

Canadian Goan Christian Group: Symposium: Courageous or Coward Christian

Submitted by: Vince Fernandes, CGCG member



On Sunday, November 9th, 2014, over 300 individuals discovered how to become courageous Christians despite shifting realities they face in their daily lives. The Canadian Goan Christian Group (CGCG), provided a captive audience with personal faith encounters from keynote speakers Paul Nazareth, Pauline Dantas and Michelle Coutinho. After opening remarks by Dr. Colin Saldanha, Eric De Souza led the assembly in prayer, followed by a moment of silence and by Rudy and Nelson Fernandes leading in the singing of our national anthem. Ivan Araujo was an effective moderator - prompting speaker presentations, fielding questions from the audience and giving the esteemed panel the opportunity to add to the discourse.

Mr. Paul Nazareth, a philanthropic advisor and social business evangelist, touched upon topics such as creating a personal moral framework and focusing on faith-based family interactions. He urged the audience to partake in social justice causes and philanthropic activities so that the less fortunate could be afforded basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. Living by the Golden Rule and outreaching to those in need encapsulate the Christian way of life that all of us should embrace boldly as we show love to our fellow neighbour. Paul encouraged members of the audience to get involved in Church activities that cater to individuals of different age ranges and Christian interests.

Following Mr. Nazareth's compelling discussion about family and social values, the audience had an opportunity to ask him questions and also to a panel comprised of Dr. Moira McQueen and Fr. Mario D'Souza. Dr. McQueen, who was recently appointed by Pope Francis to the Vatican Theological Commission, answered audience questions from her lenses of moral theology and New Testament teachings from the Bible. Fr. D'Souza also played the role of sounding board, as he responded to the audience with answers rooted in his areas of expertise – philosophy of education, Catholic education, and religion.

Ms. Pauline Dantas, an international businesswoman, business owner, and consultant, shared her perspective about the need for companies to adhere to triple bottom line accounting, which leads to profit while showing concern for people and our planet. Additionally, prescribing to a model of corporate social responsibility is reflective of Christian values that promote the need for taking care of individuals through gainful employment and building communities in the places where organizations choose to set up locations. Pauline explained about her enforcement of fair business practices in her company in the Philippines, while creating an environment that allowed for on-site Church services.

She provided examples of companies such as Microsoft and Apple, which have allowed employees to express their religious liberties through time allotted for prayer and meditation, thereby leading to a marked improvement in employee output. An easy way for professionals to show their Christian values in the workplace is to curb the utterance of profanities and to treat everyone with respect.

Ms. Michelle Coutinho, as a Catholic educator and Principal of diversity, equity, and inclusive education for the Dufferin Peel School Board, encouraged parents to play an active role in their children's faith formation. By creating a parent, school, and home partnership, a child will have a better opportunity to grasp, understand, and practise Catholic values. Michelle gave the audience tangible ways to promote a faith-based environment at home. For example, parents can use visual cues such as crucifixes and holy pictures placed throughout the home to remind family members about their Christian faith. Upon returning from Mass, parents can foster an open dialogue, ask their children about what they learned, and explain how they can apply Christian teachings, virtues, and values to their daily lives. In the classroom, the Catholic School Board uses pastoral guidelines to promote an inclusive learning community at school by supporting the rights of LGBTQ students and showing intolerance to homophobia.

The afternoon culminated on a high note with hockey icon Paul Henderson's keynote address. His inspirational message of hope, enlightenment, and humility brought the audience to a deeper understanding of the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. Despite being a non-believer into his 20s, and continuing to battle cancer in his 70s, Mr. Henderson takes solace in his Christian faith and embraces his purpose statement of being a Christian change agent. Paul Henderson is best known for his game-winning goals for Team Canada in the 1972 Summit series against the Soviet Union. However, engaging in his Christian faith, showing commitment to his wife Eleanor after 52 years of marriage, and using his international celebrity to help others, are what the audience at St. Joseph's Secondary School will undoubtedly remember from Mr. Henderson's stirring speech. After the afternoon's formal agenda concluded, Mr. Henderson obliged the audience with a sold-out autobiography book signing and he posed for pictures with adoring fans.

A special thank you to the CGCG committee, consisting of Fr. Darren Dias, Eric De Souza, Rudy Fernandes, Vince Fernandes, Patsy Fernandez, Cellie Gonsalves, Al Mathias, Angela Menezes, and Dr. Colin Saldanha – who spearheaded the event. The core team, along with several other volunteers, provided the community with an informative, faith-based event that engaged individuals and challenged them to become courageous Christians.
