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Breaking the Stone: Finding Greatness Within

A young lady discovers her mission as a writer at a Leadership Conference in Davao City (Southern Philippines).

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Alexandre Havard said, “*By breaking the stone, we can sometimes find a diamond inside.*” Those words stayed with me long after the talk ended. What seems ordinary—or even

rough—on the surface can hold something precious within. Havard's message about virtue—particularly magnanimity and humility—felt less like a lecture and more like a conversation about what it means to grow, to fall, and to rise again.

In a forum I attended on November 4, 2025, at Casa Mayor in Matina, Davao City, titled “**Magnanimity, Human Hope and Personal Greatness: The New Leadership,**” Alexandre Havard, founder of the *Virtuous Leadership Institute* and author of “Virtuous Leadership” and “Created for Greatness,” spoke about magnanimity as the virtue of human hope—the courage to dream and to act on those dreams.

His message was not about blind confidence. He said that trusting in God also means trusting ourselves, because God wants us to believe in the gifts He has placed within us.

“You are a small person if you do not trust. Trust yourself. Trust and be a believer of greatness.” Trusting yourself can be difficult. Some days, doubt feels louder than faith, but perhaps that is when we need reminding that God is not only above us—He is within us. Trusting in ourselves is trusting in His presence in our capacity, our creativity, our persistence.

I often shy away from compliments or hesitate to speak about what I can do. There are moments when I confuse humility with silence—or even with shrinking back. Havard’s words reminded me that humility is not about hiding—it is about remembering. *“You have talents,”* he said. *“They are gifts from God. They are given. The humility here is that you acknowledge where your talents come from. Hence, it is not pride. Your magnanimity is to think, yes, these are my talents, talents that God gave me,*

and it is my responsibility to multiply them.”

Those words felt like a correction. Humility and magnanimity are not opposites to be lived halfway; they are two virtues to be lived fully, each at one hundred percent. Growth lies in learning how to hold both with grace.

Writing and finding oneself

Writing became the space where I learned this slowly. It was hard at first, but eventually, I found comfort in it. The “backspace” key became a small mercy—space to think before speaking and to be honest without fear. Later, reading followed naturally. I still believe people who don’t like reading just haven’t found the right book yet. For me, books became places of quiet understanding, places that taught me what I wanted my own writing to do:

to give rest, to give truth, to give refuge.

Still, staying true to that purpose has not always been easy. When I started writing for the *Davao Catholic Herald*, I tried to imitate others' styles, thinking it was the way to sound credible. Those pieces looked right but felt wrong. They weren't dishonest in facts, but they weren't honest about who I was. I learned that it's possible to write truthfully without being true to yourself.

Investigating oneself, as Havard also emphasized, isn't an easy task. Some days, I like something; other days, I don't. Listening to oneself can be confusing—we misread signs, mistake noise for direction, or chase what doesn't fulfill us. Yet that's part of being human. We stumble, and it is our responsibility to learn from those moments, to grow in God's grace, and to try again with clearer

eyes. I once read a quote that said something like this: “*when you try something new, you’re starting from scratch; when you try again, you’re starting from experience.*” I’ve come to hold on to that thought—it reminds me that even failed attempts can become beginnings when seen with truth and faith.

Havard reminded us that “*Piety will never replace the lack of human virtue.*” Faith alone cannot do the work for us; it must be accompanied by effort. If there is no human virtue—no sincerity, no perseverance, no courage—then even supernatural virtues will have nowhere to take root. We have to work on ourselves, he said. We have to trust, investigate who we are, find our gifts, acknowledge where they came from, and multiply them.

Dayaw Center in Davao

That call to growth is something I also encounter in my formation at Dayaw Center, where formation is not simply a set of lessons but a way of living. In Dayaw, we are taught that consistency in little things—punctuality, kindness, finishing tasks well—is a path toward holiness. As St. Josemaría Escrivá wrote, “*Do everything for love.*” Love gives meaning to even the smallest acts, transforming ordinary moments into opportunities for heroism. Formation becomes like an umbrella—it shelters, guides, and reminds us that greatness begins in small, quiet acts done faithfully and with love.

I still remember growing up on the first floor of the same apartment where the temporary center now stands. Over a decade ago, it was simply home. My family had already been involved in Opus Dei long before I was born, so I often crossed paths with numeraries even as a

child. At three years old, I would shyly hide behind my mother's skirt whenever she met with people. I was not what anyone would call a social butterfly, if you can imagine. There was no women's center for Opus Dei in Davao yet at that time, but the faith and warmth of the people remained strong.

Before the women's center settled here, I used to attend the girls' club activities, where we learned to cook, clean, pray, and participate in various activities that helped us understand ourselves better. When we are young, we often imitate others, unsure of who we are or what we want to become. The girls' club became a safe space for me to discover my strengths and limitations—to "*investigate myself*," as Havard would put it. It taught me to notice what brings joy, what challenges me, and how I could serve others in small, meaningful ways.

Looking back, I see those moments as quiet beginnings of formation—lessons that shaped both my character and faith.

The women numeraries of Opus Dei finally settled in Davao City during the pandemic, on September 23, 2020. By then I was no longer hiding behind my mother's skirt (especially since I had already grown taller than her). I began attending activities again and even started helping out. Since then, I've had circles, meditations, recollections, and many other activities that continue to deepen my formation—each one reminding me that growth, like faith, is a lifelong process.

Sanctity, leadership and service

Havard's message on magnanimity and humility echoes the spirit I've seen in Opus Dei: the call to sanctify daily work and to serve others joyfully. Leadership, he said, is not a

position or title. *“Achieving greatness is by bringing out greatness in others. That is leadership. It is not a flagship. Not a position. It is a way of being.”*

Not everyone may be called to be a CEO or a manager, but everyone is called to leadership—to greatness. Leadership rooted in magnanimity drives us to strive for excellence; leadership rooted in humility reminds us that we do it for love and in service.

For me, writing has become a quiet form of leadership. It is a way of serving, of bringing light into places that might otherwise go unnoticed. To write is to build bridges of truth, to share faith in subtle ways, and to use words as instruments of understanding. Through writing, I hope to help others see goodness, to find hope, and perhaps to draw closer to God. In that sense, writing is not just a talent—it is a

responsibility, one I continue to grow into, imperfectly yet faithfully.

In the end, greatness is not about standing above others. As Havard said, it is about discovering greatness in others—and perhaps also within ourselves. When we recognize our potential and the gifts God has entrusted to us, we reflect His glory in the world. True greatness is not self-centered; it is God-centered. It is the quiet courage to grow, to serve, and to help others do the same. In that way, we live out what we were made for—to become, in every ordinary moment, instruments of His greatness.

The leadership forum was organized by *Project Sampaguita*, a group of women from Cebu, in collaboration with the *Lamdag Foundation for Women's Projects, Inc.*, a Davao-based NGO licensed by the Department of Social Work and

Development (DSWD) to operate as an Auxiliary Social Welfare and Development Agency. *Dayaw Center* for women, currently in its construction phase, is one of *Lamdag's* projects that continues its mission of formation and service.

I am grateful to be part of that light—that *lamdag*—which continues to illuminate lives across Mindanao and beyond.

Yvana Sulit

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