

I live in Omemee and I'm proud of the fact that three of the greatest and most famous Canadians grew up and/or lived here: Neil Young, Scott Young, and Lady Flora Eaton. Neil Young needs no introduction; he's my favourite songwriter and a world famous singer/songwriter/guitarist. Scott Young, Neil's dad, was a great journalist, sportswriter, and novelist. Lady Eaton isn't quite as famous now as she was, but she married into the Eaton family and became one of the wealthiest, most powerful people in Canada for much of the 20th century. And she started off as just one of the girls in the Macrae family of King St, Omemee.

It's pretty amazing when you think about it. I mean, Millbrook has Serena Ryder – who's pretty awesome. She's always been a great singer and now she's becoming a leader in the mental health movement. But that's just one person. It's hard to believe that one little Kawartha town – Omemee – produced three of Canada's greatest people.

But I'm about to blow your mind by saying that there is actually a fourth famous Omemeean. His name is Charles Norris Cochrane. Cochrane is not very well-known right now, but he was an internationally respected Professor of History at the University of Toronto. His most important book, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, was read and admired by great thinkers around the world for decades after it was published in 1945. And this world-renowned author and academic was a third-generation Omemee boy who grew up just down the street from the house where the Young family would live and not far at all from Lady Eaton's home. Cochrane's father and grandfather were doctors in Omemee.

As I said: as great as Cochrane was, he is no longer a household name. I only learned about Cochrane because my dad had somehow heard about him. Then I only got my hands on his book because my friend Jeremy found an old used copy and loaned it to me. (The spine broke while I was reading it cuz it was so old and had obviously never been read; sorry, Jeremy!)

As I read Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture* in 2019, I was so gripped and fascinated by it that I took 59 pages of notes on it as I read! I knew I'd have to give the book back to Jeremy so I wanted to get all the big ideas down in my University of Omemee Notes. (There's a University of Omemee, but that's a whole other story.) I couldn't believe that the

wise man who was teaching the world such huge ideas grew up just around the corner from where I was reading his book.

I'm going to briefly tell you a bit about the fascinating main idea of Cochrane's book as a message for the Feast of the Reign of Christ.

Cochrane asks the million dollar question: Did Christ really change the world? What (if any) was the difference between the Roman Pagan world and the subsequent Christian world? Considering the world around us, lots of people often think: "What was the point of Christ's coming? The world has just as much suffering as ever and the Church itself has caused a lot of it. How did the world change for the better after Christ?" Cochrane was the perfect man to answer this question because he was equally knowledgeable about the Classical Greek/Roman world *and* the early Church. Cochrane appreciated Rome *and* the Church, so he was able to compare and contrast them sympathetically and offer a big new idea. He was neither a polemical Christian tossing blanket condemnations at the pagan world (there *are* people like that!), nor a close-minded secular scholar condemning everything about the Church (there are people like that too!). In my opinion, Cochrane gives both historical eras a fair treatment, which is evidence of a great thinker.

To answer this big question, Cochrane contrasted the ideal (or perfect) person in ancient Rome to the ideal person in the Christian world. What kind of person did the ancient Romans think a person should be? What kind of person did the early Christians think a person should be? Who was admired and looked up to in these two different historical eras? You can tell a lot about a person (or about a historical age) by learning about their heroes.

Well, no surprise here, but the Romans looked up to the Emperor as the perfect person. Starting with Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus, the Emperor was admired so much that the Senate declared him to be a god. The ideal person was right there for every Roman to see: the Emperor himself. And if you didn't agree that he was a god and didn't want to worship him, you could be in big, big trouble. I mean, you could be fed alive to lions: not a good way to die, I'd say, when you really think about it.

So what was so important about this divine Emperor? First of all, he was male. The female had no part in this idea of the ideal human being. Rome was totally patriarchal and

women were unquestionably second-class citizens who couldn't inherit property or be in any kind of leadership position.

What else was so "perfect" about him? Well, it can all be summed up in one word: POWER. The Emperor was a *man* and he was the world's most powerful man. He was power personified. He ruled the known world. He had the world's biggest and best armies at his command. He could literally do whatever he wanted. Emperors would have their own family members killed whenever they wanted. Wouldn't that solve those awkward Christmas dinners? Seriously, Constantine the Great even had his own wife and son executed. And Constantine was the first Christian Emperor! – but that's a whole other story. There was a Senate, but really the Emperor could do whatever he wanted. He was above morality and above the law. He was a god and everyone wanted to be like him.

Cochrane puts forward this idea: this Roman tendency to worship power and authority helped Rome rule the known world, but it also led to an empty, depraved – even boring – form of life in which nothing was appreciated except conquest and power. There was no *flair* or genius or deep creativity in the Roman world. Possibly the greatest writer and speaker in Rome was Cicero, but he never really expressed any very original ideas. C.S. Lewis calls him "*the great bore*" and I heartily agree. Cicero spoke in favour of the middle class, middle-of-the-road, play-it-safe, bourgeois, possessions-first life. So, yeah, he would've been right at home in 21st century North America.

Now Cochrane was always fair to Rome, so I will be too. The Roman Emperors actually did a lot of good for the world. It's been said that the second century AD was one of the best eras in world history. The Roman Empire brought the rule of law to the world. People led safe and stable lives in the Empire. There were some great technological advances, but – at the end of the day – there was no real originality or genius. Rome's writers and sculptors never added anything to the Greek accomplishments. Virgil was a great poet, but he was simply celebrating Rome's ability to dominate and colonize. In fact, it could be argued that the Roman Empire somehow lasted for 8 or 9 centuries while producing fewer great thinkers than Omamee has, in one century. Even given a million years, the Roman Empire would never have produced a Lady Eaton – a powerful, ambitious, innovative woman. And given a billion years, the Romans would never have produced a Neil Young – a passionate, funny, irreverent, wise old man in ripped jeans and a plaid shirt.

Seriously: why is that? Why was Rome so limited, even as it dominated the world? Cochrane says that their ideal person – their powerful, controlling, wealthy male idea – simply couldn't lead to any human greatness or beauty or originality.

So, now, what were these early Christians like? Were they different at all? Well, in a word, they were crazy. The Romans certainly thought so. The first Christians blew this Roman *ideal person* out of the water. Instead of trying to be like the all-powerful Emperor, the Christians were all very different.

Here are some of the ways in which the early Church was changing what it meant to be human:

- 1) In the midst of ordered, controlled, dignified Rome, the early saints were (Cochrane says) “a heterogeneous mob of archcriminals and *renegades*.” Have you ever heard church-goers described as renegades? In the Roman world, not worshiping the Emperor made you a criminal. Not taking part in Roman religion made you a renegade, an outcast from society. The early Christians accepted that that's where they had to be. They found themselves on the margins of society.
- 2) While Rome was obsessed with the idea of Roman citizenship – proclaiming that a non-Roman was definitely a second class human – the early Christians welcomed all nationalities and cultures and languages. There were no second class humans in the Church. No-one would ever be forced to un-learn their own language and adopt the culture of the dominant people. That would be the opposite of the Church's belief.
- 3) The ideal Christian could be male or female. In the early Christian world, women were allowed to inherit property and they often became leaders in the communities.
- 4) While Rome had absolutely no problem at all *forcing* people to worship the Emperor, St. Athanasius (a 4th century theologian) said clearly, “Coercion can have no role in encouraging people to be Christian.” That was a clear criteria for the Christians: NO COERCION. Any Christian who would attempt to bully or threaten or frighten other people into becoming Christian was modeling him or herself not after Christ, but Christ's enemy.

- 5) While Rome was obsessed with the idea of personal possessions and power, the early Christians actually shared all their things, taking care of each other so no-one would starve.
- 6) Finally, there was a new freedom to be different. There was less emphasis on modeling oneself after any one person, such as the Emperor. The key word Cochrane uses is *heterogenous*. No-one was trying to be like anyone else. They could all be completely different and still be living out their faith in Jesus, the young Galilean Rabbi. A scholar who was very influenced by Cochrane, George Grant, often spoke of the modern world's tendency to become *homogeneous*. In our world, more and more communities look the same, more and more houses look the same, and everything has to be standardized so it all fits together like clockwork and we are mere cogs. The first Christians completely rebelled against that tendency. You never knew what they were going to do. You never knew what they were going to be like. In fact, Cochrane argues, the whole idea of the distinct, God-created individual was being born.

The key words for this final point are: *person* and *personality*. Rome knew very little about personality. All they knew was success, domination, control, capability, honour, and dignity.

Even Rome's two widespread ideas were not that interesting. *Stoicism* preached that you should not express your emotions, just bury your feelings deep down and control yourself completely so that you never show any weakness or...personality. It's a completely unrealistic, impossible idea of the human person, but it has gained back a lot of ground in those of us who are of British descent. For us, emotion is a bad word. Rome's other big idea, *Epicureanism*, preached that you should simply spend your life seeking pleasure – which is of course also a big part of our world today. Now Epicureanism could certainly lead to some personalities, but they would be destructive and completely self-centered.

In the Christian era, personalities began to abound. I mean, they *really* did. They stopped caring about their Roman, Ciceronian, middle-of-the-road, safe, successful lives and started desperately pursuing a deeper, more meaningful life. Many men and women

retreated into the wilderness so that they could get away from society completely. They lived simply in nature, praying, gardening, and talking about life and Christ. These were the Desert Fathers and Mothers. No Romans would ever have done this. This would have seemed like insanity and irresponsibility to the old Roman citizens.

St Simeon Stylites (my personal favourite) climbed up to the top of a pillar and stayed there praying for years and years. People would gather around the bottom of the pillar and pray with him and ask his advice.

Then when the Church reached Ireland, people really went nuts. The Irish would go out to hills alone all night and commune with stars and angels. They would set out on the sea in round boats with no oars, allowing God to take them where-ever he wanted to.

But most Christians didn't quit their jobs and become cave-dwellers. They simply began watching out for the people who were suffering in their communities. They started meeting together for a strange new ritual called "Eucharist" in which all people became family. They began communing directly with the Spirit of God in a way no Roman ever would have dreamed of. Life became more interesting and people became more interesting.

The Christians didn't care at all about expanding the glory and power of Rome. They just wanted to expand the glory of the love of God and to be who they thought God wanted them to be. It was up to each individual to decide what God was calling them to. Rome saw this as very, very strange. Agree with them or disagree with them, these people were *personalities* in a way no Roman ever was.

And the strangest of them all was a 4th and 5th century Christian Bishop named Augustine. He really broke the mold in a way that re-shaped forever what the human could or should be like. He did something no human being had ever done before. He wrote an autobiography. He called it the *Confessions* because in it he was confessing his sins, his confusion, his strange life journey, and his faith in a God who was interested in his journey. *No Roman would ever ever ever talk about his sins or confusion.* But things had changed in the centuries since Christ's death and resurrection. When a Roman wrote something about themselves, it was just about how awesome and powerful they were – Julius Caesar did exactly that in his book on the Gallic Wars. In the book he says again and again: "Here's how I defeated and dominated these people. Here's how I defeated and dominated these other

people. I'm pretty amazing, eh?" I personally learned Latin by studying this book and I can tell you how boring it really was.

Augustine was completely different. There was no longer any perfect ideal person because each person was his or her own standard. Or you could say, the divine Son of God, Jesus Christ was now the standard, but we aren't commanded to be exactly like him. We don't have to be a single, Jewish Rabbi who gets executed while still young. We're commanded to be true to His principles of wisdom, love, hope, and faith in Him. Comparing yourself to others – even Christ Himself – is vanity because no two people should look or be the same. Augustine struggled for decades with lust, desire for fame, and hatred of the physical world till he finally found peace and became a Bishop and writer. 1500 years have passed, and there's never been anyone exactly like him, just as there'll never be anyone like you or me. We are all distinct individuals who find our identity not in the amount of money or power we have, but in our God-given personhood.

After the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, there was a new ideal. The Emperor started to fade away – thank goodness! Now there was a new King. The Reign of Christ (which we celebrate today) would be totally different – *totally different* – from the reign of Caesar. This new king gives up power. This new king doesn't use his advantage over others. This new king spends as much time talking with women as men. This new king wanders off by himself into the hills to talk to an invisible God. This new king gathered hard-working fishermen around him and it seems like half his stories are about farming. This new king reached beyond traditional racial and language differences to Samaritans, Romans, and Syrophenicians.

But most of all, he didn't want to control and limit the human person. He wanted to set us free in the Spirit so that we might have life and "have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). So it's no wonder that the church has always had so many interesting characters. Since Augustine, people have been interested in their own unique lives, not trying to fit into any one mold.

Now here's the bad news: our society has gone back completely to the worship of personal power, wealth, and domination. Cochrane implies this, though he doesn't flesh it out very much. Through much of the Church's history, it has worshiped power and success as much as ancient Rome, and nowadays we Christians offer very little opposition to the

idea that the only worthwhile person is a successful, wealthy, powerful person. Throughout much of Christian history – and especially in Canada in the 20th century – the Church has often done the opposite of what Christ commanded; just like the Roman Emperors, we have used coercion and abuse and psychological domination to try to make people like us. I'm talking here about the Canadian Residential Schools. The Residential Schools were the exact opposite of everything Christ was trying to accomplish on earth, and it was modern Canadian Anglicans that were doing it. In that whole project - which spans most of Canadian history – we were using power, coercion, and societal wealth in order to mold indigenous children into an “ideal” Christian person, completely disrespecting their culture and their God-given personhood.

The Residential Schools weren't just a mistake by an otherwise nice Church; they demonstrate that the modern Canadian Church has largely lost its way and has abandoned its founding principle of respect for the God-created human person. These evil and horrific schools could not have been opened and kept open for over a century unless Canadian Christians had gone back completely to worshipping the ideal human person as a powerful, wealthy man who could control women, children, and most of the cultures and peoples of the world. Christians were (and are?) spear-heading this worship of the dominant male human who can do whatever he wants to anyone, especially forcing others to be like him. The old idea of the ideal male Roman citizen has just been replaced by the white, British-North American male who has been trying (for three centuries now) to create the whole world (the earth and everything in it) in his own image. As if he himself is God.

But here on the feast of the Reign of Christ, we can try to regain the big idea of Christ's kingship. When he came to rule, he didn't come as a Stoic, nondescript person. He was fully and completely human. Jesus had personality: anger, sadness, creativity, fear. He had culture and language, ie, he was a Jew and he loved and treasured his Jewish heritage. He wasn't just wearing a human costume; he was fully human and he still is. The early Christians saw this amazing affirmation of the human experience and they started being their own personalities and started respecting all cultures and languages in a way ancient Rome certainly never did.

And as we interact with other Christians within our churches, we have to realize that we are a community of personalities. We will argue and disagree, but we can never treat the



other person as less of a human, trying to force the other person into our own image. We can disagree and argue about doctrine and morality, but we should never curse the other person or condemn them to hell. We say the Creed and read Scriptures together, but we are all very, very, very different people. There's no longer one ideal type of person. Christ destroyed that idea by becoming flesh, breaking down the barrier between humanity and divinity. Now, we become God-like, not by conforming to one ideal powerful male image, but by finding our unique identity in Him.

For myself, reading Cochrane's book was a real blessing. It made me more confident in my unique, unrepeatable identity. The example of the powerful, efficient, domineering Roman Emperor is not only undesirable, but actually unattainable for me. I would have been an unwelcome barbarian back in Roman times, dressed in fur skins and living somewhere north of Hadrian's Wall in the Scottish Highlands. They would never have let me into Rome to be a full citizen. And that's fine, because I have a different ideal now. I don't have to feel insecure. I don't have to feel like I'm a subhuman simply because I resemble no big strong Roman Emperor.

So as we celebrate the Reign of Christ, let's also remember the fourth great Canadian from Omeme: Chares Norris Cochrane and his book *Christianity and Classical Culture*. I'd recommend you read it, but it'll be tough to find. And even tougher to get through – it took me about 5 months! Cochrane's majestic thesis is simply that, in the Church, there isn't just one ideal form of person. We follow a new ideal person who sets us free in our own way as we strive to love and have faith in different ways. And a person's worth and personhood is no longer based on their success or power or wealth or how much they measure up to the Roman Emperor. Under the reign of the God who gloried in his own Jewish, 1st Century, Palestinian humanity, it is clear that all human persons have a distinct and fascinating personality that must be expressed. Culture, language, personality: these things are not detrimental to Christian life. Control and domination and coercion and abuse are detrimental to Christian life. If the Church is true to its Founder's life and message, those *power-moves* must no longer be options.

Since we Canadians live in a country that practiced the control and domination and coercion and abuse of indigenous children for so long, we have to look at ourselves deeply

and closely. We have to ask ourselves why that was possible. We have to ask ourselves how we have to change.