sporting department, strutted on to the field to play football. Some were rather skilled, actually, while for others their skill lay mostly in their display of polished legs, a distinctly lighter hue than those body parts mercilessly afflicted by the sun.

These extracurricular activities took on a more competitive twist with the approach of Sports Day as the members of Mills, Spencer, Ringenberg, and Afflick competed with much vigour and gusto on behalf of their houses.

The numerous social activities arranged by the Student Council to enhance life on the campus and support our spiritual formation also provided a reprieve from the rigours of academic life. Lifetime bonds and friendships were also formed as we found in each other a tower of support and strength.

I must pause to recognize the Jamaica Theological Seminary for many a luscious and succulent mango which we have eaten from its trees, mangoes which we have picked at our leisure, especially when the maddening heat in this concretized Kingston landscape threatens to dehydrate us of the very essence with which the good Lord has made us. I say this out of a wealth of personal experience, having been prematurely exposed to the Sahara Desert right here in Town. Notwithstanding all this, we survived.

Not enough can be said of the quality of the academic material provided by JTS. The rich amalgamation of lectures with

informative and creative presentations made by classmates enlivened class sessions, stimulated critical thinking, evoked robust debates and expanded and reformed some of our myopic and erroneous views. Courses such as Abnormal Psychology left us riddled with laughter and turned many of us into diagnosticians.

The standard of academic excellence upheld by the institution mandated thorough research and scholarly papers which reflected an analytical and critical approach to topical and relevant issues. The integrity of academic work was invariably enforced with an absolute zero tolerance for plagiarism. Noteworthy is the practicability of this material. Lecture content did more than furnish us with understanding but placed significant emphasis on the practical application of such knowledge.

A fringe benefit of being at the Jamaica Theological Seminary was learning how to multi-task. Those of our colleagues who worked part time proved to be stallions of the highest breed as they traversed between work, school, and their families. To them I would raise my hat but I do not intend to struggle to readjust it, so a bow will have to suffice.

The latter days of our scholastic journey as graduates were marked by stomachs boisterously growling for hunger when we forsook eating to finish an assignment, and dishevelled hair which, at some point, began to resemble the roost of two hens fighting for territory. It was certainly on this last leg of our journey that words of encouragement and a prayer were like adrenaline shots to weary bodies. The library became our chill spot and sleep became an ever elusive friend. Many a tear of frustration and exhaustion was cried, some openly, some secretly, yet by the grace of a good God, here we are, degree almost in hand.

What would we change? Nothing, because the sweet nectar of victory is only tasted when one has come to the end of a challenging journey.

As a result, it is with great humility that I stand on behalf of these graduands and say thank you to the President, lecturers, and family of the Jamaica Theological Seminary, for the way in which you have facilitated our growth and development. There is not a graduand here who came by chance (because unnu cost nuff money). It was by divine ordination that we came through these gates and it is by divine ordination that we walk through these gates.

The wide spectrum of knowledge we have received through diverse and invigorating courses has made us acutely aware of the deficits within us, our communities, and country, and of the need for divinely inspired leaders equipped with the requisite tools and skills to operate efficiently within our respective fields.

You have broadened our narrow vision and demolished our self-aggrandizing ambitions, replacing them with a desire to help, heal, and restore those who are broken. Not only so, but you have sought to mould us into optimally rounded individuals who are acutely cognizant of our mission as revolutionaries within an ailing society. You have challenged our complacency both spiritually and socially and have communicated across all facets of the institution the need for our holistic development as Christians.

To every family member and friend who has been a stalwart of support, we say thank you. Your perpetual love, financial support, altruism, prayers, and commitment are why we are here. You, along with us, have earned a degree and we recognize and salute you.

Above all, we thank God for His guidance and the love with which He has provided for and cradled us. We thank Him for starting and finishing not just a good, but an excellent work, for defeating our doubts, trampling our concerns, and destroying our worries. We

thank Him for defying our limitations and for proving Himself to be faithful even to the end. It is therefore our resolve as graduates to wear the JTS brand proudly and to be anointed assets wherever we go, as we seek in the words of our motto to know Him, that is, Christ, that we might make him known.