

# CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AS CENTRES OF 'THE NEW EVANGELISATION'

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In his Encyclical on the Church's Mission John Paul II said: "I sense that the moment has come to commit all the Church's energies to a new evangelisation." (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990) This call was the antiphon of his pontificate as he called the Church to preach the Gospel anew in previously Christian communities which were falling away from the Gospel in the face of secularisation and other cultural change. In his Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis the Pope explained that the definitive aim of evangelisation "is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (*Catechesi Tradendæ*, 1979) In this John Paul II echoed his predecessors such as Paul VI, whose own Encyclical on Evangelisation in the Modern World, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), remains a classic on this topic. This emphasis on evangelisation and catechesis has been reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI and by Church leaders around the world.

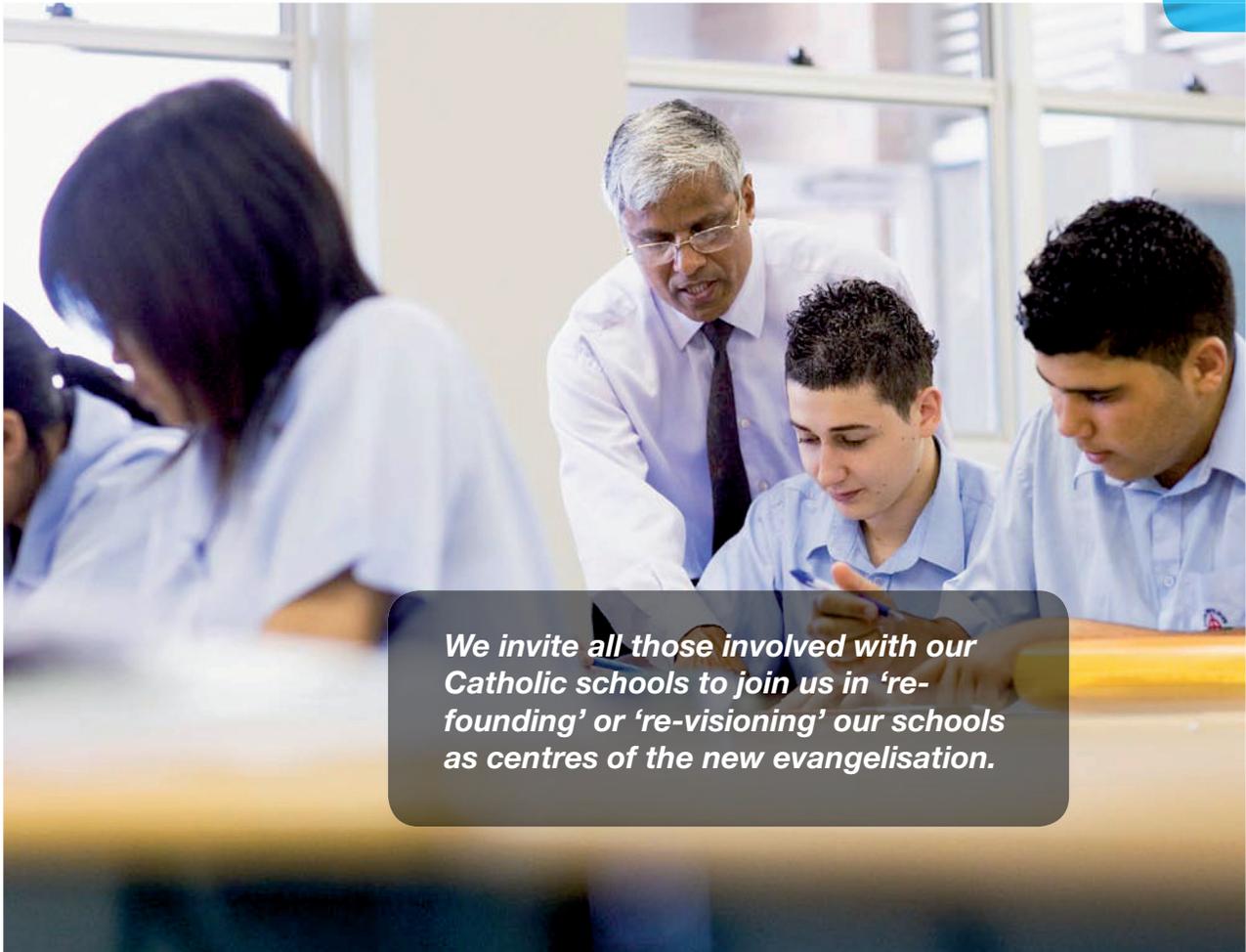
*Evangelisation* means proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. Its goal is bringing people to faith through a personal encounter with Him. It is to be distinguished from *catechesis*, which involves deepening and instructing that faith already received. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Jesus Christ and the Peoples of Oceania, John Paul II noted that:

*Living the life of Jesus Christ implies...a living spirituality and authentic morality, strengthened by the word of God in Scripture and celebrated in the Sacraments of the Church. When Christians live the life of Christ with deeper faith, their hope grows stronger and their charity more radiant. That was the goal of the Synod, and it is the goal of the new evangelisation to which the Spirit is summoning the whole Church...The present generation of Christians is called and sent now to accomplish a new evangelisation among the peoples of Oceania, a fresh proclamation of the enduring truth evoked by the symbol of the Southern Cross. This call to mission poses great challenges, but it also opens new horizons, full of hope and even a sense of adventure. (Ecclesia in Oceania 2001, 8 and 13)*

The 'sense of adventure' inspired by the new evangelisation is all the more urgent in the context of growing numbers of non-practising Catholics, under-catechised Catholics and other-than-Catholic students in our schools. All Christians receive the gift of faith at Baptism, and many others carry "the seeds of faith" within their hearts. But many of them need the Gospel to be proclaimed to them anew. This is not a matter of proselytising or "forcing beliefs down students' throats"—quite the contrary. Genuine faith cannot be imposed: it is freely received or rejected. If we are "up front" about our educational and catechetical goals with any prospective student, teacher or parent, while encouraging students to engage with open hearts and reasoning minds, then we are fully justified in engaging in activities of witness, formation and service.

If Catholic schools are to be centres of the new evangelisation:

- + the life and activity in the school would be the context for a personal encounter with Christ and would promote, and never contradict, the teachings of the Church
- + all those involved in our schools would appreciate their roles in receiving and proclaiming the Good News by word and deed, and by the example of their lives
- + students would participate in RE classes, liturgies, retreats and prayers which are, as far as possible, tailored to their place in the journey of faith, addressing the core of our faith and inviting a response
- + special programs would be developed for students who first enter a Catholic school later than Kindergarten (for instance in Year 7) and may not have received much prior religious education
- + schools would work with their local parish(es) to establish programs for initiating children and young adults into the Church
- + other efforts would be pursued to integrate the activity of our primary and secondary schools with the life of the surrounding parish(es) and diocese, so that our young people are given a sense of belonging to a wider Church beyond their family and school
- + consideration would be given to the desirability of establishing Catholic pre-schools, with catechesis appropriate to this crucial stage in faith formation
- + every effort would be made to engage our students and young teachers in preparations for, participation in and enrichment after major religious events such as World Youth Day
- + families and parishes would back up and support their schools in all these activities.



*We invite all those involved with our Catholic schools to join us in 're-founding' or 're-visioning' our schools as centres of the new evangelisation.*