

### ***The New Evangelization in Our Catholic Schools: Creating a Culture of Belief amid a World of Indifference***

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#### **INTRODUCTION: CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AS CENTERS OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

There is no experience quite like it in the world! To stand in the vast expanse of St. Peter's Square; to talk and laugh among the sojourners who have come to the *Eternal City* from every corner of the globe. They have diverse ethnicities and faith traditions, yet they are all waiting for an opportunity to enter this holy place whose portals are ever welcoming. Then a hush falls upon the visitors as the massive doors open, and they are ushered into the beauty and sacredness of this great Basilica.

Just as those pilgrims are drawn to Rome, all people are drawn to the Divine. Even though most modern cultures espouse relativism "which does not recognize anything as definitive"<sup>1</sup> and secularism which implores man "to build his life without God,"<sup>2</sup> however people, most especially the youth, are searching for some sort of faith and belief. In the words of Blessed John Paul II, "There remains a thirst for the absolute, a desire for goodness, a hunger for truth, the need for personal fulfillment."<sup>3</sup> Such yearnings are our hope as Catholic school educators! Yet the desire to see the face of God often remains unsatisfied and dormant amid the deafening clamor of those who "preach" individual and complete autonomy. On the contrary, the New Evangelization, with Christ Himself as its conductor, eschews the modern secular culture, seeks to restore universal harmony, and, by doing so, addresses the desire for God that lies in the heart of each human being. Today we celebrate that God has called all of you as Catholic educators to be members of Christ's symphony—true evangelists who strive each day to echo in the hearts and the hallways of your schools the Church's choral expression of the very core of Jesus' redemptive mission: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, April 18, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Speech in Spain, November 7, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Blessed Pope John Paul II, Speech to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture, March 14, 1997.



I know that you already have the “Song of Songs” swelling through your hearts, but I would like to examine how you, personally and as a whole, are the true models of the New Evangelization as you communicate that joy to your students, and, ultimately, to an often jaded and disillusioned world.

Faith comes through grace and the Holy Spirit. However, believing is the truly human act of understanding and accepting, and, as such, it possesses both personal and relational dimensions. Is it no wonder that Pope Benedict XVI used the term “ushering” to announce the current *Year of Faith*?<sup>4</sup> To usher means to escort, lead, introduce, and conduct. Each synonym implies a relationship, an interaction, and a movement. Thus, as Catholic school evangelists, we must lead our students away from the culture of non-belief and usher them ever more deeply into the mystery and the majesty of our faith. Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization states: “One specific task, however, which is asked of us is to avoid travelling alone. In any event, we cannot do this; we are incapable of it; by nature we are *Catholics*; that is open to all and wishing to be alongside each person to offer them the company of the faith. We want to speak to all, even if we know that not everyone wishes to have dialogue with us. We have all been invited to knock on every door, even though we know that many remain barred.”<sup>5</sup>

Let me relate to you a story that illustrates why it is so important for us to travel with our young people and to immerse them in a culture that ever reminds them that they are surrounded by the joy of a belief in God. After years of being a chaplain and teacher at one of our Diocesan high schools, I was asked by my Bishop to serve as the President of that same school. I was in this new position of authority, but I could not forget the anguish that I had detected in so many young voices as I spoke with them in my office or heard their confessions. Our exemplary Catholic high school, to which parents were working hard to send their children, had a major drug problem. These kids were struggling with the demon of drug usage—they were trying either not to get hooked or to get unhooked.

There was only one solution, and so I introduced a drug testing program to the school. The initial reaction from both parents and students was unbelievable. I was being portrayed as a person on a witch hunt, and they thought I was changing the trusting and positive energy of the school. They used all of those “buzz words” of the contemporary culture—I was destroying the students’ independence and turning the school into a repressive institution. In response to these venomous insults, I called a special assembly and invited students, parents, and even community leaders. During the assembly I explained that as Catholic educators we had a duty to protect life, all life, and that we would not allow the devil of drugs to destroy the very existence of our students. In fact, I explained, we were giving them a new independence away from the slavery of addiction.

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Motu proprio Porta Fidei*, October 11, 2011, no. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Archbishop Rino Fisichella, *The New Evangelization: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference* (London: Gracewing, 2011), 44.

Without getting into all of the procedural details of the process which we followed, my staff and I would inevitably come to the decision that we would have to ask certain students to leave because they were endangering others in addition to themselves. These were always the toughest days for me. I was especially disturbed by one young man who was so angry at his dismissal that he accused me of being a poor excuse of a priest because I did not practice tolerance and forgiveness. His face haunted me for months; I knew that he was a good kid at heart but just very confused.

However, one evening, over a year later, that same young man banged on the front door as I was finishing up paperwork. I was shocked to see him because he had left so bitterly.

"Father," he said, "I wanted you to know that the program saved my life, and this school saved my soul. After my dismissal, I was cleaning out my locker when a teacher who assisted in the drug program came up to me. She had tears in her eyes and really seemed to care that I was leaving. When she said, 'We are doing this because you are a child of God and we love you,' I thought to myself that if you really loved me you would let me stay, and I got even angrier."

"I entered my treatment program hating everybody, but I found myself with time to reflect upon all that had happened—how people cared about me and wanted me to be the best person I could. And I went through tough withdrawal with that teacher's words echoing in me until finally, by God's grace, I really believed them to be true." He thanked me once again and went on his way.

So you see, once that young man opened his mind and his heart to the culture of faith that celebrates and treats each person as having been made in the image and likeness of God and worthy of being loved, he found the strength and received the grace to stand up against the drugs that could only lead to dissipation and, ultimately, death.

Thus, more than ever before in history, our roles in the lives of young people are critically important. We must continue to ask ourselves what type of culture are we creating in our schools, and do we have a set of priorities that clearly delineates the doctrines of Jesus Christ? We have to be strong evangelizers to combat the culture of indifference that is so prevalent today.

And yet, as a former high school president, I know the daily pressures which you face and the struggles that are before you. I can remember asking myself many times, "How can I prioritize all of the necessary tasks to maintain a Christian culture, for I am just trying to survive each day, and my hours are filled with discipline issues, financial challenges, and never ending parent complaints."

Everybody around me had his or her own top priority, and I would be pulled in so many directions: "Father you have to make this school the finest academic institution." "Father you have to make it a football powerhouse." But it was during these moments when I realized that unless I, as the Catholic educator and leader, set the culture of the school, first and foremost, directed towards what it means to be Church, to be Catholic, problems would only multiply and our community would disintegrate. For each organization within the Church becomes disjointed and loses its natural vitality if it distances itself from the priority of its founder Jesus Christ.

And what was the priority of Jesus Christ? Simply put, Jesus was not just an evangelizer but was the greatest evangelizer, the one who preached the Kingdom of God and made it the heart of his message. "Jesus preached the kingdom. He ushered it in with his life, death and resurrection.

After the Resurrection, the apostles no longer proclaim the kingdom as Jesus did. They now proclaim the Crucified and Risen Jesus as Lord.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it was Jesus Christ who after his resurrection commissioned his disciples to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28: 19).

Pope Paul VI, attentive to the missionary nature of Christ and wanting to ensure that the Church remain on this missionary course as set during the Second Vatican Council, stated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: “Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”<sup>7</sup> For Pope Paul VI, evangelization was synonymous with mission, and he further believed that the Second Vatican Council had as its objective the task “of seeking to put the Church on the main road of the evangelization of the contemporary world.”<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, we must avoid the misconception that the renewed focus on evangelization and its title as the “New Evangelization” have anything to do with declining numbers in many of our parishes and schools. Simply put, we evangelize because it is what Jesus did, and it is who we are as Church. Pope Francis reinforced this point so clearly to a group of 6,000 seminarians and novices in the Paul VI Hall of the Vatican on this past July 6 when he stated: “I would like a more missionary Church, not so much of a tranquil Church, but a beautiful Church that goes forward.” No sooner had these words been spoken then the youth erupted in joyful celebration, recognizing that they were to be the missionaries, the new evangelists. We, also, have this excitement for the mission that we are called by God to engender in the hearts of our students. In fact, I feel that we are very fortunate to be Catholic educators in this unique time in the history of our Church. There is much work to be done, but the opportunities are ever before us, and the grace of God is always with us.

Before I conclude this introduction, I would like to recall the words of the *Lineamenta* of the 2012 Synod of Bishops on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*: “The New Evangelization is the opposite of self-sufficiency, a withdrawal into oneself, a *status quo* mentality and an idea that pastoral programs are simply to proceed as they did in the past. Today, a ‘business as usual’ attitude can no longer be the case... Now is the time for the Church to call upon every Christian community to evaluate their pastoral practice on the basis of the missionary character of their programs and activities.”<sup>9</sup>

As teachers and leaders of the Christian communities called schools, we must take to heart this sage advice and not be afraid to strike from our minds and lips the sentiment: “Well, we do it this way because that is the way we have always done it.” And yet, do not think that the promotion of the New Evangelization means casting aside our school traditions for empty novelty; however, it does mean that our schools need to be ever more missionary focused in character and culture. While the Gospel can never change, the times in which we live most definitely have. We must be cognizant

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<sup>6</sup> Bishop Arthur J. Serratelli, Pastoral Letter, *Evangelization: Grace and Vocation*, May 11, 2008, no. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, December 8, 1975, no. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Talk in Leeds, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *Lineamenta: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*, 2011, no. 10.

of such change and work ever harder to create a school environment in which our students can become melodic voices in the culture of belief.

#### HOW THE NEW EVANGELIZATION RESPONDS TO THE CHALLENGE OF INDIFFERENCE

In 2008, when my bishop named me Episcopal Vicar for the New Evangelization, my mother asked me what she should now tell her friends about my new job. I suggested that she simply give them the title, to which she quickly responded: “I can’t do that, because they will think that you have become Protestant.” My mother was certainly echoing the perception which many Catholics have had regarding the term “evangelization”. Thus, it is important that we as leaders are able to understand and express in precise language an accurate definition of the New Evangelization.

And, indeed, in the past, the Church had often been reticent to use the terms “evangelization” or “to evangelize” out of the belief that they sounded too Protestant. As a result, the Church preferred to speak of “mission”. However, in the 1950s, the Church began to speak “about evangelization as the activity of the Church which was identified with the first proclamation of the Gospel and of catechesis to define the systematic formation of believers who had already been evangelized.”<sup>10</sup>

This new terminology was continued with the Second Vatican Council which placed the Church on course for the evangelization of the contemporary world. Often this primary objective of the Second Vatican Council becomes confused with a belief that it was convened for the purpose of modernizing the Church. Yet, we see from Blessed John XXIII’s Allocution, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* which opened the Second Vatican Council, the true purpose for calling the Council was to examine the contemporary world and its changed relationship with God in order to arrive at more effective means to preach the Gospel.<sup>11</sup> In this way, the world would be changed on faith’s terms: “It is necessary that this doctrine, certain and immutable, and to which faithful assent must be given, be deepened and expounded in a way which is demanded by our age. In fact, the Deposit of faith is one thing, that is to say the truths which are contained in our venerable doctrine, but the way in which they are expressed is another, always, though, with the same meaning and understanding” (no. 6.5).

Following in the trajectory set by the Second Vatican Council, Blessed John Paul II first introduced the actual term “New Evangelization” during his 1979 apostolic visit to Poland. However, it was in his Magisterium given in 1983 to the Churches in Latin America that he used the term to inspire greater efforts in the missionary and evangelizing initiatives on that continent: “The commemoration of this half millennium of evangelization will have full significance if, as bishops,

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<sup>10</sup> Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2009), 180.

with your priests and faithful, you accept it as your commitment; a commitment not of re-evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expressions.”<sup>12</sup>

His use of the term “new” rather than “re” is of great significance. If the prefix “re” had been used, the mission could have been perceived as an indictment upon prior pastoral work, and this is something which must be avoided. For example, when I was building a Center for New Evangelization in the U.S., I faced some strong resistance from pastors. At first, I was surprised by this negativity but soon came to realize the origin of their opposition. They perceived the New Evangelization as a condemnation of their pastoral leadership and ministry. My immediate mission then was to help them understand that the New Evangelization is not an indictment of their ministries but an indictment of the state of our contemporary world. As stated so clearly by Archbishop Fisichella: “Allow us to speak of the New Evangelization as a form by means of which one and the same Gospel from the beginning is proclaimed with new enthusiasm, in a new language which is comprehensible in a different cultural situation and with new methodologies which are capable of transmitting its deepest sense, that sense which remains immutable.”<sup>13</sup>

Further, in his 2000 Address to Catechists and Teachers, the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger made an important distinction between the permanent and the new evangelization: “The Church has always evangelized and has never interrupted the path of evangelization. She celebrates the Eucharistic Mystery every day, administers the sacraments, proclaims the Word of Life—the Word of God, and commits herself to the causes of justice and charity.”<sup>14</sup> He goes on to explain that while this permanent evangelization has borne great fruits, many today are unable to find the Gospel, and thus have no clear path in life. He notes: “This is why we are searching for, along with permanent and uninterrupted, a new evangelization, capable of being heard by a world that does not find access to ‘classic’ evangelization. Everyone needs the Gospel.”<sup>15</sup>

So to sum up all of the above explanations, the New Evangelization is the mission to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior of all, inviting and ushering each man and woman to a personal relationship with the One who is love. However, this mission cannot be reduced to a program which is placed in a box and then opened and implemented for each school and parish. The New Evangelization is much more than a program. It is a way of being Church.<sup>16</sup> In order to take to heart most effectively this mission of how to be Church, each of the faithful must remember the words of Blessed John Paul II, “The Church proposes; she imposes nothing.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the New Evangelization is not to be confused with proselytizing or with the act of telling the world what it must believe. There can be no arm-wrestling people to God. Rather, the New Evangelization requires that within the relational context,

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<sup>12</sup> Blessed John Paul II, *Discourse to the XIX Assembly of C.E.L.A.M.* March 9, 1983, no. 3. See Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Address to Catechists and Religion Teachers, *The New Evangelization: Building the Civilization of Love*, December 12, 2000, no. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Serratelli, no. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Blessed John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990, no. 39.

we share who Christ is for us and then give witness to the great joy and hope that come from having this personal encounter with Him. Of course, such a way of being Church requires great patience, and we will endure many moments of failure. But we find courage in the motto of Blessed John Henry Newman: *Cor ad Cor Loquitur* (heart speaks to heart). Did not Jesus speak to the heart of the Samaritan woman at the well who “left her water jar, and went to the city, and said to the people. ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’” (Jn 4:29)

Recognizing that the New Evangelization is directed towards a diverse group of people including those who have never heard the Gospel, those who have heard it and have since distanced themselves from the Church, and those who are searching for the truth is vital for the success of the work.<sup>18</sup> But we must also be cognizant that the culture of indifference is endemic in most countries of the Western World. I say this not to deter us but to emphasize the importance of promoting the mission of the New Evangelization. However, aware that many here today are not from the west, I will spend only a few moments on these points.

In his Apostolic Letter in the form of *Motu Proprio Ubicumque et Semper*, which established the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, Benedict XVI summarized the cultural context of the west by quoting the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, “Whole countries and nations where religion and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering a viable and working community of faith, are now put to a hard test, and in some cases, are even undergoing a radical transformation, as a result of a constant spreading of an indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism. This particularly concerns countries and nations of the so-called First World, in which economic well-being and consumerism, even if coexistent with a tragic situation of poverty and misery, inspires and sustains a life lived ‘as if God did not exist.’”<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, as a result of secularization, this radical “eclipse of the sense of God,” there is not only a crisis of faith in much of the west but also an anthropological crisis: by making himself the center of the universe, man has become disoriented and now finds himself in crisis. As described so powerfully by Archbishop Fisichella, “The only face reflected in our heart has become our own. That is too little, too little for us to define ourselves as adults, autonomous and independent.”<sup>20</sup> With an eclipse of the sense of God has come an eclipse of the sense of self.

In addition to a loss of the sense of self, another consequence of secularization is the staggering poverty of joy. In the previously mentioned Address to Catechists, Cardinal Ratzinger began with the following: “The deepest poverty is the inability of joy, the tediousness of a life considered absurd and contradictory. The inability of joy presupposes and produces the inability to love.”<sup>21</sup> The joy of which he is speaking is not a feeling or an emotion predicated upon the circumstances of one’s life but arises from the conviction of knowing that one is loved by Christ. “[It] flows from allowing oneself to be embraced by God’s love and is capable of withstanding all the trials

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Serratelli, no. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Blessed Pope John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, December 30, 1988, no. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger, Introduction.

and tribulations of life.”<sup>22</sup> Such spiritual poverty certainly envelops the youth. In previous generations mainly the elderly struggled with depression, but now the youth, also, wrestle with despair and a lack of purpose. In fact, both teenage and senior citizen suicides are at an all-time high in many Western countries.

And how does this poverty of joy manifest itself in the lives of our youth? First, they are enveloped in a profound state of boredom. This does not mean that they do not have many things to do but that there is a general inability to be compelled by beauty, truth or goodness. They are jaded—nothing excites them anymore because they believe that have experienced everything in life at an early age. Second, such lack of enthusiasm leads them into a state of *acedia* (sloth) whose symptoms are despair, discouragement, listlessness, and discouragement. Such a state makes it impossible for one to love. Third, as a result of the inability to experience the thrill and the love so vital to human existence, the young person has an overwhelming sense of meaninglessness and finds himself or herself rolling the stone of Sisyphus up the interminable hill of life.<sup>23</sup> If only the youth could take to heart the words of Jesus: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd” (Jn 10:10).

#### **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS: PROVIDING STUDENTS WITH A CULTURE OF BELIEF AND EXPERIENCES OF JOY**

In our roles as Catholic educators, we are called by God to imitate Jesus the good shepherd. However, to do this in the secular and relative age in which we live requires a bit of a reversal of the parable. Today we must be careful about spending too much time pampering the one sheep that has been found and forgetting that we have to go after the ninety-nine that are now lost. I can think back to my own experience and how delighted I was to get seven or eight students to daily Mass on a school day. Yet, how much time and attention did I really give to the other 992 so that they could be feasting also on the Bread of Life?

However, as we all know, being such shepherds is not an easy task. In his Address to the Members of the Council for the Laity in 1974, Pope Paul VI stated, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”<sup>24</sup> Such words ring even more true today than they did in 1974. Our youth are more suspect today than ever before, for they value above all else their personal autonomy. In addition, we cannot ignore how suspect in the eyes of many the Church is as a result of its recent scandals. The youth today often question any type of authority and view the Church with suspect eyes. Thus, trust must be earned in their minds. We can no longer just tell them, we have to show them also. They long to be introduced to authentic witnesses of the Gospel so that they can have a reason to

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<sup>22</sup> Msgr. Joseph Murphy, *Christ our Joy: The Theological Vision of Pope Benedict XVI* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Murphy, 24-39.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis*, October 2, 1974: AAS 66 (1974), 568. See *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41.



believe. To accomplish this important and challenging task requires that each one of us, through our words and our actions, provides our students with the Biblical understandings of both love and freedom. As we will discuss, both of these terms have been usurped by contemporary society and have been redefined for our youth in such a way that can only lead to isolation, despair, meaningless, and sadness.

But when we provide our students with an accurate understanding of love and freedom, we give them an authentic Catholic identity which allows them to arrive at the sense of belonging within the community of the Church, something for which they long.<sup>25</sup> Without such identity, authentic belonging is impossible. As Archbishop Fisichella explains it, “A belonging which was without identity could not be defined as belonging; it would remain always bound to a form of living together in society which modifies its own coordinates according to the changing of the seasons, without any possibility of impressing upon them a real sense of common feeling and of active participation.”<sup>26</sup> And such an identity begins with two words, love and freedom, which must be redefined for our youth.

The young Fr. Joseph Ratzinger opened an Advent homily which he gave in 1964 to a group from the Catholic School Chaplaincy with the line: “Being a Christian means having love.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout the remainder of the homily, Fr. Ratzinger attempted to wrestle away from the minds of the youth the trite and banal definitions of love offered by contemporary society. He explained that authentic love is the content and the identity of a Christian. But such a love demands that we do our best to live as God lives and not as we wish to live. And how does God live? He lives by loving each one of us not because we are always good, particularly virtuous or of any incredible merit. He does not love us because we are useful or even necessary to him.<sup>28</sup> “He loves us not, because *we* are good, but because *he* is good.”<sup>29</sup> He loves us even when we are unlovable. Christian love means to follow this path. We have to love those who have nothing to offer us, who do not please us and from whom we have nothing to gain by giving our love. We have to love as Christ did which was to do good for one who needs kindness, even if we do not like that person.<sup>30</sup> As the young Benedict stated: “In a certain sense, we are still living before Copernicus, so to speak. For we all carry within us that inborn illusion by virtue of which each of us takes his own self to be the center of things, around which the world and everyone else have to turn. We find ourselves time and time again seeing other things and people solely in relation to our own selves, regarding them as satellites revolving around the hub of our own self. Becoming a Christian is quite revolutionary. It is achieving

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Colleen Carroll, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 89.

<sup>26</sup> Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, p. 87.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *What It Means to Be a Christian: Three Sermons* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 72.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 69.

the Copernican revolution, no longer seeing ourselves as the center of the universe but recognizing that we are one of many among God's creatures, all of which turn around God as their center."<sup>31</sup>

Pope Francis has inspired and challenged the Church and the world to embrace this Copernican Revolution. When he spoke to the seminarians and novices in Rome this past July on the occasion of the *Year of Faith*, and they responded with enthusiastic applause, he challenged them with the following: "You applaud now. Sure this is the time of your honeymoon. But what about when the honeymoon ends? Will you give up and say, I don't want to do this any longer?" Then he went on to express to them in one line the very essence of Christian love: "Are we encountering people each day and sharing with them in words and deeds the truth that he or she is important to me!" That is the revolution my friends. Loving is letting each person know that he or she is important to me. More specifically, we are shepherds of evangelizing communities, and our students, staff, and parents must view each one of us as a witness to this love. However hard it may be, we have to recognize the dignity of every person within the walls of our school.

While to love is what it means to be a Christian, the very life of the Christian is a call to freedom. Unfortunately, contemporary culture has provided our youth with an incorrect notion of freedom and, like that of love, it must be redefined for them in terms of a life of faith. I will never forget it as long as I live. I received a letter from our new Bishop to meet with him at his office. Since I had been a principal for several years, I assumed that this would be a time to get acquainted and an opportunity for him to learn a little more about what was taking place in the Catholic high schools of the Diocese of Paterson. Well the conversation started off wonderfully. I was telling him about all that was taking place in the schools. However, when I was finished, he said to me, "Father, now the real reason why you are here. I am sending you to Rome for a doctorate." Before I could stop myself, I said to him, "Can you please find someone else, I am happy where I am." With that he said to me quite strongly, "Isn't it freeing to know that you don't have a choice?" Those words at first stung, but over the years they have proven to convey and to contain the Wisdom of Solomon, and, in fact, they contain the very wisdom of all of Sacred Scripture.

But how can one be free if one has no choice? Isn't this a contradiction? Well it certainly appears to be a contradiction if one understands freedom from the perspective of the secular world rather than that of God. Father Robert Spitzer, a talented educator who has written extensively on the relationship among the disciplines of physics, philosophy, reason and faith, expounds upon what he calls four levels of viewing freedom. He begins by noting that whichever level we so choose to believe in about freedom will affect the way we view our options, our choices, our commitments, and our prospects for self-sacrifice and surrender. The first level is that of saying I feel free when my strongest sensorial desires are met as quickly as possible. And when I get them whenever I want, then I am free. But this notion of freedom does not want to be inconvenienced at all, and, thus, it is antithetical to commitment, which by definition, requires some level of sacrifice. The second level

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 70.

reasons that I am only free when I am in relationships with others and dominate in all of these relationships. I always need to be in control and to be the boss. Thus, the other cannot constrain me but, in fact, I constrain the other. This notion accommodates some measure of commitment and self-sacrifice but only to achieve self-serving goals which will benefit me and give me an advantage over others. If I live at this level, I am unable to feel free and do, in fact, feel constrained when another's will appears to dominate mine. The third level is that I feel free when I am advancing a noble purpose that will make the world better. This notion shifts the focus of freedom from getting what I want or being in control to actualizing what is objectively good for something or someone beyond myself. One feels free, even with constraints and discipline, when actualizing an objective good.<sup>32</sup>

Fr. Spitzer's fourth level of freedom is the biblical understanding of freedom. It is seeking the will of God and acting on it out of the conviction that God's will is what will actualize and make present what is most deep and enduring. And what is that? Love. Biblical freedom is a freedom from attachments, as beautiful and important as they may be, so as to discover the freedom to do God's will. Think about it for a moment. Nowhere in scripture do we see one being celebrated who is all about self-discovery and self-expression. Nowhere do we see one being celebrated who has thrown aside tradition so as to do what he or she wants to do and, thusly, listens to no one. No, those being celebrated in scripture and held up as our models are those who have had to make the decision to sacrifice what they might have willed and wanted in order to actualize the will of God. Thus, Christian freedom means surrendering to God. But such surrender is not a gesture of enslavement. No, it is just the opposite. When we surrender to God's will, we become his instrument, being able to do what is most enduring and pervasive in the eyes of God, and it is only within that giving up of ourselves do we find true peace, a peace which this secular and indifferent world cannot give. This means though that I may have to give up what I want, to give up a goal that would give me status or power, and even to give up something that I believe to be very good and contributive.<sup>33</sup> To quote Fr. Spitzer: "Freedom is being at peace with, and being able to accomplish, whatever I discern to be the will of God according to his truth and his love, which may not be my view of truth or love."<sup>34</sup> The Christian life is a call to such a freedom, "a choice of responsibility which commits one's existence to a new horizon, that of a life in *truth* and *charity*."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, as shepherds of evangelizing communities, we must be examples of a people who can love and who also are authentically free.

Finally, Catholic educators must recognize that while a personal witness is essential, so also is providing our students with a new faith apologetics. We must help our students enter into the logic of the faith. According to Peter Kreeft, "Apologetics is essentially the enterprise of trying to win men and women for Christ by obeying Scripture's own command to 'be ready to give a reason for the

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., *Ten Universal Principles: A Brief Philosophy of the Life Issues* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 105-107.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Unpublished Notes, 2013.

hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15)'''<sup>36</sup> We have to provide our students with the reason to believe and be able to explain the reasonableness of the assent of faith. "The appeal to everlasting traditions or to various experiences, deprived of the force of reason, have not drawn people, especially before a culture that more imposes itself through the certainties of science. Thinking that the New Evangelization can take place with a mere renewal of past forms is an illusion to be avoided. Of course, nor is the solution an extravagance of inventing novel forms... We have to remain faithful to the foundation and build something that is consistent with it, and which can also be heard and understood by a different man than the man of the past."<sup>37</sup> We have to help our students account for the faith. We must present the Christian event in a way that can be communicated to and received by contemporary men and women. Faith and reason have to be shown to our young people as mutually compatible.

Through redefining for the youth what love and freedom are and providing them with the reason to believe, we are shepherding our students to a true encounter with the Good Shepherd, the source of all joy. And you, personally, have experienced such joy because your Benedictine schools are built upon both the missionary charism of Jesus Christ and the charism of *Ora et Labora* of St. Benedict.

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, the Franciscan preacher of the Papal Household, gave an Advent Series entitled, *The Four Waves of Evangelization*, in which he reflected upon the particular protagonists of evangelization in four periods of history. During his second sermon, Fr. Cantalamessa discussed the state of Europe after the Barbarian invasions following the fall of the Roman Empire in 476. He asserted that it was the monks who were the leading protagonists of the re-evangelization of Europe during this period. But more importantly for our discussion, Fr. Cantalamessa's extraction of specific lessons from this historical examination can assist us today in our mission of the New Evangelization.

As the monks of the early middle ages would leave the silence of contemplation in order to evangelize, conversely, today there is a great need for each Christian to be dedicated to contemplation in addition to service. "The effort for a new evangelization is exposed to two dangers. One is inertia, laziness or not doing anything and leaving everything to others. The other is launching into a feverish and empty human activism, with the result of losing little by little the contact with the source of the Word and its efficacy."<sup>38</sup> Prayer is so vital to the mission of the New Evangelization because "Christian preaching is not primarily a communication of doctrine but of existence. He evangelizes more who prays without speaking than he who speaks without praying."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith: Essays in Christian Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Talk given in Leeds, England, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Homily, Second Sunday of Advent, 2011, *There is Neither Jew nor Greek; Neither Slave nor Free*. Sourced from <http://www.cantalamessa.org/?cat=9&paged=3&lang=en>; Internet; accessed July 27, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

While our schools are certainly not monasteries and our students not monks, the principal of *Ora et Labore* is essential for the promotion of the New Evangelization. Thus, we need to teach our students how to prayer and how to contemplate. Pope Francis, during his Sunday Angelus the week prior to leaving for World Youth Day, affirmed that “in our Christian life prayer and action are always profoundly united. Prayer that does not lead to concrete action toward a brother who is poor, sick, in need of help ... is a sterile and incomplete prayer. But, in the same way, when in ecclesial service we are only concerned with what we are doing, we give greater weight to things, functions and structures, forgetting the centrality of Christ; we do not set aside time for dialogue with Him in prayer, we run the risk of serving ourselves and not God, present in our brother in need”.

The students must know how to pray and to recognize that our God longs to have a personal encounter with each of them, “[Our] reaching for God meets an even more passionate divine reaching for us. Perhaps we could put it best by saying that the mystical coming together of these two longings—our longing for God and God’s longing for us—is prayer.”<sup>40</sup> Yes, we want them to serve the poor and do community service as part of their outreach, but they can only be truly effective if such work is based upon their one on one relationship with God.

**CONCLUSION: GRADUATING STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE JOY OF CHRIST THROUGH A CULTURE OF BELIEF—  
BUILDERS OF THE GREAT CATHEDRAL**

The New Evangelization requires that each one of us reflects upon the type of students we hope to graduate from our schools. Thus, I leave you with this Medieval story told by Archbishop Fisichella: “A poet passed by some work being conducted and saw three workers busy at their work; they were stone cutters. He turned to the first and said, ‘What are you doing my friend?’ This man, quite indifferently, replied: ‘I am cutting a stone.’ He went a little further, saw the second and posed to him the same question, and this man replied, surprised, ‘I am involved with the building of a column.’ A bit further ahead, the pilgrim saw the third and to this man he put the same question; the response full of enthusiasm, was: ‘I am building a cathedral.’”<sup>41</sup>

Friends, I opened this presentation by stating how wonderful it is to stand in St. Peter’s Square and see all of the sojourners who have come to the Eternal City. But how many of those visitors perceive the Basilica as simply a great work of art and the Catholic Church as a static institution mired in the past with no future? I dare say that these are the impressions that not only sojourners to Rome have but so too do many of our students. Yet we have the opportunity to witness and to teach our students that the Church is alive and as Blessed John Henry Newman stated, “It grows, and is not overgrown; it spreads out, yet is not enfeebled; it is ever germinating,

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Barron, *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of Faith* (New York: Random House, 2011), 224-225.

<sup>41</sup> Fisichella, *The New Evangelization*, 150.

yet ever consistent with itself.”<sup>42</sup> We are able to provide them with the witness and the tools which will help them to encounter Christ and, thus, enable each one when asked what they are doing with their lives to respond enthusiastically that they are building a great cathedral—one which is alive and growing. We want our graduates to be faithful to their baptism and to be able to bear witness to the faith, thus, offering their own unique contributions to the construction of the great cathedral in the world today, the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And as the visitors to Rome are waiting to be invited into the Basilica, our students are waiting to be given the tools, the very faith, with which to be such builders.

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<sup>42</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1878; reprint, U.S.: Klessinger Publishing’s Rare Reprints, *n.d.*), 442 (page citation is to the reprint edition).