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INAUGURAL ADDRESS: AD FONTES, BACK TO THE SOURCES

**Dr. Don Sweeting, President,
Colorado Christian University**



Dr. Don Sweeting, the new President of Colorado Christian University, speaking at the Presidential Inaugural February 16, 2017

When I arrived at CCU, people asked me, “What’s your vision?” I said, “My vision for CCU can be summed up in two words: *“ad fontes.”* It’s a Latin expression meaning “back to the sources” or “back to the fountains.”

It was actually a motto during the Renaissance and the Reformation. In

the Renaissance, it was about a return to classical sources, because there was life there. When the Reformers used it, they were talking about a return to the Scriptures and to Christ, the primary sources of the Christian faith.

The word *renaissance* is a French word for “rebirth,” and rebirth is essentially a Christian notion. Similar terms such as “renewal,” “reformation,” and “restoration” all imply looking backwards to go forward—looking backwards to find wisdom and life so that one can go forward with strength. But mention going backwards in this culture and people think you’re crazy. They think it sounds retrograde. Why go backwards?

The phrase *ad fontes* occurs in the Latin vulgate in Psalm 42:1. Literally it reads, “*in the same way the stag is drawn back to the sources of water, so my soul is drawn unto you, O God.*” The Psalmist expresses a longing to return to God as the source of his life. He laments life apart from God.

What is the fountain? The fountain is the Living God. As medieval saints and Protestant Reformers looked at this psalm, they added that the fountain is “Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God; it is the Gospel, the power of God for salvation; and it is the Scriptures, the Word of God which abides forever.” These are the springs that gave us our life. *Ad fontes.* By looking backwards, we can go forward.

Os Guinness wrote, “The Church always goes forward best by going backwards. The surest way to go forwards is always to look back to the thing that gave you your life in the first place.” This is great advice for the Church because churches can drift.

It’s good advice for universities, too. Universities can drift from their mission and their original source of life. The Western university was born out of cathedral and monastic schools across Europe. University mottos often reflect this faith base. For example, the motto of Oxford University is “*Dominus Illuminatio Mea,*” (the Lord is my light), taken from the Psalm 27:1.

My contention has always been that the biggest issue facing higher education is not rising costs or student debt or financial sustainability or demographic changes or government intervention or the digital revolution, even though these are all important issues. The biggest issue in higher education is the center. What is the center? Think about the Western world. The Western world emerged from tribalism, and after the Roman Empire was

destroyed, it was the church that put things back together in a new order called *Europe*. The conversion of the West was gradual, it was halting, it was lived out inconsistently. Even so, people proclaimed the Gospel and shared the love of Christ. Missionary ventures went out everywhere. Monastic

outposts were established. Gospel preaching took place. People looked to the Scriptures as a book to remake their world.

We forget how the light of Christ transformed our world. It transformed the plight of the poor; changed the way we treat children, women, and the elderly; created our health care system; established early science and musical notation; and led to extraordinary artistic endeavors. We forget the immense impact of God’s Word on our world. The fact

“Ad Fontes” Meaning “Back To The Sources”, “Back To The Fountains”

Dr. Don Sweeting was inaugurated as the new president of Colorado Christian University on Feb. 16, 2017 in celebrations at the CCU campus.

Centennial Institute sponsors research, events, and publications to enhance public understanding of the most important issues facing our state and nation. By proclaiming Truth, we aim to foster faith, family, and freedom, teach citizenship, and renew the spirit of 1776.

is, Jesus and the Gospel have a track record of being the greatest, people-changing, culture-changing force in human history. How crazy it is for our civilization to run away from this. We are cutting off the limb upon which we are sitting.

As we think about the Western university, our Western world, our nation, and CCU, we must ask, “What was it that gave us life?” With CCU, it’s quite obvious. Our heritage schools were born out of a vibrant, Christian faith, a belief in divine revelation, that God reveals Himself in His Word. We’ve been serving the Mountain West and our community in Colorado since 1914—that’s 103 years. We desire to be a Christ-centered university of learners and scholars because Christ is our life. We wouldn’t exist if it wasn’t for Jesus Christ, and that’s why we talk about having an enduring commitment to Christ and His kingdom. That’s why we talk about students who honor Christ and

A Christ-Centered University Of Learners And Scholars Because Christ Is Our Life

share the love of Christ around campus and around the world. That’s why we teach students to trust in the Bible and lead holy lives and be evangelists.

Today, we live in the midst of what many call “the crisis of Western liberalism.” Classical liberalism is gone. It has lost its roots. A new liberal progressivism now prides itself in absolute autonomy and severing itself from every tradition and source of authority. We see the effects of this in the world of higher education. There’s a disorientation in our universities, and much of higher education seems to have lost its way. Reason to be concerned? Yes, and it’s not just the United States.

A Canadian professor was recently interviewed about the state of undergraduates in the average institution of Canada, and he said, “Our students are post-Christian, therefore they do not know what to believe. They are post-historical, therefore they are cut off from almost everything that is worth knowing. They are post-literate, therefore even if you can point them to what is worth knowing, they are either not interested in reading or they are incapable

of taking advantage of it because they do not, in any effective sense, know how to read.” Clearly, there is a problem.

But to Christian universities and leaders who are here today, I say to you, we have an incredible opportunity before us because we have incredible spiritual resources that are found by going *ad fontes*: back to the fountain. Consider the verse that we chose as the theme for this inauguration, Colossians 1:17: “He (*that is Jesus Christ*), is before all things and in Him, all things hold together.” You want to find a way back? I tell you, there is light and life in Him. Go back to the sources, the source of God’s Word, the source of the Gospel, the source of the eternal Son of God who’s the Living Word, our Light and Life.

I ask you today—what if we dared to dream a different dream? What if, instead of going along with everybody else, we went in a different direction? What if, instead of going over into the abyss, we went backwards, *ad fontes*, to go forward? What if, instead of a university being an influence that had a corrupting effect on a younger generation, it was a place of spiritual awakening, renaissance, and reformation? Imagine the cultural impact on the church, on our community, the nation, our Western world, even the whole world.

If we go back to the sources, what then is my dream for CCU going forward? Let me share what I dream about for CCU.

1. I dream that we exalt Jesus Christ and remain faithful to Him in our second 100 years, that we are courageously faithful to Him, even with all the pressures that come.
2. I dream that we build a great Christian university, in the classic tradition of the Western university, and that we do so under the Lordship of Christ. That includes fulfilling the wonderful Strategic Objectives that have been set before us for the glory of God and the blessing of people everywhere.



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- Jeff Hunt, Director



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3. I dream that we prepare as many students as possible to spread the influence of Jesus Christ. That we train them to be whole people, to live for Christ, to love God's Word, to love people, and to spread the light of Christ. That we prepare students to be representatives of goodness, beauty, and truth, to strengthen the Church, to engage the culture, and to do what they do with such excellence that people notice. That we prepare students for all kinds of callings: to be evangelists, apologists, missionaries, pastors, authors, editors, CEOs, TV journalists, opinion-shapers, cultural thought-leaders, leaders of the academy, the arts, the professions, business, government—World Changers. That we prepare students for significant service and, while they are here at CCU, we plant seeds of greatness in their minds and in their hearts.

My predecessor, President Bill Armstrong, would often walk around the campus, not only asking “what if,” but asking, “I wonder who the next _____ will be?” I wonder who the next Francis Schaffer, Chuck Colson, or Florence Nightingale will be coming from our student body. I wonder who the next William Wilberforce, Thomas Edison, or William Tyndale will be—the next Bill Gates, Patrick Henry, Dwight Moody, or Esther. World Changers. In fact, he would say, “I honestly believe that someday presidents will come from this campus.” Talk about faith!

4. I also dream of another Great Awakening. As a church historian, I love to read about the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, and the great spiritual revivals. They often began among students and then spread to the wider Church. We need a revival and reformation in our churches today, and I often pray, “Lord, will you do it again?” We don't know His will, but what if? Why don't we pray together for a Fourth Great Awakening, one that starts right here among our students, that they wake up to God, and to their calling, and serve Him wholeheartedly. My hope is for a refreshing of His Holy Spirit that begins on this campus and then spreads out to other campuses and the country.

5. I dream of a stronger academic base for our students, academics that are second-to-none. Unfortunately liberalism has gone soft. Standards have dropped. There's a theological reason for this. If you have no ultimate authority and if everything is relative, everything flattens until “Surfing 101” and “Skiing

101” become as valuable as “Shakespeare 101.” Again, we want to go in the opposite direction, towards academic substance and excellence. We have a strong core curriculum, a Biblical worldview, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving. We want to give our students an extraordinary education, and we want our faculty to embody, not just the expertise of their field, but a passion to serve the Lord Christ as they teach their students.

6. I also dream of a school that changes the thought life of the United States through our students, our faculty, and the Centennial Institute. That we change the way many think about freedom, about the sanctity of life, the importance of marriage and family, and the value and importance of a quality education.

7. I dream of building and encouraging the Church as we go forward. That CCU will bless the Church and help the Church be the Church. That we will not undermine the faith of its sons and daughters, but strengthen students to go forth to be pillars of their church in the days ahead.

8. I dream of finishing our campus, of building a great setting where students can learn and have an extraordinary education in an inspiring environment. As Bill Armstrong often said, “Great buildings don't make a great university, but a great university requires great buildings.”

That's what I dream about. Will God allow it? I don't know, but we can pray for it. We can work for it. We can be faithful and leave the results to Him.

Meanwhile, we are living in this amazing historical moment. Where's it all going to go? We don't know that either. Some have said, pessimistically, that things will continue to come apart, that we're entering a new dark age. Others have said perhaps God will bring renaissance and reconversion to our drifting world. Chesterton once quipped, “At least five times the faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs, but in each of these five cases, it was the dog that died.” We have to come back to the fact that Christianity is a religion of surprising reversals.

Our hope for renaissance, revival, and reformation are rooted in Christ who rose from the dead, and the work of the Holy Spirit who brings rebirth and breathes new life into dry bones. A move of the Holy Spirit could be used to bring forth a new evangelization and a new great mission to our Western world. But, friends, this will not happen by simply appealing to education as we normally do, or to generic values, or to conservative values, or even a

Dreams For CCU Going Forward



SPEAKING AT HIS INAUGURAL CEREMONIES ON FEB. 16, 2017, DR. SWEETING SHARES HIS VISION FOR COLORADO CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Prior to joining CCU, Dr. Sweeting served as president of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida where he also served as the James Woodrow Hassell Professor of Church History.

An ordained minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), Dr. Sweeting served as senior pastor of Cherry Creek Presbyterian Church in Greenwood Village and taught as an adjunct faculty member at Denver Seminary. Before moving to Colorado, he served as the founding pastor of Chain of Lakes Community Bible Church in Northern Illinois. And prior to entering into ministry, he served as an assistant to Chuck Colson and Prison Fellowship in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Sweeting holds a degree in Bible Theology from Moody Bible Institute, a B.A. degree in History from Lawrence University, and a B.A./M.A. from Oxford. He received his doctorate in Historical Theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois.

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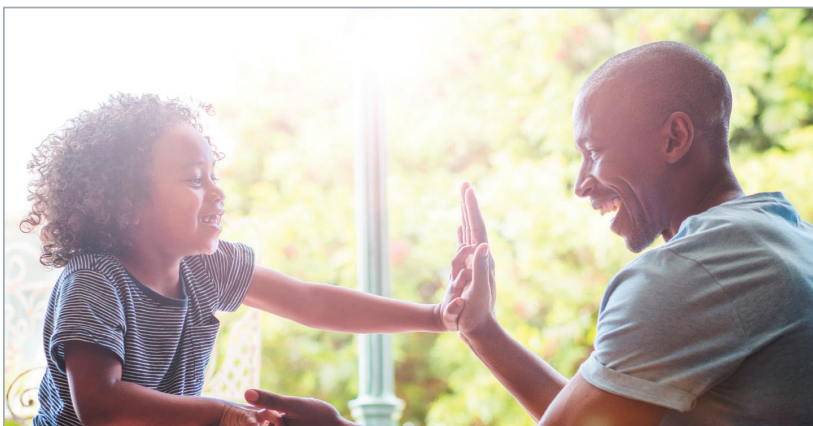
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return to teaching a Western canon. It will only happen if we return to “the great tradition.” If we go back to the God who is Lord, to Christ Jesus who is the Son of God. If we return to “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus”, as President Armstrong often said. If we go back to the power of the Gospel and the clarity of God’s Word and look at life through that lens. As we let this shape the soul of our university and our culture, who knows what God will do?

**On Christ
The Solid Rock
We Stand**

So I say to you, *ad fontes*—back to the sources! What an appropriate motto for a year commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Back to the sources! Why? Because that’s how we were born and that’s how we will thrive. For as the old hymn puts it, “On Christ the solid rock we stand; all other ground is sinking sand.” Will you help us in this dream? Will you pray with us as we go forward? May God guide us in the days ahead. ■



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