

CAMPION COLLEGE VALEDICTORY SPEECH
11th December 2019

President Dr Paul Morrissey, the Very Reverend Anthony Percy, Professor Margaret Somerville, esteemed faculty, members of the board, friends and family, students, alumni and the Graduating Class of 2019.

It falls to me this afternoon to delve back through the memories of these past three years, to say goodbye to my dear friends sitting here before me, and to thank those who have helped us arrive at this important moment in our lives. A moment which we have been anticipating since the beginning of our degree, yet which we hoped would never come. But after three short years, here we are. I think I speak for all the students when I say that during these three years, Campion has truly become a home away from home.

Admittedly, from the outside, our home in Toongabbie is a weird place, constantly haunted by not just ghosts, but also by fire trucks and angry neighbours. And where else can you find people who walk around barefoot so often? Campion is indeed a strange place to the rest of the world. But it is also strange in the best of ways. Because no where else can you find a group of people like our year, who embrace their strangeness. It is strange to think that these people braved the wind and the rain for hours to stand up for the unborn. They cut short those precious hours of sleep and miss out on lunch to visit our Lord in the chapel. They leave their homes and reject offers from prestigious universities to study the Liberal Arts in little old Toongabbie.

And maybe Campion is less known than the other universities, but as all her students can attest, it is every bit as excellent, and more. Through the four core subjects, Campion has truly shown us the value of a good education. And though it was sometimes hard to see the relevance of it all, by our third year, it all seemed to come together.

Through our study of history we delved into the processes of cultural, religious, scientific and political change that formed the world in which we live today. In literature, we explored the rich imaginations of the writers of the past, drawing upon their insights, and through which we are now able to examine with a clear lens the perennial questions about God, morality and the human experience. In philosophy we cultivated a true love of wisdom, and developed the skills and habits of clear thinking and argument required for all fields of study. And in theology, we brought meaning and context to the other disciplines, examining them in the light of our Catholic faith, and developing an understanding of the moral and spiritual realities of our world.

But the benefits we have received from our three years here at Campion do not only extend to our intellectual pursuits, but to our faith as well. Living and studying at Campion has allowed us to develop our spiritual lives and our virtue, and ultimately to grow closer to our Lord. We grew in prudence and temperance by trying to maintain the balance between our academic, spiritual, and social lives. We learned how to be more patient and charitable through living with one another in such close proximity. And we have received many great opportunities to practice courage and justice through our political activism in the Marriage campaign, the federal election and the pro-life movement. We have come far, and we have done many great things.

But none of this spiritual and academic growth could have happened without the support of many, many other people. Firstly, to all the faculty at Campion College, Dr Boschiero, Dr Dray, Dr

Islam, Fr Luke, Dr Bell, Dr McInerney, Dr Chavura, Mr Flynn and Mr Qummou, thank you for your wisdom and guidance, and for making our experience here more enriching than we could have ever hoped for. We truly admire the way that you teach, the way that you speak, and the way that you simply care about all of your students.

I would like to also thank Fr Piotr and Fr Luke for their spiritual support and guidance. Without you, we would not have had the privilege of having such easy access to our Lord in the Eucharist every day. Your advice, counsel, and mere presence at the college is a blessing to us all.

To the benefactors and donors of Campion College; thank you for your financial support. It has certainly allowed many of us to push forward in our studies with a little bit of a lighter burden on our backs.

To all our families and friends, we thank you for all the emotional and financial support you have given us: not only in helping us to decide to study at Campion in the first place, but also being there for us after all the other decisions we make, especially after the bad ones.

And finally, to the third years, the graduating class of 2019, the soon-to-be alumni of Campion College, but most importantly, my closest and dearest friends. I would like to thank you for joining me on this enriching, exhausting and awesome academic odyssey. St Thomas Aquinas said that "among all worldly things there is nothing which seems worthy to be preferred to friendship... all that pleases is changed to weariness when friends are absent, and all difficult things are made easy and as nothing by love." And your friendship really did make the sleepless nights in the fish tank and the stress of exams as nothing. Yes, the Ball and the parties were fun, but the things that kept me hooked to this place the most were the small moments with you all in between. I will miss those cool summer evenings before dinner, throwing the frisbee around in front of the library (sorry Keziah); the Maccas runs and the water fights; the spontaneous polyphony; jamming in the band room; showers in the dorms with the lads; and drinking tea late into the night talking about Vatican II, or whether women can wear pants.

Now because I'm only 20 and don't have nearly enough wisdom to say anything more than what has already been said, I will merely pass on the wisdom of probably the most quotable Catholic of the 20th century: G. K. Chesterton. He says that "it is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most." So, my friends, don't be afraid to stay strange.

Don't be afraid to be counter-cultural. Believe in God, though He is despised and ignored. Seek the truth, in this relativistic and nihilistic culture. Strive for virtue in a world that adores vice. And stand for life in this culture of death. No matter where you go from here, whether it be into further studies, a job, missionary work, or straight into the arms of a husband, I hope and pray that you retain the courage and resilience I have seen in every single one of you, and that you will be the contradictions that this world desperately needs. Yes, it will be difficult. People may despise you and try to tear you down. But As St Catherine of Siena said, "nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring." And finally, if it ever feels like it's too much, always remember that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. May God bless you all. Thank you.

Rainier Juanta
St. Patrick's Cathedral, Parramatta
11th December 2019