

The Revolution is Here



The Revolution is Here And there's no going back.

Something extraordinary is happening in England. There's movement, there's change, there's excitement, and there's one word on everyone's lips: Invocation.

In its third year running, the crowning event of the year took place this weekend at Oscott Seminary, Birmingham, drawing Catholics of all shapes and sizes to its doors. Bigger than ever before, it's having a revolutionary effect on British Catholic culture.

Invocation has one major goal in mind: to help young people "hear, recognise, discern, and respond to the call of Christ in their lives."

Are you thinking: 'same old, same old?'

Think again.

Invocation reaches its climax in this yearly festival, but is busy working away throughout the year on all kinds of initiatives which are transforming the lives not only of young Catholics throughout the UK, but also anyone who comes into contact with it, including priests, educators, families and youth leaders.

The organisation's creator and Executive director Chris Smith speaks to Aleteia about the revolutionary organisation and the secret to its success.

“Invocation grew from the work that many of us were doing in vocations ministry in the diocese [Birmingham]” said Smith. “We were working in our parishes, schools, families, and we noticed that there were gaps that needed filling. There were things they needed support with, in building and developing this culture of vocation. So we started just off the cuff, addressing some of those needs.

“We began by helping the education departments with small initiatives and events which very quickly escalated into a full organisation.

“Ultimately what we do is we try to help young people everywhere to hear, recognise, discern and then respond to the call of Christ in their lives. To enable this, we work with many different agencies in and linked to the Church, to support them in providing that outstanding practice, providing the right tools and the best opportunities within the right environments, and to find new, intelligent and inspirational ways of achieving this goal for those young people.

Smith explained that this basically involves - at the first level - providing the proper support and formation for youth leaders, educators, spiritual guides and parish priests, so that they in turn can - at the second level - provide the necessary support for these young people, creating the proper environment for attending to the call of Christ.

A common thread

This is why the four-day festival this weekend was not limited to one bracket of people, but had a day of formation for priests, a day for educators, and then two days dedicated to the youth. They all brought sleeping bags and prayer journals and had an intense time of prayer, celebration, reconciliation and formation.

The secret to Innovation's success is one fundamental element; one common thread that weaves the whole of their work together: Christ.

A personal meeting with Christ is their foundation and focus. “Adoration and confession was available throughout the festival,” said Smith, “and every session, from clergy, to teachers, to youth, is geared and directed towards this concrete, personal encounter with Christ.”

He continued: “Cardinal Hume said, if we are all unique and if we are all made in the image and likeness of Christ, then each person we meet can reveal to us something of Christ that nobody else can.”

Indeed, one of the young participants described Invocation as a “safe harbour” where they could just “be themselves and relax, with no pressure, and encounter Christ, and be formed and inspired by the people” around them.

Christ in the classroom

Sonya Thomas, a teacher and participant at the invocation festival and conferences told Aleteia how Invocation revolutionised Catholic education and culture in her school as well as in her own life.

“After attending an Invocation conference for the first time I felt really inspired to look at the curriculum in our school” said Thomas. She took her experiences with Invocation to the rest of the staff, and they soon implemented a full curriculum, where now, “in every single subject area, they devote a significant amount of time throughout the year to exploring how Jesus Christ works through each subject.”

For example, in History they’ve had “God in the trenches”; in Geography, they are looking at poverty, focusing on charity; in French they are learning the prayers; in Science, the Big Bang, and how it isn’t God v.s. nature but God with and through nature; in Maths they have even taken a look at the Fibonacci code.

Creating this new culture in which Christ is at the centre has changed the whole school. “The first difference I noticed was in the teachers,” Thomas explained, “then through them, you see the difference in the students.”

“Now we can really see Christ working through our school,” she added with a smile.

A culture with a future

The organisation is supported and encouraged by the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelisation. President of the Council, Archbishop Fisichella, attended the event this weekend as the keynote speaker.

Speaking to Aleteia, he described the Invocation festival as both “a moment of ecclesial life and a moment of profound joy.”

He told Aleteia that the “greatest challenge for young people today is to help them discover the value of silence.”

“I am convinced that in a culture and society like ours where the great part of the time is dedicated to noise...that we should rediscover the value of silence, of entering into the profundity of ourselves, of listening to those most important questions that come to the heart and mind of each one of us, and there in the silence, to rediscover the presence and nearness of Jesus Christ.”

“I believe it is the most important proposal that we can make and at the same time the greatest challenge that we must confront. But I am convinced that the young people of today desire greatly to rediscover these moments. And I am convinced that precisely in these moments, in a profound experience of prayer, they can look towards the future with a mature desire and with greater commitment.”

He finished by leaving Aleteia with a little advice for all educators: “Never leave these young people alone,” he stressed. “Be near to them, in a presence which is not oppressive but discrete, which is made strong by the strength of prayer.”

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