

PLEDGES OF A LEGAL ACADEMIC

Tsegaye Regassa*

As an academic, I have the burden (and the privilege) to legislate softly, persuasively, and lovingly. I have the freedom to do it with academic freedom. I cannot do anything less.

As an academic, I have the duty to imagine, and help society imagine, a better world, a different world, a new heaven and a new earth. That is my prophetic duty. And I cannot do anything less.

As an academic, I have the privileged position of being the custodian of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness (Knowledge, Art and Virtue). I navigate the three domains of epistemology/metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics. I am a custodian of love, hope and future. I have the duty to describe dead scripts, disavow death wishes. I need to fight hatred, despair, and cynicism. And I cannot do anything less.

As a legal academic, I have the duty to serve as a worthy custodian of a public text, a legal text, based on which we govern society. I have the responsibility to approach public texts with the ethic of reverence, care, and discipline. I have the duty to restore hermeneutical sanity (in the place of hermeneutical anarchy) and interpretive integrity (in the place of interpretive uncertainty, duplicity, and inexactitude). I have the duty to promote a hermeneutic of compassion (in the place of a hermeneutic of power and shallow political correctness). And I cannot do anything less.

As a legal academic, I live with the burden of serving as a custodian of justice. I have the duty to do exegesis of the law to uphold the integrity of the law. As such, I have the duty to counter those who do violence to the law. I take it upon myself to become a worthy legal exegete, a worthy commentator of our laws for our times, a defender of the civilization embodied in the laws of the country. And I cannot do anything less.

* Tsegaye Regassa is currently a PhD Candidate at Melbourne University Law School and can be reached at < t.ararssa@student.unimelb.edu.au >

As a legal academic, I note that I am part of the corps of intellectuals who, as society's paid thinkers, seek to generate, disseminate, and preserve knowledge for posterity. As such, I seek to generate both 'useful' and 'ornamental' knowledge, not just to solve problems but also to cultivate our 'finer arts'. I take the task of expanding the horizons of knowledge as my duty with a sense of awe and humility. And I cannot do anything less.

As a legal academic, I have the duty to distance myself from the politics of hegemony, and from the scholarship of power. I have the obligation to distance myself from legitimizing bad use of power to inflict injustice, to violate the inviolate, to neglect the needy, to justify greed, and to promote vanity. Needless to say, I have the responsibility to be a voice for the voiceless, the voice of memory and remembrance, the voice of *re-membering*. In my work on human rights, I seek to meet the challenge of the solemn call to be "a voice of suffering." And I cannot do anything less.

As a legal academic, I have the duty to uphold the principle of rule of law, the primacy of liberty, the centrality of equality, and the sanctity of human dignity. I have a commitment to advance the vision of a democratic and egalitarian society. As such, I have the duty to stand in favor of emancipation of all oppressed and subaltern actors. I live under the imperative of making mistakes, if at all, in favor of freedom rather than oppression. And I cannot do anything less.

As a legal academic, I serve as a custodian of reason to speak truth to power. I shall speak the words of the law to the might of force. And I cannot do anything less.

As a custodian of justice, I'll make it my utmost priority to protect the weak from the strong, the poor from the rich, and the powerless from the powerful. And I cannot do anything less.

These are the things that I should do, and these are what I shall do.

I pledge to do this. By the grace of the Almighty, this is what I shall commit myself to do in the days, weeks, months, and years to come.

