

## **WHAT A BEAUTIFUL NAME**

*How CCO has effectively introduced students to Christ for 30 years*

Vancouver Founders' Dinner Keynote

21 October 2018

Your Grace,  
My Brother Priests,  
Beloved Missionaries of CCO,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is a distinct privilege to be in your midst this evening; I am very humbled by the invitation to address this distinguished audience. Please take into consideration the careful stewardship shown by your local CCO team in saving the expense of bringing a non-acclaimed speaker when you contemplate your donation this evening!

### **My personal experience with the movement**

In all seriousness, my relationship with Catholic Christian Outreach has been a budding friendship which I cherish. I first learned of the movement while attending an event that was hosted by CCO called a *Summit* during World Youth Day Cologne in 2005. We were witnesses that night to an inspiring display of piety, devotion, fervour and enthusiasm; an evening filled with testimonies, praise and worship music (the best I had ever heard), fellowship, and at the centre of it all, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It was clear *Who* was the focal point of this movement's mission: Christ our Lord.

At the end of that night an invitation was extended to all present to consider attending their annual conference later that year back in Canada called

Rise Up. It was going to be hosted in Vancouver between Christmas and New Year. I immediately knew that I would love to attend. I simultaneously knew that on my seminarian budget, that was totally out of the question. Nevertheless, once I was settled back in to another semester in the seminary, the question kept coming from my new found friends in CCO, *was I going to Rise Up?*

I desperately wanted to but knew that my only hope was to entrust it into the hands of our Lord- and whomever was the patron saint of acquiring money. Little did I know that the former Premier of my beloved home province was already such a patron even before his death. Shortly after making that prayer, my dad called to inform me of the good news that every Albertan was going to be receiving \$400 from Ralph Klein that year! The cost to attend Rise Up was \$385; it was clearly God's will for me to be there. Thus, it is actually rather quite fitting that I have the honour to deliver this brief address in the city where I first became fully acquainted with Catholic Christian Outreach thirteen years ago.

It was my very first time here and we traveled by an overnight bus trip with other eager Rise Up goers. That week, I was lavished with a defining moment in my life and my vocational discernment. Each passing talk of each passing day deepened my love for Christ and my conviction that He may, indeed, be calling me to serve Him in the Holy Priesthood. On the commissioning night, keeping in mind the death earlier that year of our beloved Pope John Paul II, we were each given a small crucifix which was a replica of his famous pastoral staff, but it was with the explicit instruction that we were to pray with absolute confidence for the

conversion of someone we loved who one day would be converted; and then we were to give him or her that crucifix once that had occurred. Though it has been a long time coming, I look forward to finally giving that crucifix to my little sister next summer when I officiate her wedding Mass: a long hoped for blessing that, more often than not, I feared would never come to pass...

The highlight of the conference, though, was at the evening of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Winding down the grand spiral staircase of the Marriott Hotel into a lobby packed with visitors who had nothing to do with our conference, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was lovingly and devoutly carried in procession for all to see. As the monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament made its way through the lobby, one by one, people fell to their knees in the presence of His Majesty, including staff and patrons of the hotel who needed not to be attending Rise Up to still recognize their Lord. Finally, He entered the ballroom to a crowd of youth on their knees, hands lifted, voices raised, and heads bowed. In my heart I said, *Jesus, if these are the future people you are calling me to serve, then the priesthood will be an incredible joy.* That intuition has never proven wrong.

### **The Five Tenets**

I have learned over these many years of my increasing involvement in and intimacy with CCO that they operate according to five tenets; five central core values which direct and inspire all that they do. Their focus is clear: university students, which is more properly translated as future leaders. They have one

message: the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaimed clearly and simply. They are motivated by a heart moved by love for the salvation of the world. Yet they touch this whole world one person at a time. And all the way along, every step they take and every contact they make, they do so with great expectations that, through them, the Holy Spirit is going to move in this person's life in some way more powerful than before they were privileged by that encounter.

This way of seeing and doing their apostolate has proven incredibly effective over the past thirty years- twenty of which have been spent in this city at Simon Fraser University; another ten at the University of British Columbia. Yet it is not only here where this work has borne fruit thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. For the past eight years I have been a grateful witness of the success of Catholic Christian Outreach in my diocese of Calgary. To quote our emeritus bishop, Frederick Henry, on the occasion of this dinner in Calgary four years ago- if CCO hadn't been created, we would need to do so now!

### **The Crisis of Evangelization in the Church Today**

The fact of the matter is that in our modern times, notwithstanding the moral and religious decline of our culture in general, within the Church herself we are facing a crisis of evangelization. Meaning no disrespect to anyone who would hold otherwise, I fear one of the greatest signs of this crisis would be any unwillingness to admit it. We frequently identify the secular press and media as our greatest enemies or detractors. While they may have little love for Christ's Church, I would hardly consider them our enemies. Especially the most recent

exposés on the scourges of abuse, moral turpitude within the clergy and the failure to sufficiently address it, we must always bear in mind that these factors are symptoms of a deeper crisis. The media only reports on them but they point to a much graver issue. It is a crisis characterized by what I often borrow the help of Mufasa from the Lion King to point out to my school children. When beholding the celestial vision of his deceased father, Mufasa, the King of the Lions, Simba is chided by him saying, *Simba, you have forgotten who you are!*

Indeed, the central crisis faced by the Church in our day is the failure to remember who we are: the adopted sons and daughters of God. And when we have forgotten *who we are*, we can be very sure that we are doing little to help the lost discover or rediscover their identity as such also. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, is forever urging us to make our way to the margins, to the peripheries, where we will find the lost, broken and wounded. But who will go to them and what will be brought to them if the ones who are to know Christ at the deepest level have forgotten who they are? This is an echo of what St. John heard communicated in his vision of the Apocalypse, Revelation 2: 4 addressed to the Church of Ephesus, *I have this against you, you have forgotten your first love.*

### **How the Church Must Return to a “Clear and Simple” Proclamation of Jesus**

After only six months into his Pontificate, Pope Francis stirred up a lot of controversy by commenting in an interview with the Italian Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica* that, “We cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay

marriage and the use of contraceptive methods. This is not possible. I have not spoken much about these things, and I was reprimanded for that.” People heavily invested in the pro-life movement were especially distraught over what sounded like the Holy Father’s downplaying of the importance of these unpopular truths. Yet, one must better understand the context within which Pope Francis made this comment. Essentially, he was insisting that, to propose the truth of these laws, while certainly possible on their own merit because of the natural law, fails to attract those who hear them to the beauty of the *Lawgiver*.

He developed this statement more thoughtfully in his first major apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, “Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed. When we adopt a pastoral goal and a missionary style which would actually reach everyone without exception or exclusion, the message has to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary. The message is simplified, while losing none of its depth and truth, and thus becomes all the more forceful and convincing” (#35).

Put simply, people who have forgotten who they are, have forgotten Who made them, have forgotten what He’s asked for, have forgotten why it even matters- before ever being reintroduced to His teachings- must be simply introduced **to HIM**. We would do well to remember, therefore, that we cannot

merely replace these unpopular truths with popular, contemporary ones. People are helped no more effectively towards encountering Christ through constant recourse to migration and plastics in the ocean than by abortion and contraception. Jesus is the essential, the most beautiful, the most grand, the most appealing, the most necessary. As Francis' great predecessor, St. John Paul II- whose feast we commemorate tomorrow on the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of his papacy- stated to the youth at World Youth Day Paris in 1997, "It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provoked you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise..." Our young people are looking for only one thing: Jesus.

The oft ignored second portion of Pope Francis' comments to the Jesuit magazine back in 2013 drive the point home clearly, "Proclamation in a missionary style focuses on the essentials, on the necessary things: this is also what fascinates and attracts more, what makes the heart burn, as it did for the disciples at Emmaus." What our CCO missionaries are doing on campus is sidling up with students in the hallways and concourses of our universities, like Christ on the road to Emmaus, and are re-proposing to them the truest of all beauties contained within that Name above all names; the Name of Jesus.

Last month, as a kick off for a large university student and young adult event which I organized in our diocese, our Bishop, William McGrattan,

generously spent the better part of a Friday evening mingling with them and getting to know them. As the night was winding down, we all witnessed something of a miracle. When one of the worship music leaders took to the stage, he sang a verse of a popular, contemporary worship song before inviting the Bishop to take the stage, say a few words and spontaneously pray over us- which he graciously did. And then, keeping the microphone in his hand, as Michael strummed and repeated the refrain of that song, *What a beautiful name it is, the Name of Jesus*, Bishop McGrattan held that microphone to his mouth and gently sang those words to his sheep, almost as a father singing his children to sleep.

As miraculous as that touching experience was, the real miracle was that in a room with as many smart phones as there were people, not one photo, not one video was taken of that moment. Our students were too deeply enraptured at the beauty of a *lover of the beautiful Name of Jesus* re-proposing that Name to them. It is the announcement of that Name alone which has borne countless fruits in 30 years of work in Catholic Christian Outreach; it is the announcement of that beautiful Name which will heal the Church of our times from the wounds which afflict her; it is the announcement of that beautiful Name for which each of our hearts are longing...

\*cue Joe's singing