

LUX EDMUNDI – MARCH, 2014

We celebrate the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord on the 25th March. Dionysius Exiguus, Denis the Small, re-formed the calendar in the sixth century. He made the Incarnation the base-line for all relevant calculations. This way of dating - in effect, the BC/AD way - was popularised by the Venerable Bede. Nowadays, references to “Before Christ” or to “*Anno Domini*” would be deemed politically incorrect by some and these would use “BCE”, “Before the Common/Current/Christian Era” and “CE”, “Common/Current/Christian Era”. Yet, Dionysius worked from, and for, a faith-based culture, and, in this context, rightly took as his starting point the Incarnation of the Word of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who “by the power of the Holy Spirit ... became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man”.

The Incarnation, this irruption of God into time and space, into human history and human reality, is the event of events since time began. In objective terms, it is wholly and utterly definitive and transformative, for each of us and for every human being. It is the necessary basis and context for any complete understanding of what it means to be human. With Christ thus “pitching his tent” amongst us, he becomes the template and the measure of full and authentic humanity.

We have often emphasised that, in this sense, the Incarnation is the foundation and the frame of reference of all Catholic education and Catholic schools. In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI reminded us: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction (#1)”. It is our primary, our defining, task as Catholic educators, managers, leaders and teachers, to guide and help the young people in our care to experience for themselves precisely this encounter, with the event of the Incarnation, with the person of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

To discharge this task effectively, to help the young encounter Christ for themselves, to accept that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever would believe in him would not perish but would have eternal life; to accept that the Son, in turn, “loved me and gave himself for me”, we ourselves must, with Mary, God’s mother and ours, say “Yes” to God: “Be it done to me according to thy word”. Christ stands at the door and knocks and we must open to Him if we are, with his help, to inspire and assist our students and pupils to hear his voice and let him enter to eat with each of them in loving and saving companionship, “bread-together-ship”.

The Rule of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation provided that the Angelus be recited in the schools at 12 noon each day. In schools conducted by the Christian Brothers, it was also customary to recite the Hail Mary each time the clock struck the hour. In Catholic schools generally, and especially in Catholic primary schools, the recitation of the Angelus at noon was standard practice. It would be good – some would say essential – if, in every Catholic school, the day was marked by times for public prayer and if the recitation of the Angelus were continued/re-introduced. There may, at post-primary level, especially, be logistical difficulties, as it were, and all schools must respect the constitutional right to attend a school without attending religious instruction/worship there-in. It should not, though, be beyond our wit to find ways and means of turning to God in worship, of commemorating the Incarnation, each day, whilst accommodating the rights of parents/students and the needs of the curriculum.