Imagining the Future of Theological Education

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Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to be here, and to discuss with you the future of theological education —a matter that closely touches all of us.

However, before I go into that, I find it necessary to define the subject. Too often, when we speak of "theological education," what we mean is mostly what takes place in seminaries, universities, and other places where people are prepared for leadership in the life of the church. However, I am convinced that the time has come when we must redefine the meaning of the very phrase "theological education," and look at it in wider terms.

Theological education is not something that begins when you enter seminary, or when you go to college in order to major in religious studies, nor even when someone decides to go to a bible institute in order to prepare for pastoral ministry. Theological education is a continuum that begins with catechesis and with adult Sunday school and Bible studies for all ages and continues throughout life. What we usually call "theological education" —that is, what takes place in institutions such as Duke Divinity School and so many others— is just one of the many

venues of theological education. This sort of theological education is certainly a very important component of the wider task of theological education. The church and the world are in bad need of such education. But this is not the totality of theological education.

I have often explained what I mean by this by comparing the image of a pipeline with that of an irrigation system. One reason why I use this image is that it is somewhat autobiographical. Some years ago, when a group of us began working on a number of projects so that there would be higher representation of Latina and Latino students, professors and administrators in seminaries and universities, we used to speak of a “pipeline.” We were developing a pipeline that would begin encouraging young people as early as high school, through college, into seminary studies, and eventually into PhD programs that would allow them to become leaders in what I then called “theological education.” Today I find that image insufficient and even harmful, for it implies that the purpose of the entire enterprise is to carry as many students as far along as possible, and that somehow not making it to the end is a sign of failure or insufficiency. I now prefer the image of an irrigation system —one of those systems in which perforated hoses are placed in the ground so that as water runs through them it seeps out and

fertilizes a crop. In that kind of irrigation system, a drop of water that seeps out is not a failure. It is simply fulfilling its purpose in its own assigned place.

This makes an enormous difference on how we view the entire enterprise of theological education. A pipeline is valued positively on the basis of how much gets to the end, and negatively on how little is allowed to leak along the way. An irrigation system is valued on the basis of its beneficial effects on the surrounding soil, and on the basis of the evenness and fairness in the distribution of its bounty. Certainly, that some water gets to the end of the system is still of great importance. There too the land must be irrigated. But the drop that gets to the very end is not therefore more valuable nor more successful than the drop that leaked out at the very beginning of the system.

Ideally, theological education, like an irrigation system, must fertilize all the land. In order to do this, it must be interconnected. It must not consider that a drop that arrives at the very end is therefore more important or more worthy than all the others that remained behind. Indeed, a drop that does not leak out at all is a useless failure. In brief, theological education must not

evaluate itself only on the basis of how many move ahead or how far they go, but also on the basis of how many move out, and of how well they do as they seek to irrigate the land.

Having said all that, I come to a phrase that has become quite common these days whenever we speak of the future of theological education: theological education is in crisis. There is no need to say much about this. The crisis is certainly hitting some of the most distinguished institutions in theological education. When I first began studying theology, there was in this country a seminary whose library was of such importance that its classification system was used by theological libraries throughout the world. Now, a few years ago, that seminary has found it necessary to place its invaluable library under the management of a nearby university. Many institutions of theological education are dipping too deeply into their endowments, and are thus compromising their future. Others are selling part of their property, or even all of it. Several are either closing down or merging with others. A few years ago, the oldest freestanding theological school in the nation sold its campus and moved to another city and state in order to merge into a university with more resources.

Obviously, the crisis is not only in finances. In many institutions there is a deeper crisis of self-understanding, of mission, of relevance.

But all of this is not the entire picture nor the most worrisome element in the present crisis in theological education. When we speak in those terms, we are thinking only in terms of the crisis at the end of the irrigation system. But the crisis goes back to the very beginning. The crisis has to do with the theological education of people preparing for baptism, of people preparing to join a church, of people who have been active members of the church for a long time and are convinced that they need no further theological education. In a conversation some thirty years ago, a colleague who had been hired to teach evangelism in a well-known seminary declared that he found it very difficult to teach evangelism to seminary students and to churches that had no idea what the Evangel was! And, unfortunately, he found many such cases.

The crisis is not only in seminaries and schools of theology. The crisis is in the entire body of the church. When a member of the body suffers, the entire body suffers. When my back aches, I

cannot think straight. When I don't think straight, my back seems to hurt more. The present crisis in theological education is worse than I would have imagined a few years ago. Indeed, I fear that it may be worse than I can imagine right now.

Since I have been invited to "imagine the future of theological education," let me share with you a strange vision that came to my mind a few days ago. I was thinking about how to imagine the future of theological education as if I were looking into a crystal ball —which is a way many people today think of imagining the future. I could see nothing in the ball, until I dropped it and it shattered into smithereens. As I looked at it, I hoped that was not a vision of the future. But in many ways it is indeed a vision of the present.

And then, as I looked at those many pieces of glass, and the light shone on them, I could see a strange beauty in their brokenness. It was not all nice and even, or all easily understandable or describable, or measurable, as the ball that had just been shattered. But there was a promise of beauty in it. There was the opportunity of making something better, something more beautiful, something more meaningful, than the ball that had been shattered.

With that as our background, I come back to the question: “imagining the future of theological education.” I have no crystal ball, neither whole nor shattered. All that I have to imagine about the future is the past I have known —not just the past I have known personally, but also the past of generations before me whose experience I have inherited. It is only on the basis of that past that I can plan, think, or even imagine, the future.

Since I am a historian, I am quite conscious of this. But, when you stop to reflect on it, all anyone has in order to plan for the future is the past. When economists warn us about a coming recession, what they are actually saying is that, on the basis of similarities between the present situation and situations in times past, they expect a similar outcome. When I was planning to be here today, the only reason I had to believe that the sun would rise today was that it has risen and risen again and again over thousands of generations and millions and millions of years. And —just as a freebie to take home with you and to play with— the only reason I have for expecting two plus two to make four tomorrow is that two and two have made four for a very long time…

Back to our subject: the only way I can even begin to "imagine the future of theological education" is to look at the past of theological education and try to relate it to our present —to invite the past to illuminate the present.

As I think about this procedure, there are many possible points of departure. Allow me to suggest, almost in passing, some of them, in order finally to focus on a particular one.

One possible point of comparison would be the second century. This was a time when theological education was in crisis throughout the church. Until then, most converts had been either Jews or "God-fearers" —that is, people who were accepting the faith and many of the practices of Judaism, and even attending synagogue, didn't become Jews. When such people accepted the message of Jesus as the Messiah, they did not have to learn much that was new to them. They knew the Ten Commandments. They knew that there is only one God. They knew that God is the Creator and Ruler of all things. But now, as more and more converts came from among the gentile population, a new system of theological education was necessary for them, usually for a long time before they were ready for baptism. The experiences of that time would

be very helpful to us, when more and more people come to the church for all sorts of reasons, thinking that they know exactly what the gospel is all about, and yet are in dire need of further instruction, correction, and formation.

A second possible point of comparison would be the darker times during the Middle Ages, when mostly illiterate people learned about the faith through ritual and art, and when some very devout men and women in monastic houses preserved for later generations a wisdom and a knowledge that otherwise would have been lost. This too may be important for us at a time when modern forms of barbarism seem to imply that humankind no longer needs the wisdom of the past —and also at a time when it seems that so much worship is more concerned about aesthetics than about meaning, and growth, and relevance. In the midst of the present crisis, we must not lose heart, knowing that the wisdom and the experience accumulated through generations —and certainly the faith of the church— are worth keeping.

Thirdly, we may look at the high point of the Middle Ages, when theology flourished in the universities —the time of the great Summas of Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas. A time

that present-day theologians cannot ignore. And also, a time when most of the church —laity as well as clergy— had no idea what was going on in the universities and couldn't care less. If —perhaps with good reason— we sometimes feel like those medieval university professors, perhaps we may gain solace by remembering that it was in the midst of one of those generally ignored universities —and not a great university at that— that in the sixteenth century a mighty movement of reformation would emerge that would change of life of the church forever.

Any of those times —and many others— are worthy of reflection. But for our "imagining" today I have chosen the fourth century. I have chosen that time for several reasons. The first, I must confess, is simply because I find it fascinating. I can justify my fascination —at least in part— by pointing out that this was the century that somehow produced Augustin and Ambrose, Jerome and Paula, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Macrina, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen, and countless others. But in fact, I have chosen the 4th century because that is the time of two great leaders whose parallel yet different careers may help us understand what is happening today in the field of theological education —particularly in the field of "theological education" more narrowly understood as preparation for pastoral ministry and church leadership. These

two great leaders are Augustine and Ambrose. Both were learned. Both were pastors. Both were theologians. They read many of the same books. They even knew each other. They knew each other —in fact, it was Ambrose who helped Augustine overcome many of his intellectual difficulties on the path to faith, and Ambrose who baptized Augustine. Neither of the two wished to be a pastor or a bishop. Yet, despite such similarities, their paths to pastoral ministry were significantly different.

Augustine was first of all a thinker. He and a group of friends had created a community whose main purpose was to practice the Christian life and to think about all sorts of theological and philosophical issues. He was already a well-known theologian when he visited the city of Hippo in order to recruit a possible member for his community of prayer and reflection and was hijacked into ordination. He was not happy. He simply wished to go back to his place of retreat and meditation. But he complied. Once in Hippo, and now burdened with pastoral duties, he insisted on creating a community similar to the one he had to leave in his hometown. But now his meditation on issues of interest to him had to cede their place of primacy to issues of relevance to the life of the church.

Ambrose was older than Augustine. Although always a Christian, he had never been baptized. He had paid attention to his Christian tutors and had learned from them; but his real interest was in government and administration. Eventually he became a very high officer within the Roman Empire. He too was hijacked into ordination when he was unexpectedly elected Bishop of Milan. When he found that there was no way to escape this unwelcome new calling, he decided to welcome it. Being aware of his theological deficiencies, he called on his former tutor in religious matters, Simplician, who taught him as much as he could as fast as he could. A week after his baptism, Ambrose was conducting worship and leading the church in Milan.

In brief, Augustine was a theologian before he became a pastor, and Ambrose was a pastor before he became a theologian.

Neither of the two was fully prepared for the task at hand. As one compares the writings of Augustine before becoming a pastor with those written after that event, it is clear that much had to change in Augustine's theology. Some changes had to do with actual doctrines with which he had flirted earlier, but which he abandoned when he was responsible for a flock. For

instance, he had toyed with the notion of the transmigration of souls; but when as a pastor he reflected on what this meant, far beyond a matter of idle speculation, he completely rejected the idea. On a wider scale, other changes had to do with a different approach to theology. What Augustine wrote while he was merely thinking for himself and his small group of fellow thinkers had to do mostly with matters of an individual's relationship with God, and in some cases just with idle curiosity. In his later writings, he clearly thinks of himself as part of a much larger body, representing and leading that body and speaking for it. Typical among his earlier writings are the Soliloquies — whose very title says much about their nature. After becoming a pastor, his writings had to do more with the life of the church. Many of these later writings are sermons—some of which are particularly insightful in relating theology to the life of faith.

Most of the rest are controversial works having to do with manichaeism, donatism, pelagianism, and paganism, all of which he viewed as a threat to the life of the church and the faith of its members.

Ambrose wrote much less than Augustine, but still quite a bit. Having been formed in preparation for civil service, he was well versed in Greek, a language that was necessary for

much imperial administration. He now used that knowledge to translate and adapt some important works that were not available to the Latin-speaking West. Foremost among these was the translation of the treatise On the Holy Spirit by Basil the Great. In many of his sermons one can still hear echoes of earlier Greek preachers and biblical commentators. His preaching and his biblical interpretation always showed the practical penchants of a civil administrator and a student of Roman law, to which he added his developing expertise in theology. He did not abandon his former knowledge, but rather endeavored to join it with the best theology available to him.

Two very similar and yet two very different paths to pastoral ministry. And two different paths to the study of theology. But eventually, both Ambrose and Augustine came to be counted among the four outstanding theologians that the Western Church considered its great doctors.

One can find other similar instances in the same fourth century. Basil of Caesarea was only interested in becoming a famous and respected professor of rhetoric at the University of Caesarea, until the imprecations and supplication of his older sister Macrina and the

unexpected death of their younger brother called him to a different life. Like Augustine, who had also been a professor of rhetoric, he decided to follow a life of monastic contemplation. But, also like Augustine, he was forced to become first a presbyter and then a bishop, and to become also a leading voice in debates which were very important, but he would rather have avoided.

It is important to note that at that time there were no academic requirements for ordination. The congregation in a particular city would elect its prospective bishop, who would then be expected to share a confession of his own faith with the surrounding bishops. If these were approved, a delegation from among them would consecrate the new bishop. Soon even this process was abandoned, and ordinations required no particular knowledge of theology. Although some leading thinkers had established centers for the study of theology, such centers were not specifically devoted to the training of clergy, but rather to the exploration of theological and biblical issues. Such was, for instance, the school that Origen led at Caesarea, where Gregory the Wonderworker studied before he became bishop of Neocaesarea. Such was also the school that Lucian later ran in Antioch, where Arius, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and many

of their supporters studied.

Certainly, even though there were no academic requirements for ordination, the new priest or bishop was supposed to teach and lead the flock; but nobody determined that they had to have any particular knowledge or to meet any academic requirements. In the early Middle Ages, under the reign of Charlemagne, Alcuin and other sought to improve the education of both clergy and laity; but their efforts did not make a lasting impact. When the great universities developed, mostly in the XIIIth century, the preparation of parish leadership was not their paramount concern. In the Roman Catholic Church, it was only in 1546, at the fifth session of the council of Trent, that it was ordered that cathedral schools have programs for the instruction of clergy, of potential clergy, and of the people at large. It was the Jesuits who first began establishing particular schools for training their members and prospective members —training them particularly in polemics against Protestantism. In 1563, almost two decades after ordering the establishment of cathedral school, the same Council of Trent, now in its 23rd session, ordered the founding of “seminaries” in each diocese to train young men preparing for the clergy.

The very word, “seminary,” is significant in its meaning. Originally, a “seminary” was what today we call a “seedbed.” A seedbed, as any gardener knows, is a particularly sheltered place where one plants seeds or seedlings and keeps them free of disease and pests so that, when the plants are sufficiently mature and strong, they can be transplanted safely to an environment in which they will not be as sheltered or protected. In other words, they are protected from the world until the world cannot destroy them. This procedure —and the name itself of “seminaries”— had been suggested a few years earlier by Cardinal Reginal Pole, who was then at the service of Queen Mary Tudor of England and saw the need to train Catholic priests with no trace of interest in Protestantism.

Therefore, the very word, “seminary” or “seedbed,” does not need much explanation as to what their function was to be. They would be places where young Catholic boys would be raised far from any possible influence of heresy or deviation of doctrine, until they were ready to be ordained and transplanted as deacons and priests working in the real world. In other words, this system was the Augustinian model carried to its extreme level: these young men were first to be formed theologically in a sort of monastic community —or in a theological

hothouse— and only after they had been fully formed and had reached the rank of "theologians" would they undertake their pastoral tasks.

Meanwhile, the Protestant reformation had begun in a university, and its main leaders saw that it was necessary for the clergy to learn how to preach and live a different version of the gospel than they had been taught. These leaders were well aware that this required not only a different sort of strictly theological education, but also a different form and availability of education in general. In a series of studies and surveys, Luther and Melanchthon discovered in Saxony numerous priests who hardly knew more than the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the Creed; and that this was all they could teach. In 1524, Luther and Melanchthon, in a letter that they addressed to the Councilmen of all German cities, proposed that governments should establish public schools for the education of their subjects. Four years later, Melanchthon issued a proposed course of studies for these schools. Something similar was done first at the University of Wittenberg and then in several other universities, often under the leadership of Melanchthon, who therefore gained the title of Praeceptor Germaniae —Master Teacher of Germany. Through Melanchthon's influence and work, at least four new

universities were founded, and the curricula were revised in at least a similar number. Meanwhile, something similar was happening in Zürich under the leadership of Zwingli; and somewhat later in Geneva, under Calvin's leadership.

Thus, from the very beginning most of the Protestant wings of the Reformation promoted advanced theological education with curricula that prepared people for the very difficult task of developing a church whose membership could know and understand at least the basic principles of the Reformation. Eventually this led to the requirement of specific theological studies for ordination —a requirement that has long characterized most of the churches emerging from the Reformation.

Those early leaders, however, did not set aside the need for the education of the masses. This was not entrusted solely to the new scholarly leadership that was emerging. Education into the new theology was to be done also directly at home and in the churches. To that end, in 1529 Luther wrote both the Greater Catechism and the Lesser Catechism. The larger work was addressed to adults, partly so they could teach the Lesser Catechism to the children, and partly

so they could delve deeper into the Christian faith. In the reformed tradition, both Martin Bucer and John Calvin wrote catechisms for the church at large. In the Calvinist tradition, there was weekly preaching on a particular question of the catechism that was to be studied during that week.

In summary, in the early reformation there was a strong emphasis on the education of both laity and clergy, so that theological education was a continuum or a system that connected theological studies at all levels.

However, as time went by, and the discussions in theological circles became more and more esoteric, the result was a number of churches in which, while there were strong programs of theological education in preparation for pastoral ministry, that sort of study came to be considered as radically different from what the laity were taught. In what is sometimes called "Protestant Scholasticism," academic theology became as relevant to the common Protestant believer as the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas had been to a French peasant in 13th century France.

We now come to our present day and our present crisis. As one looks at churches in this nation —and in many other parts of the world— it becomes clear that both the Roman Catholic Church and the most traditional Protestant churches have adopted what earlier I called the Augustinian pattern rather than the Ambrosian pattern. It is also clear that most of the Protestant churches that have long followed this pattern are not growing, but rather declining, in membership. The main exception in this country is the Roman Catholic Church, whose growth is mostly due to immigration.

Please understand that I am not saying that there is a causal connection between seminary education and dwindling membership. There are many other demographic and social reasons for the situation I am describing.

This is part of the crisis of “theological education” —in this case, understanding “theological education” in the rather limited sense of what takes place in seminaries and schools for divinity. These institutions were built for growing churches. Their facilities, faculty, budgets, and much else reflect the times in the mid-20th century, when the so-called mainline

churches were booming. Now they find their constituency dwindling, and their mission losing relevance. How can they maintain their facilities? How can they justify their budgets? Will they have to close down? Will they have to merge with other institutions? The MDiv, valuable as it is, is no longer the only game in town. ATS accreditation is no longer a clue to success, nor even to survival.

Whatever the reasons, it is also clear that the churches that are growing are generally those that do not require what we have traditionally called “theological education” for ordination. In many cases, their leaders did not set out to be pastors. They simply began meeting with a small group of people that eventually grew into a congregation and made them their pastor.

I believe that concrete examples are often helpful. Therefore, let me tell you about a pastor of an independent church who showed up at my house some years ago with one of my books, asking at the door if he had the right person. He had much enthusiasm, but no formal theological education. At the time he was a part-time student at a small Bible institute that had no recognition but their own. His church was growing. The young people and many others were

asking questions that he could not answer. He knew that he needed to know more than he did. I gave him some pointers, and he went on to try further studies. We have kept up along the years. After a long absence due to the pandemic, he stopped by a few weeks ago. He now has not only a seminary degree, but also a D.Min. When I asked him about his church, which began in his living room, he told me that they had just bought a 12-acre plot in suburban Atlanta. I asked him how they had managed to do that, for I know that most of his members are poor, he simply said that the members of his church decided to go to their respective banks and asked for personal loans. When they pooled their loans together, they had more than enough to buy the plot and begin planning for a building. Yes, he said, there have been some difficulties. Some church members came up with unexpected difficulties and were unable to cover their loans. But others simply offered to take over their payments!

I worry about him and his church. But still, I admire his zeal, commitment, and leadership ability. And I covet the experience of a church with the solidarity that he seems to have. I covet it, and I fear it!

For good and for bad, this is one more example of the Ambrosian model of a way into ministry and into theological education. This is a model that has always existed along with the Augustinian model, but quite often not been recognized —or has been ignored as clearly inferior to what “we” do.

Here we come back to the matter of the crisis —mostly to the crisis in theological schools, but also to the crisis of theological education in the wider, fuller sense. Jointly with the crisis in theological schools, there is a crisis in many who have followed the Ambrosian model: the world is getting too complicated for them. What they have learned along the way, which originally seemed enough, is proving to be insufficient. Where can they find the further education they need? Where will they find help for interpreting the trying circumstances of our day in the light of the gospel? Where will they find help in interpreting difficult passages of Scripture? Where can they find the necessary tools to deal with domestic violence, with social injustice, with corrupt government agencies, with preachers of an easy gospel with no cross and nothing but riches and prosperity, with issues of church and state, etc.? Who will do for them what his tutor Simplician did for Ambrose?

The answer is clear: they can find most of that in seminaries and schools of divinity. And, if it is true that those institutions are the answer to these people looking for further education, it is also true that these people are in many ways the answer to many of the crises facing traditional theological institutions. Statistics clearly show that this is the case. Seminaries that a few years ago had a student body that was almost entirely of their own denomination now find a radically different composition in their student body. In many cases, more than half of students in a new entering class belong to denominations different from those sponsoring the institution itself. Most often, they represent denominations and independent churches that do not require an MDiv for ordination. If the seminary does not have a large endowment, it is these students —students who are very different from those for whom the institution was built— that keep the institution financially viable. If the seminary does have a large endowment, it would still have difficulty justifying its existence without these students whose presence was unexpected and uninvited two or three decades ago.

Another important point is that most of these students are not coming to study because their church or denomination requires it, but rather because they feel that they need it. Most of

them are not registering for the general MDiv degree, but rather for a two-year alternative master's program —often a program that focuses on a particular need they feel. To them, the availability of an institution of higher theological education within their reach is a blessing; and they are grateful. To the institution, they are a blessing; and the administration is grateful and relieved.

Thus the crisis is abated. But, beware! The crisis has not been solved. It has only been postponed. This is particularly the case of the many institutions that are enrolling these new students, so to speak, "on the cheap." (We have pastors who want to know more about Scripture, and we are offering great courses on that subject. Welcome! Come on in! We have others who need theological clarity, and we have courses on that too. Welcome! Come on in! Problem solved! Or rather, problems solved!)

But the day will soon come when those who have been so warmly welcome will begin asking for courses and approaches that are more relevant to their situation and their questions. It is difficult in a single course to teach preaching to people who have been preaching for decades

and to others who have rarely seen the other side of a pulpit. At some point, the patch of new cloth will pull, and the hole may become even bigger.

And yet, the very presence of this variety of students, of this variety of questions and needs, is also a sign of blessing that comes through crisis. Were it not for the crisis, many of these new and different students would never feel the need to apply to a theological school. And were it not for their own crisis, probably many a theological school would not even look at them.

Again, I like concrete examples. Years ago, when some were beginning to struggle for various changes in the hope that more minorities and poor people would be admitted into traditionally middle-class schools, we often found schools passing the buck and saying, “the ATS will not allow it.” Now, to a large measure due to the crisis, the ATS is open to new alternatives as never before. The Augustinian model is no longer the only model that ATS accepts and even blesses, for the ambrosian model is now gaining increasing recognition.

Allow me to offer a very brief example of the new options being opened: A few years ago, the

ATS agreed that, if the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (the AETH) certifies the value and dependability of a bible institute program, graduates of that program may be admitted by any ATS-accredited school, not as special students nor on probation, but as regular students with the equivalent of a BA. As a result, seminaries are beginning to “discover” neighboring bible institutes that they had long ignored. Some seminaries have developed their own bible institutes. The managers and directors of bible institutes are developing partnership agreements with seminaries. Seminaries are offering classes to help teachers in bible schools. Professors in seminaries are being invited to lecture in bible institutes, and to chat with students.

The crisis has not passed. Actually, we should be thankful that the crisis has not passed and will not pass, for crisis is a means by which, either willingly or kicking and screaming, we are being pulled into God’s future.

Ultimately, I must return again and again to my shattered crystal ball. The seemingly better, whole crystal ball, promised me much, made me feel good; but it spoke falsely. It provided

shallow views of the future. It made me think I could take control of the future. But all I could see in it were mere reflections of my own hopes and my own fears. Now this shattered crystal ball, this confusing pile of glass, shimmers with lights unexpectedly. Looking at it, I am dazzled by the ever-changing light. Living with it, I am reminded that the future is not in my hands, as in a crystal ball, but in the much better hands of the Light that shines in every shred of glass, of the Life that lives in every life, of the Future that is promised in every past.

This is a good thought to hold on to in these days when we approach the end of the trying days of Lent; in these days in which we are reminded that after his death Life still lives; that no matter how beautiful and joyful the future we seek to build, or the future that we imagine, the promise is even better. On this we must stand even in the midst of the most frightening crises, for this is not only our only hope, but also our sure Hope. So be it.