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INTEGRITAS

Wyoming Catholic College

“Changing the World through The Little Way” *2021 Commencement Address* *May 24, 2021*

Thank you all very much, Dr. Arbery and the leadership of Wyoming Catholic College. It is a tremendous honor to be here to celebrate the great achievements of the class of 2021. It is a tremendous honor, as well, to be able to speak with you, the friends, loved ones, and family members of the graduates.

We live in an age of crumbling culture, of a fragile church. We are in *desperate need of hope.*

That hope is sitting right before us, the Wyoming Catholic College Class of 2021!

My wife and I were overwhelmed yesterday when we arrived at the Baccalaureate Mass and took our seats in the back of the church; overwhelmed by the number of young people there and by the beauty of the liturgy. There is something about youth—mature youth—that is a great ground for hope. And I would like to speak briefly about that hope and offer an insight that this is truly a commencement, a beginning for you all.

The foundation you have is phenomenal and extraordinary, especially at a time when most young people today are being told what to think—and what they’re being told has very little to do with the True and the Good and the Beautiful. But you’ve been taught how to think, so that you can pursue the True, Good, and Beautiful in all their facets. You’ve been taught to live

these virtues and to recognize that they are not just transcendentals, but that they exist perfectly in our true and loving God. And you’ve been taught that they can be found and manifested in our lives and in our work.

“We live in an age of crumbling culture, of a fragile church. We are in desperate need of hope.”



Curtis Martin
Founder and CEO
of FOCUS

I'd like to speak with you a bit about that work you are about to undertake, because we live in an age that is *in desperate need of exactly what you've learned over the last four years.*

Now there are two ways you can pursue this. One I would call the **"Big Way."** Maybe becoming president, like Dr. Arbery here. (Wonderful talk by the way; thank you so much for that!) Perhaps serving as businessmen or standing behind podiums like this one, leveraging your impact on large numbers of people. Think about Jesus feeding the five thousand and giving the Sermon on the Mount. Because of your education, you are called to serve in this larger way, which I think is appropriate because of your patron. And that's a powerful thing.

The "Little Way" of Jesus, however, was the way (I would argue) that changed the world. Of the five thousand people who were fed or the multitudes who heard the Sermon on the Mount, they found themselves just a little while later yelling "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Indeed, the impact that the "Large Way" has on people can be fleeting.

But the Little Way is extraordinary, and something that I think is quite appropriate for all of you here at Wyoming Catholic College. The Little Way is manifested by Jesus Christ, who found twelve men and then went camping for three years. He knew those twelve men extraordinarily well and he allowed them to get to know him, too. And it was through the Little Way that he imparted not just His friendship, not just faithfulness—in at least eleven out of the twelve—but also His own fruitfulness.

This Little Way is manifested in the spiritual life and in the spirituality of St. Thérèse, the Little Flower of Jesus. Perhaps she was not able to do the things that the "Big Teresa" did, but she had great love. And through her great love for Jesus, she impacted the lives of countless people in a big way. "Big Teresa" did great things because she did the smallest things with extraordinary love.

You have been given a tremendous gift in receiving this Wyoming Catholic College education. You have been taught how to think and to think well. And through the exercise of your reason, you know that the pursuit of knowledge is not independent from the moral life or the spiritual life. Indeed, these things are integrally connected; the pursuit of truth and the good life are a unity that will enable you to navigate your future, your career, and your relationships. You are better prepared than the vast majority of your peers to have an impact wherever you go—in your families, in your careers, and in whatever vocation you choose to pursue. This is a fantastic thing.

"But the Little Way is extraordinary, and something that I think is quite appropriate for all of you here at WCC."

At the same time, I wanted to speak to you for just a moment about the limitations of this gift. There was a great saint—a great man—who was the most gifted speaker of his generation. He was called by the Church to go and to speak to heretics, to win them back to Jesus Christ and to the fullness of the Catholic faith. Despite his giftedness, he was failing miserably. But one day, Our Lady appeared to him, and said that the flaw, the error is not in you. You are pursuing the true and the good and the beautiful. The flaw, the error, is in them. They are not ready to hear you. And she introduced him to the meditations on the life of Jesus Christ through her

eyes; on that day, Our Blessed Mother gave St. Dominic the rosary.

“The limitations are not so much in you, because Christ is alive in you. It is the limitations alive in them...”

But I want to do more than speak to you about your giftedness, though it is amazing and will continue to mature. I want to pray for you, through the intercession of Our

Blessed Mother, for the sake of everyone that you are going to impact in your life. **The limitations are not so much in you, because Christ is alive in you. It is the limitations alive in them, because either Christ is alive only weakly or not at all.** I pray that all those you interact with—whether it be in the home or in the business world—would be profoundly impacted by your presence, so that the truth and the goodness and the beauty which is alive in you will radiate into them and allow you to bear abundant fruit.

May God bless you.

Curtis Martin is the founder and CEO of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), one of the fastest-growing college outreach apostolates in the Catholic Church. Mr. Martin holds a master's degree in theology and is the author of the best-selling book, *Made for More.* Curtis is likewise the co-author of *The Real Story: Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible* with Dr. Edward Sri and *Boys to Men: The Transforming Power of Virtue* with Dr. Tim Gray. In 2004, Curtis and his wife, Michaelann, were awarded the Benemerenti Medal by Pope Saint John Paul II for their outstanding service to the Church. In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Curtis as a Consultor to the Pontifical Council of the New Evangelization. Curtis and Michaelann live in Colorado. They have been blessed with nine children and five grandchildren.



Anthony Jones
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*WCC Senior Class
Speaker, '21*

“Every Gift Evokes a Response:”
*Delivered to Wyoming Catholic College’s 2021
Graduating Class*

Mr. Martin, Chairman Kellogg, President Arbery, Dean Washut, thank you. I want to also extend a word of thanks to both the faculty and to you, my classmates, for looking past all the terrible puns I’ve made in class over the years and selecting me to give this address. It was truly an unexpected honor, and I hope to do you proud.

On May 31, 2017, we embarked on a radical journey that has led us to this moment. Why do I point to that date in particular as the start of our journey? Well, a few weeks before it, Trevor Lontine, WCC’s former Director of Admissions and the man

who personally recruited many of us to attend this college, sent out an email to our growing class. He informed us that we had increased to 49 students, with more on the way. He also said that he had read each of our admissions essays - and had come to the conclusion that, as a class, we sorely needed a “slight refresher” in grammar and punctuation, as he gently put it. Apparently he wasn’t the only one who thought so, as Mrs. Kozinski went out of her way to provide extracurricular grammar reviews our first semester, God bless her. Having completed the Trivium track and written dozens of essays since then, hopefully our professors can attest that we’ve vastly improved and banished dangling modifiers from our writing once and for all.

But back to the story. At the end of his email, Trevor invited us to vote on a Class Patron Saint, a fantastic idea that had been initiated by Rinju. On May 31, it was decided that our patron would be St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Since that day, St. Thérèse has faithfully watched over our class and helped us become the tight-knit community that we are. How fitting that we have come full circle at the end of May four years later, just as small springtime flowers are budding around Lander. This season of our life has flashed by so quickly - and yet the process of growth has been so rich, so challenging - in short: so amazing.

What words could I possibly use to describe all we have gone through together, the memories we’ve made, and the people we’ve become?

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Like a good liberal arts student, I should begin by turning to someone much wiser than me from the Western Tradition - our class patron herself, from her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*.

"If a little flower could speak, it seems to me that it would tell us quite simply all that God has done for it, without hiding any of its gifts. It would not, under the pretext of humility, say that it was not pretty, or that it had not a sweet scent, that the sun had withered its petals, or the storm bruised its stem, if it knew that such were not the case."

As little flowers that can indeed speak, we ought to follow the example of St. Thérèse, particularly in reflecting on our time at WCC. It is of course true that from our very first week of classes, we joined the ranks of the Socratic ignorant who are at least aware of how little they know. In many ways, that awareness only increased as we encountered new (or rather, old) texts, dilemmas, and ideas throughout the curriculum. My inability to confidently defend the existence of substantial forms last month in Science 402 was a humbling reminder that even in spite of what I think I've learned here, there is always something more of the depths.

This is true, and important to remember, but it is not St. Thérèse's main point. She knows that true humility consists in recognizing the reality before us. **And the reality, my friends, is that the past four years have left us *very, very blessed*.** Day

"And the reality, my friends, is that the past four years have left us very, very, blessed."

in and day out, our professors tirelessly introduced us to the central authors of our intellectual inheritance. Now, with Machiavelli (though hopefully with better intentions), we know how to open a book and "enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly,"

we are "not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity reply." We have stepped into this tradition and, having wrestled with its big questions, especially in our theses and orations, are now a living part of it.

Our general sense that we should be good Catholics, good human beings, has been refined and reinforced by our study of nature, the soul, its Creator, society, the Church, and how to order those things in right relation to each other. Consider how remarkably our understanding of just those three words has developed: "good human being." Our time here has packed so much meaning into those words that we could have expansive conversations about what each of them mean, tying in at least a half dozen texts from this curriculum while we're at it. That's... incredible. And just the tip of the iceberg.

Another blessing that deserves to be remembered and cherished is the camaraderie we've built over the past four years. In a real way, we've established ourselves at

the center of this community - and I don't just mean the Baldwin building. The fact that we were able to commandeer that space and hold onto the nerd table actually points to something exceptional about us that stretches all the way back to freshman year. Intentional community has always been important to us. Think back to the moments before our very first final in Fall 2017, when we all locked arms in Augur as Joe Pho led us in singing "The Piano Man". Earlier that semester, we organized our corner of Frassati for color day on short notice with a class spirit like no other. (Deep down, we'll always know that we won). Or our freshman dance, when we pitted the upper class against the ghetto so successfully that another rap battle or break dance of such grand proportions may never again grace the halls of WCC. When Rinju originally pitched the idea for the theme, he said, "it could go wrong, but we're the class that could do it right." It held true, as it has for so many of our wild projects throughout the years.

We always fed our imagination by delving into the poetic depths of reality, reading and reflecting on the objective character of art with Maritain, the spousal meaning of the body with Pope Saint John Paul II, the goods of our school with the Philosophical Vision Statement and John Senior, all in our precious free time, and of course with the help of our gracious professors. We thereby collectively formed a clearer understanding of the transcendentals, the good, the true, and the beautiful, but instead of drifting into idealism, we actively worked to embody them in the college community, whether by organizing nerf wars with underclassmen, creating regular fine dining opportunities (thank you John and Kevin), or praying the Little Office together in the chapel.

When the pandemic sent us home during the middle of junior year, we were hit hard. The limitations of online education infringed upon our class unity and the friendships we had made. The higher they fly, the harder they fall: the old adage held true for us. It didn't help that one of the books assigned during quarantine was Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Most of us were confined to reading it for hours on end in isolated rooms with low ceilings, yellow dusty wallpaper peeling off the walls, and cockroaches clacking under our tattered cots. Okay, maybe that's a slight exaggeration of the physical reality, but our souls weren't too far behind. Let's just say it's a good thing there weren't any pawnbrokers around - or axes.

***"We channeled
our frustrations
into community-
building efforts."***

We missed out on a lot last spring - being able to host the senior send off dance, understanding the Incarnation and statistical reasoning as well as we could have, and the fullness of the Junior Author Project. That could have very easily made us resentful toward the community, each other, and perhaps even ourselves. But we didn't let that happen. The temporary deprivation of the goods we held dear

highlighted their true value and enlivened our genuine love for the community with renewed vigor. We channeled our frustrations into community-building efforts in spite of the abbreviated semester and looming thesis deadlines: the Portsmouth dance, weekly Pequod happy hours, class meals - we cherished the traditions of this school and did everything we could to pass them down. When our time was cut short, nearly half our class migrated 1500 miles to Louisiana for Thanksgiving and finals week (thank you again to the Fontenot family for your extreme generosity).

Once we made it through orations week, this past semester did not slow down, in fact, in some ways it felt more jam-packed than ever. But we were together. And in spite of the fact that new, exciting life changes were on the horizon for all of us, there was an underlying yearning to spend quality leisure time with one another. That's because we love each other. It's what it means to be part of the class of 2021. We will leave this community center today and part ways from this town we have called home for four wonderful years, and these mountains that surround us, and this college that has formed us. But the love that unites us as the class of 2021 will always remain. The blessings we have received these past four years need not fade away.

As St. Thérèse of Lisieux insisted, a little flower doesn't put its light under a bushel or hide its gifts. It testifies to the reality of those gifts in the way it carries itself, both inside and out. And this is key. **We must remember what we have received, and remember that, fundamentally, we have received it.** In our last official theology reading at Wyoming Catholic College, the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI explained that "Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift." My friends, this community founded on truth has certainly revealed and inspired in us a deep love for the true, the good, and the beautiful for one another, and for God. Let us remain in an attitude of grateful receptivity to these gifts. And as every gift evokes a response, let us dedicate the rest of our lives to actively reciprocating with the same enthusiasm for sharing the good in community wherever God takes us.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us.

Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

Anthony Jones is a policy scholar at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. In this role, he conducts research on public policy issues; assists the Foundation in academic publication; educates lawmakers and members of the public on Foundation research; and provides formal testimony to local, state, and federal entities. Prior to this position, Jones completed internships at both the Heritage Foundation and the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Born and raised in Fairfax, Virginia, Jones graduated from Wyoming Catholic College with a B.A. in Liberal Arts. He has a passion for pro-life activism, theology, and mountain biking.