



## **Back to the Basics: ‘Becoming a Christian’**

September 1, 1999

*The following is an excerpt from the first talk in Archbishop Chaput’s “Back to the Basics” Jubilee Lecture Series. It was presented Sept. 1, 1999, at the John Paul II Center for the New Evangelization.*

I want to end my formal remarks tonight with a small observation — but it has some very big consequences. Every real love story is a great love story; and every great love story creates new life. Real love is always fruitful. It’s never barren. The love of husbands and wives bears fruit most obviously in the lives of their children, but also in many forms of Christian service, and in the witness their love provides to other people.

Religious, priests and people called to the single vocation are just as fruitful, but in a different way. They nourish the Church with their lives. They create a witness of radical service, and a legacy of spiritual children and apostolic works.

My point is this: The community of faith is no different from the individuals within it. The Church is the bride of Christ — and that love needs to bear fruit. The new life which the Church brings to the world is salvation in Jesus Christ, through preaching and teaching the Gospel, and offering the sacraments. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit...”

Jesus was talking to us — all of us, including each of us here tonight. If we’re not sharing our love of Jesus Christ with others, it’s diminishing in our own hearts. If we don’t live that love and share it, we lost it. And we can’t be happy without it. That’s what St. Paul meant when he wrote, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.” Baptism indelibly marks us as missionaries. It’s that simple.

Who could doubt that the world needs the Gospel? And here, I’m talking about northern Colorado in a particular way. As a Church, we find ourselves in the middle of a young, secular, highly educated, unchurched and economically very successful social terrain. This is mission territory. This is the new Areopagus. This is the kind of environment John Paul II had in mind in 1985, when he spoke to the Pontifical Council for Culture.

Listen to his words: “You must help the Church respond to (the) fundamental questions for the cultures of today; How is the message of the Church accessible to the new cultures, to contemporary forms of understanding and sensitivity? How can the Church make herself understood by the modern spirit, so proud of its achievements, and at the same time so uneasy for the future of the human family?”

And hear this passage from his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*: "Against the spirit of the world, the Church takes up anew each day a struggle that is *none other than the struggle for the world's soul* ... As the Year 2000 approaches, the world feels an urgent need for the Gospel..." It's appropriate that we're talking tonight in the library of an institute (Our Lady of the New Advent Theological Institute) founded on the goals of the "new evangelization" — the idea that a new missionary spirit needs to be born in each of our hearts, and if it is, that God will use it to win the soul of the world to Christ. Over the next few years, you'll be hearing a lot about the new seminary here. And that's right and proper, because there's no Gospel witness without the Church, there's no Church without the Eucharist; and there's no Eucharist without the priest. We need more priests — good men who are well formed; men who love Jesus Christ and His people. That's the first and most urgent step in renewing our Church.

But if it stops there — no matter how many good seminarians we attract — we fail. Because ultimately, if there's no Church without the Eucharist, and no Eucharist without the priest...there are no priests without families on fire with Christ. Families who help their sons hear God's call; who affirm and support and encourage the priests who already serve them; who live their lives in a way that proves to our priests that their sacrifices make a difference.

What I hope God allows us to help Him build here, is not just an old way of seminary formation with a new vocabulary and an updated marketing strategy — but something true to what the "new evangelization" really is, a communion and mission of the whole Church, ordained, religious and lay, each respecting the other, each serving the Lord by bringing the Good News to the world, and the world to the Good News.

That's the equality of the faithful: each unique; each complementing and completing the other; altogether in service; and on fire with God. I hope in 20 years we can look back on the Our Lady of the New Advent Theological Institute and say, this is where God began something new. And if we can, then like Simeon, we can go home to Him in gratitude and peace.