

**CRITICAL ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE OF SENIOR CLASS RETREATS
IN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS:
PART 1 - MAJOR THEORETICAL AND EDUCATIONAL ISSUES**

Abstract

This first of two articles reviews some of critical issues for the future of retreats in Catholic secondary schools that emerged from a doctoral research study of teachers' understandings of the nature, purposes and conduct of live-in retreats. It follows up an earlier publication that reported some of the research findings (Tullio, 2006). The scope of the research project is outlined briefly in endnote 1. The article draws on the conclusions reached in the final chapter of the research thesis (Tullio, 2009). It tries to develop a 'big picture' interpretation of the significance of the live-in retreat as one of the most important 'grass roots' innovations in Australian Catholic religious education. The follow up article will discuss some of the key issues for the theory and practice of retreats.

For a number of reasons, the place of retreats in Catholic secondary schools is not as secure as perhaps it was formerly. Hence there is a need for Catholic education authorities to review the conduct of retreats so that their valuable contribution to religious education can be confirmed, while at the same time addressing the problems that could impede their future development. This article seeks to further this agenda by reporting research based insights that can promote reflection and discussion.

Introduction

In 1964, Bernie Neville, a De La Salle brother working at St Michael's College in Adelaide, organised an experimental live-in weekend retreat for senior class volunteers from some local Catholic boys and girls schools. It was called a *Christian Living Camp* and it was conducted at Victor Harbor. As far as we can determine, this was the first live-in communitarian retreat for Catholic schools in Australia. It proved to be both a remarkable and significant turning point in the conduct of school retreats. What began as an innovation by a small group of practitioners eventually became the norm for retreats for Catholic secondary schools across the country. While for centuries Catholic retreats were modelled on the silent retreat for religious communities and clergy, the new style communitarian retreat was rarely silent; it was centred on community building, communication, conversation, fun, friendship, and celebration – a substrate within which religious activities like prayer, reflection, Reconciliation and Eucharist were embedded.

This represented something of a revolution or quantum change as far as the conduct of Catholic school retreats were concerned. Yet it is possible to show that this new style of retreats retained key elements in the traditional Catholic notion of a retreat dating back into early Christian spirituality.

The discussion in this article concentrates on major theoretical and educational issues associated with the communitarian retreat as a significant innovation – in the areas of Catholic spirituality, psychology, education, school based curriculum development, and especially in Catholic school religious education. The second article in the series will address psychological and spiritual issues related to the conduct of retreats, together with contextual factors that have a bearing on the implementation of retreats, and the resourcing of retreats and the professional development of retreat leaders.

Major theoretical and educational issues

1. *The 'new style' communitarian live-in school retreat: Evidence of both continuity and change in Catholic spirituality*

The idea of *going away* on a *retreat* had its origins in early Christian spirituality, particularly in what has become known as 'desert spirituality' (Swan, 2001; Ward, 2003). Desert spirituality presumed that one could get closer to God by retiring, even temporarily, from the concerns of everyday life to commune with God in silence and solitude (Mundy, 2000; Pearce, 1989). While silence is rarely if ever a prominent feature of contemporary school retreats (or in Catholic retreats generally), there are a number of aspects of early retreat spirituality that are still evident in the purposes and activities of live-in school retreats today.

The life of monks in the monastic orders was like a continuous retreat (Belisle, 2003; Brooke, 2003; King, 1999; Knowles, 1969); but the 'active' religious orders (such as the Jesuits, and the teaching orders founded since the 17th century) developed the structurally lasting characteristic of the retreat as a *time out* for physical and spiritual rejuvenation (Caraman, 1990; Goussin, 2003; Ivens, 2004). This more 'portable' retreat came to have a significant influence in Catholic Christianity. The Catholic retreat movement has endured for centuries by adapting successfully to different circumstances (Lunn, 1913; Hood, 1958; Lovell, 1994).

The introduction of Christian Living Camps in Adelaide in 1964 represented a dramatic transformation in the purposes and mode of conduct of school retreats. For the first time in the history of Catholic spirituality (at least in Australia), the notion of retreat became associated with much talk and fun. In this more personal/communitarian context, the idea of taking time out and going away to reflect on one's relationship with God was being presented in a different light. The spiritual dimension of retreats was usually always a positive experience in the Catholic spiritual tradition. The communitarian retreat would add the elements of enjoyment, fun and exhilaration.

While to some extent, this new form of school retreat was influenced by the experience that some of the original retreat leaders had in the adult Catholic Cursillo movement (Neville, 2007), in the main, it represented an innovation in Catholic spiritual practice that had its origins in Australian Catholic schools. From there, the acceptability and the desirability of communitarian retreats spread to religious orders and the wider Catholic community in Australia. This is an interesting incidence of the Catholic school system coming to have a nation wide spiritual influence on the Catholic Church in this country (as explained further below).

While there are many aspects of the communitarian retreat that were new and innovative in the 1960s, there is still evidence of a continuity with the spiritual principles associated with the historical development of the retreat within the Catholic spiritual tradition since the times of the early Church fathers and desert spirituality. This is illustrated in Table 1 (p. 59).

2 *The new communitarian retreat: An innovation in Catholic spirituality from the time of the Second Vatican Council*

The new communitarian retreat was to become a key signpost in the development of Catholic spirituality after the Second Vatican Council. It represented the quest for a 'personally relevant' spirituality in modern times. The transition from traditional, silent, religious order modelled school retreats to the new, celebratory, community-modelled, discussion-oriented retreats was iconic of the transition from a traditional 1950s Catholic spirituality to what could be termed a Vatican II spirituality. During and just after the Second Vatican Council, Catholics in Australia were making significant adjustments to their practice of spirituality – changes which were more extensive than had occurred for centuries since the Reformation (Cashen, 2005; Greeley, 2004; Groome, 1998; Schillebeeckx, 1985; Tacey, 2003).

Table 1: A summary of retreat practices and emphases in spirituality from the early Christian communities through to contemporary live-in school retreats. It shows areas of continuity and change.

Retreat practices and emphases in spirituality	Early Christian monastic communities	Religious orders, especially the teaching orders (following the innovation introduced by the Jesuits)	Catholic secondary school retreats in the 1950s	Contemporary communitarian Catholic secondary school retreats
Withdrawal from society	X life was like a continuous retreat	X	X limited withdrawal when conducted on school premises	X
Going away to live at a relatively isolated place	X	X	Usually stayed at school	X
Spiritual practices/prayer	X	X	X	X
Liturgy and sacrament of reconciliation	X	X	X	X special attempt to highlight the community experience of Eucharist as a keynote of the whole retreat community experience
Silence	X	X	X	
Personal reflection	X	X	X	X
Being in a community	X the taken for granted living structure of the group	X	X	X special emphasis on community building as a principal retreat dynamic
Fun activities and recreation				X
The joy of going away with friends				X
The joy of meeting new people and making new friendships; enhancing existing friendships.				X this applied to the early 'inter-school' and 'stranger' camps and retreats and not to retreats for one school's pupils only.
Extensive discussion in groups				X
A special emphasis on 'personal development' alongside the 'spiritual' dimension.			In these times it was presumed that the spiritual dimension to retreats would be important for overall personal development – but this link was not stressed	X

The adults who conducted the first new style communitarian school retreats in the 1960s (all of whom were members of religious orders) were concerned with trying to enhance the lives of young people in Catholic schools with a 'relevant' spirituality (Firman, 1968; Rossiter, 1975, 1978); this was an additional stimulus for them to work out what was a 'relevant Catholic spirituality' for adults. They acknowledged that working together, and with young people on these retreats provided an influential forum that affected their own personal spirituality, as well as their approach to resourcing the spirituality of youth.

In a sense, for a number of these retreat leaders, the conduct of retreats served to 'fast track' both their personal and spiritual development. A key factor in this movement was their growing belief that *relationships* (friendship and being 'close' to people) were central to personal development and spirituality (Kennedy, 1967). Being in a responsible position to model spirituality on retreats put them in the role of 'bridge building' from the traditional to a new style of Catholic spirituality.

Another factor was their flexibility in trying out new and innovative community building activities that related to youth spirituality. However, there were some concerns, even in the early stages of development of these retreats, about the important explicit, spiritual dimension of retreats. This still remains an issue today.

A key to understanding both the changing spirituality background to the emergence of the communitarian retreat and its psychological dynamics lay in the new Vatican II spirituality. Crawford and Rossiter (2006, pp. 173-177) provided a succinct account of the development of what they called a Vatican II "psychological Christian spirituality" in the 1960s and 1970s. They claimed that this represented a quantum transformation in Catholic spirituality, and that it set lasting precedents such that it eventually became the 'mainline' spirituality in Australian Catholicism since that time. However, there remains considerable diversity in Australian Catholic spirituality and a number of Catholics would not identify with this so-called mainline spirituality whose authenticity they would question.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) proposed that the key characteristics of this new spirituality were:-

- The idea of the continuation of the revelation of God through human experience (Moran, 1966, 2002, 2009; Second Vatican Council *Dei Verbum*, 1965).
- Personal relationships were central to both human development and spirituality.
- The development of community was central to the development of personal relationships.
- The psychological dimensions of spirituality needed articulation – religion (theology, scripture and spirituality) needed to be perceived as relevant to people's lives which led to a 'psychological Christian spirituality'.
- Authentic liturgy involved: - community, participation, communication and celebration (contrasting with the earlier emphasis on: - individual, attendance, silence and awe). While liturgy was still regarded as the 'human interfacing with the divine' the emphasis shifted more towards the 'human experience' side of the equation.

While one of a number of arenas where the new Vatican II spirituality was being forged, the senior school live-in retreat was important for three reasons:-

- Those religious personnel involved in the new communitarian school retreats became influential spirituality leaders in the Australian Catholic community.
- The Vatican II spirituality of the new retreats became embedded in Catholic schools where this culture of Catholic spirituality affected generations of Catholic educators; in the schools, it probably had a more significant influence on teachers (especially religion teachers) than on the students.
- The school students, who became the successive generations of Catholic laity, absorbed this new spirituality from the schools, and in particular from its special expression within the communitarian retreat.

From this perspective, the school communitarian live-in retreat made an important contribution to the development of Australian Catholic spirituality after the Second Vatican Council.

3 *Application of humanistic psychology and group dynamics theories to religion/spirituality and education*

The work of Carl Rogers (and others like Rollo May, Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow) in humanistic psychology in the 1960s impacted on popular culture in Western countries by underscoring the importance of the development of relationships within the overall developmental task of 'becoming a person'. *On becoming a person* (1961) was the title to one of Rogers' most influential books. As suggested above, the relationship dimension to spirituality became prominent in the 1960s and humanistic psychology was a significant influence on this development. The human and psychological dimension to spirituality focused on the *human* side of the quest for God and the spiritual. Hence the word 'relevant' became prominent in spirituality – that is, the application of spirituality to everyday life; it needed to make sense by being applicable to ordinary life.

As well as having applications to clinical practice in therapy and counselling (Kennedy, 1977), the use of encounter groups, personalist psychology and group dynamics also spread to the business world where they informed organisational development and were used for staff professional development programs (Schein and Bennis, 1965; Rogers, 1972).

Rogers (1969) also applied his psychology to education with the popular publication *Freedom to learn*. He claimed that "There is *no* resemblance between the traditional function of teaching and the function of the facilitation of learning" (Rogers, 1983, p. 135), and in so doing, contributed to the development of contemporary thinking that emphasises 'learning' while underplaying 'teaching' – the latter tends to be replaced by the idea of 'facilitating' (a development critiqued by Moran, 2008).

While not the only forum where humanistic psychology was impacting on religion/spirituality and education, the early communitarian school retreats were important opportunities for their retreat leaders at the time to explore (both for themselves and their students) the interfaces between religion/spirituality, humanistic psychology (and the social sciences in general) and educative processes. For them, this highlighted a psychological perspective on religion and it fostered the development of a psychological spirituality (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p. 173). It emphasised the quality of personal relationships as a key to personal development – and hence to spirituality. The persistence of the Catholic Institute of Counselling in Strathfield (Sydney), which continues to offer personal development programs for adults (since the 1960s), remains one prominent organisational testament to this movement.

The personal interactions and community development on school retreats meant that a strong personal development emphasis became prominent in the school retreat movement – along with the more traditional spiritual dimension. It became an area of work for educators where humanistic psychology was affecting their understanding of both personal development and spirituality. The live-in retreat was probably the most appropriate school venue where humanistic psychology might be relevant to student learning. The idea of facilitating *personal* learning makes more sense in the retreat situation because in effect it is structurally like an 'intensive personal development seminar'.

4 *Psychological insights into youth spirituality*

The special circumstances for enhancing teacher-student relationships in the live-in retreat helped Catholic educators (both in the first communitarian secondary school retreats, and on a continuing basis since the 1960s) develop more insight into, and greater professional interest in, youth spirituality. This special interest in youth spirituality has influenced the thinking and professional practice of generations of

teachers and educational leaders within Australian Catholic education. In turn this has contributed positively to the spiritual/moral dimension of Australian Catholic schooling.

The retreat provided adults with a privileged situation for talking over questions about spirituality with young people. The founders of the communitarian retreats in the 1960s believed that the retreat experiences were important for them in coming to a better understanding of the personal and spiritual needs of young people, as well as of what they considered to be the 'big' spiritual/moral issues in their lives and the world at that time. While this question was not raised specifically with the participants in the study, it was likely that the retreat still provides some stimulus to educators to think about contemporary youth spirituality and how they might best promote its development. Further research could check whether retreats provided educators with more significant insights into youth spirituality than their corresponding classroom experience.

The leaders of the first communitarian retreats considered that the psychological dynamics of retreats were favourable for promoting attitudinal change. While the teachers in this study did not specifically refer to this possibility in the same psychological terminology of attitudinal change, they indicated that the promotion of personal change and the development of spirituality were regarded as important aims for retreats.

The range of issues for contemporary youth spirituality identified in the literature (for example in Crawford and Rossiter, 2006; Engebretson, 2007; Hughes, 2007; Maroney, 2008A, Maroney, 2008B) provides a profile of spirituality that could inform the work of school retreat leaders. It is not that all young people could be adequately described by a single profile, but familiarity with the trends and issues could be helpful for retreat leaders in shaping retreat activities that would be more in tune with the spiritual starting points of their students. Also, some of the issues themselves could well become useful content for inputs at retreats (E.g. the way that a consumerist ideology and practice can affect young people's identity development.).

Given the overall interest of retreats in developing young people spiritually, it is suggested that a study of youth spirituality should be an essential component of any professional development program or book resource for retreat leaders. Also of importance for retreat leaders, would be some appreciation of the nexus between spirituality and humanistic psychology that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (as discussed above) because of its importance for understanding both the development of Australian Catholic spirituality as well as of the psychological and spiritual dynamics of live-in retreats.

5 *The communitarian retreat: A significant 'grass roots' education innovation and example of school-based curriculum development*

In writings about the development and implementation of school curriculum, much attention was given to the progression from system policy to the operationalising of change and innovation at school level. Even school-based curriculum development (SBCD) was usually driven by central system-wide policy. The literature often proposed approaches to make system-wide, government-mandated and 'top down' models of curriculum change work more effectively (Print, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Brady and Kennedy, 2003; Slattery, 2006). The origin and consolidation of the new style communitarian retreats in Australian Catholic secondary education was quite different. It represented a significant grass roots innovation in Catholic schools commenced by practitioners and maintained by schools that eventually became a mainline practice in Australian Catholic education.

The innovation was carried forward and supported by religious orders. The original pioneers and the 'early adopters' of the new style retreats were members of religious orders and their work in school retreats was quickly endorsed by authorities in the orders. In turn, the religious orders further supported the new retreat movement by instituting travelling retreat teams, setting up retreat centres and commencing

programs for the professional development of teachers as retreat leaders. While not as prominent in Catholic diocesan religious education guidelines as might be expected, retreats are still regarded as making a distinctive contribution to the Catholic schools' overall religious education program. Rossiter (1981. p. 110), in his review of religious education in Australian schools, considered that retreats were perhaps the most distinctive feature of Catholic school religious education in this country.

Apart from the contribution of the religious orders (who provided retreat centres and travelling retreat teams E.g. Prout, 1995; Mogg and Prout, 1998; Mulligan, 1994), the development of communitarian live-in retreats in Catholic secondary education was almost exclusively the initiative of the schools and not of systemic authorities. Similarly, the resourcing and training of retreat leaders was primarily school-based. This gave freedom to the schools but it also tended to leave retreats vulnerable in the long term because their future was too dependent on the situation in particular schools. Change in school staffing could deplete the retreat team and also change the culture of acceptability of retreats within the school. If retreats were generally regarded as an important part of the school's religious education program, then it could be expected firstly, that this position would be reflected in diocesan curriculum documentation. And secondly, there should be a commitment to the development and resourcing of retreats as well as to the leadership training of teachers.

6 *The communitarian retreat: Providing insight into the spiritual moral dimension to school curriculum*

The links between educational practice and personal change in pupils (in beliefs, attitudes and values) have always been complex and tenuous, and are influenced by many non-school factors. The retreat was like an intensive personal development seminar where its psychological dynamics were considered as contributing to attitudinal change (Neville, 2007; Rossiter, 1978). The psychological dynamics of retreats suggested that personal change is more likely to be promoted in a personal environment where there is:-

- freedom
- supportive community setting
- friendly and fun activities
- friendship and scope for friend-making
- small group discussions favourable for exchange of personal views
- a favourable psychological environment in which new thinking about potential personal change could occur, together with the 'imagining' and 'rehearsal' of what such personal change might be like
- opportunity for personal reflection
- informative stimulus material for discussion.

A favourable place for such opportunities is when students 'go away' from the formalities and routines of school and home life. This view also suggests that the potential for promoting personal change in the classroom setting is different – where it is more concerned with an intellectual engagement with spiritual/moral issues in the format of a regular, open, inquiring, informative *study*; in other words, a *different channel* towards personal change that is a natural part of the *academic school subject*.

According to the scheme of Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p. 305), the same principles and safeguards that applied to *personal learning* in the formal classroom context should apply to the live-in retreat, and in particular to its small group discussion. However, the live-in retreat provided a naturally more personal and informal environment than the formal classroom, making it particularly suitable for personal reflection and discussion; this situation could not easily be replicated in the classroom. Hence, it could be expected that there would be more scope for personal discussion on the retreat. It would then be reasonable to conclude that the retreat had greater natural potential for prompting students towards a review of life and consideration of possibilities for personal change than could be expected in the classroom.

The contribution of classroom discussion towards personal change is more indirect through the channel of *informed inquiry* (Crawford and Rossiter, 2006, p. 282). By contrast, the distinctive channel towards personal change in the retreat is more *psychological* and *emotional*. It is not that one channel is better than, or should be preferred to, the other. Both can be used to provide personal development opportunities for young people at school. Understanding the distinctive possibilities for promoting personal change in the retreat goes hand in hand with appreciation of the complementary possibilities in the classroom.

According to Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p. 414), acknowledgment of the distinctive potential of retreats for prompting personal and spiritual change in pupils was evident in some commentaries on religious education. These commentaries tended to regard the retreat as a more of a 'catechesis' like experience (that is, a faith-sharing and faith-developing experience) than was the case in the classroom teaching of religion; in turn, this tended to equate 'emotionality' with 'faith development', identifying the retreat (and 'personal sharing discussions') as more effective in promoting faith development than classroom religious education. Crawford and Rossiter considered that this terminology reflected a problematic interpretation of the nature of faith. Their view would acknowledge the distinctive potential of the retreat for personal reflection and interactions, but it stopped short of labelling this somewhat unconditionally as faith development. Their approach was concerned with identifying educational strategies that could point young people in the direction of personal change (and faith development) while not presuming that any pedagogy could make this happen on cue; this emphasised the students themselves as the authentic authors of their own personal change.

The psychological, community and spiritual dynamics of retreats: How some of these same dynamics are evident in other community activities

1 *Different meanings associated with the word 'retreat'*

The word retreat has extensive common usage in referring to some degree of withdrawal from the demands of the ordinary life and/or work situations. It includes the notions of escape, relaxation, refreshment, renewal and rejuvenation. This opportunity for 'recharging' the individual's physical and mental 'batteries' may be focused on preparing for a more healthy, purposeful return to ordinary life. In addition, the retreat may be used as an opportunity for reflection as a part of important personal decision-making; and for 'finding the self' – a phrase referring to a review of personal identity and the appraisal of behaviour that has identity consequences; this could include reflection on the possibility of new thinking and new behaviours. Thus the retreat in its most generic sense has an important natural place in personal and social life and it is not surprising that the term came into religious usage with the added connotation of renewing spiritual health.

Hence the word retreat has been applied to a special room or place in one's house or place of work, to a holiday house, to a rehabilitation centre and even to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum – as well as to the psychological encounter group.

While at an ordinary human level, and in the religious situation, there was always a ready understanding of the purposes of a retreat, the development of humanistic psychology, and in particular, the sensitivity or encounter group by Carl Rogers and other psychologists, led to more systematic reflection about the psychological dynamics of personal change through group methods. This was encapsulated in the title of Schein and Bennis' (1965) seminal book: *Personal and organisational change through group methods*. This psychology identified the potential for personal change within a complex of the following aspects or qualities of the live-in retreat.

- removal to a new situation;

- the relative isolation put individuals temporarily out of contact with the home situation and their usual reference groups of family, friends and workplace;
- the new situation was a stimulus to personal change with community support;
- making new acquaintances and developing new friendships, and / or the enhancement of old friendships were exhilarating;
- community building occurred, often resulting in good feelings about group identity;
- the isolated retreat situation, as well as the group interactions, could prompt individuals to reflect and review their personal lives and perhaps talk about this in the group;
- group discussions and one-to-one interactions provided scope for imaginative rehearsal of new thinking, new values and new behaviour (personal renewal);
- the group could provide an understanding and supportive reference point for experimenting with new thinking and new behaviour;
- there was scope for preparation to return to ordinary life with a new outlook.

On the basis of this list, we have identified a range of contemporary institutions, events and practices that show up the operation of some of the same psychological and community dynamics identified in secondary school retreats. While it is beyond our scope in this article to describe these similarities in detail (as presented in the research thesis), the following is an example list of events that illustrate the parallels.

Events, organisational structures and television programs	Notes on purposes and psychological dynamics
Public events	
Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Retreat.	The APEC Retreat was held in Sydney, 2007 – conducted “in an informal, relaxed retreat setting in which leaders addressed issues of strategic importance” (APEC Australia, 2007).
Corporate structures	
Corporate Retreats; An example: Sheila Campbell; USA. President of <i>Wild Blue Yonder</i> , Training, Retreat Design and Facilitation (Campbell <i>et al.</i> , 2006)	Corporate retreats have continued within the business world in the same vein as extended staff meetings or special professional development events to involve participants in creative thinking, strategy development and projected changes to organisational behaviour within a corporate culture, and enhancement of corporate identity and team spirit.
Community health structures	
Hospital rehabilitation / physical therapy.	Injury related rehabilitation and trauma related therapies remove people from their usual environment (or from the regular hospital) to provide special treatments to improve their health and help them recover sufficiently to be able to return to full independence when they return home.
Mental/psychiatric institutions	Patients are removed from their usual situation which is often stressful, to experience physical and mental recovery, often making use of medication. Counselling and individual/group therapy (including personal story telling) may be included to improve mental health.
Rehabilitation Centres for substance abuse.	Individuals admitted themselves to these centres which effectively removed them from their usual substance abusive situation and provided programs (including individual and/or group counselling sessions) that attempted to help them break away from addiction and develop more resilience.
Adolescent youth structures	
Operation Flinders: a South Australian-based program (Operation Flinders, 2009).	A government-sponsored project in South Australia called <i>Operation Flinders</i> sponsored young people at risk aged from 14 to 18 to attend an eight-day retreat-like experience with adult mentors.
School structures	

School Camps and/or alternative campus experiential programs.	School camps were usually conducted in bush camp sites that were away from the school with an emphasis on physical activity, often including experiential programs as a part of environmental education.
Television programs	
<i>Brat Camp</i> ; Reality television: USA and United Kingdom.	Brat Camp (Isaacs, 2005) was a television program showing how anti-social young people were affected positively by being in a wilderness setting away from their regular environment.
<i>Ladette to Lady</i> : Reality television program. UK and Australia.	A small group of young women were taken out of their ordinary life situation to an institution for grooming under 'culture authority figures' – making a significant 'break' with the assumptions and behaviours that went with their home situation.
<i>The Abbey</i> : Women experience life in a monastic institution.	A television documentary entitled <i>The Abbey</i> (Sidwell, 2007) showed how five women lived in a women's religious monastery for 30 days. The participants experienced a life of withdrawal from their usual environment, regular spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation, silence and community life.

2 Similarity with the community and spiritual dynamics of World Youth Day

The psychological and spiritual dynamics at work in the secondary school retreat were also identifiable in a number of other situations – in particular, the Catholic World Youth Day (WYD) program in Sydney in 2008. The parallels included:-

- the going away – even to another country;
- an association of religious activities with community development and friendship;
- the generation of positive emotions and euphoria through the acquaintance process and community activities;
- generation of a tangible sense of group religious identity;
- negotiating the problems in saying goodbye to new friends and in 're-entry' to ordinary life after a significant emotional experience.

Hence, the claims made for World Youth Day as a significant experience of evangelisation (WYD Syd, 2006; AYCS and AYCW, 2007A, 2007B) could be equally applied (and perhaps even more so) to the school retreat because of the potential for ongoing follow-up after the event back at school, together with the ongoing religious education through the school's formal classroom religion curriculum. While at World Youth Day, the religious activities were of a more traditional type (Latin Mass, Benediction, traditional Stations of the Cross, the Angelus in Latin etc.) at the communitarian retreat, there was greater scope for making the prayer and liturgy more relevant to contemporary youth spirituality; and there was more scope for student involvement and engagement in the liturgy as growing out of, and as a celebratory climax to, the development of community during the retreat. Like at the World Youth Day Mass, the tangible sense of community at the retreat contributed to both the prayerful and the emotional dimensions of the celebration.

The public documentation used in preparation for World Youth Day showed the intention of making the event a significant religious experience for youth that would be accepted as a type of 'New Evangelisation' (Pope John Paul II, 1988, 1990; WYD Syd, 2006). This could help renew their sense of Catholic religious identity; and there was also the hope that it might lead youth to more engagement with the local Catholic parishes, and their religious life. Arrangements for follow up activities to facilitate new relationships with parishes were organised. Similarly, the idea of New Evangelisation could be applied to the school retreat.

One significant difference between the retreat and WYD, apart from the size and international scope of the latter, was the public *pageantry* of WYD. Both young people (and adults), who were participants or observers, were impressed by the pageantry of the World Youth Day Stations of the Cross and the Papal

mass – as they have become accustomed to expecting pageantry in public events and celebrations. The religious content of WYD was associated with the pageantry, colour, music, good feelings and community energy that have come to be expected of large scale public events. In addition, another difference was the way that large numbers of youth involved in the WYD helped generate a tangible sense of Catholic religious identity. The overt prominence of Catholics at the event translated into a feeling that the Catholic Church was both large and multi-national in its membership. For those who may have felt that being Catholic was the experience of a religious minority in a secular society, WYD made them feel, often with pride, part of a substantial religious group.

When it comes to appraising the success of WYD and the retreat, there are difficulties in deciding on what criteria this should be judged. There was an initial natural tendency to judge the experiences as a success if the participants enjoyed them; on this count, participants at both experiences reported positively. Another approach to appraising the events was to ask participants to comment on whether they felt that the experience enhanced their spirituality. Again, on this score, both events were regarded as positive religious experiences (Flynn, 1985, 1993; Flynn & Mok, 2002; Maroney, 2008A, 2008B). Whether or not the experiences would lead to more participation in Catholic parishes was more difficult to determine. As far as retreats were concerned, there has been no data collected on this question; also, as yet, there is no substantial data as to whether WYD has affected youth parish participation.

It is considered unrealistic to expect that either of these experiences should make a significant difference to youth participation in parishes. The option for young Catholics to be an active part of a parish depends on a number of factors, the principal one being whether or not their parents are regular church goers – but this is not always a guarantee that youth will follow the example of their parents. Other factors would include:- the perceived spiritual relevance of the Church; the relationship between the spirituality experienced at WYD or the retreat and the perceived spiritual practices of the parish; the religious dispositions of individuals' principal group of friends.

It is evidently important for Catholic authorities to know that events like WYD and school retreats are effective and relevant spiritual/religious experiences; if not, then it would be difficult to justify their costs and resourcing, as well as for retreats the disruption of the school timetable for year 12 students and teachers. These spiritual/religious experiences are holistic in the sense that enjoyment, good feelings and community identification have infused the religious practices, and to that extent become somewhat inseparable from them. It is therefore problematic to try to differentiate the 'human' gains from the 'religious' ones – and the human enjoyment from the potential religious development. Also, it is considered problematic to try to measure spiritual/religious effectiveness and relevance in a way that puts too much emphasis on changes in parish participation.

We consider that retreats provide a positive and healthy spiritual/religious influence on young people, but this does not necessarily dispose them towards becoming regular Sunday mass attenders. It is our judgment that the cultural decline in formal church participation in Australian Catholicism over the last 60 years cannot be reversed in a significant way by any program or religious experience – WYD, school retreat etc. Hence, our conclusion is that the potential enhancement to personal spirituality in these experiences should be offered to youth *unconditionally*. Criteria for addressing youth's spiritual needs are required for appraising the value of experiences like retreats. While hopefully such experiences might favourably dispose some youth towards voluntary participation in parish life, this result should not be taken as an absolute criterion for measuring their success.

Conclusion

A number of the judgments and evaluations made in our study are controversial; not all Catholic educators would interpret the results in this same way. Nevertheless, we have identified important issues and questions about the place and conduct of retreats in Catholic schools in historical perspective. Further

study and research are needed to determine the extent to which this retreat agenda is evident elsewhere in Australian Catholic education. In turn, systematic research on retreats, particularly from the perspective of young people, is needed to inform the maintenance and further development of retreats as a valuable component of Catholic secondary schooling.

References

- APEC Australia 2007. APEC Retreat in Sydney 2007. Retrieved October 2007, from <http://www.apec2007.org/>
- (AYCS & AYCW) Australian Young Christian Students and Australian Young Christian Workers Movements. (2007a). *On fertile ground: Preparation and formation towards WYD '08*. Sydney: AYCS & AYCW.
- (AYCS & AYCW) Australian Young Christian Students and Australian Young Christian Workers Movements. (2007b). *The Holy Spirit comes: Making the most of the days in the diocese and World Youth Day*. Sydney: AYCS & AYCW.
- Belisle, P-D. (2003). *The language of silence – the changing face of monastic solitude*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- Brady, L. and Kennedy, K. (2003). *Curriculum construction*. Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Prentice Hall.
- Brooke, C. (2003). *The age of the cloister. The story of monastic life in the Middle Ages*. New York: Hidden Spring.
- Campbell, S., Liteman, J. & Liteman, M. (2nd Edition) (2006). *Retreats that Work: Everything you need to know about planning and leading great offsites*. New York: Pfeiffer / John Wiley & Sons. See also *Retreats That Work* <http://www.retreatsthatwork.com> and *Wild Blue Yonder* <http://www.wildblueyonder.biz/>
- Caraman, P. (1990). *Ignatius Loyola*. London: Collins Publications.
- Cashen, P.W. (2005) *From the Sacred Heart to the heart of the sacred: The spiritual journey of Australian Catholics since the Second Vatican Council*. Unpublished Ph D thesis, Australian Catholic University, Sydney.
- Crawford, M.L. & Rossiter, G.M. (2006). *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Engebretson, K. (2007) *Connecting: Teenage boys, spirituality and religious education*. Sydney: St Paul Publications.
- Firman, W. (1968). Toward a living religion: Ideas and experiments. *Our Apostolate*. 16, 3, 209-217.
- Flynn, M. (1985). *The effectiveness of Catholic schools*. Sydney: St Paul Publications.
- Flynn, M. (1993). *The culture of Catholic schools: A study of Catholic schools, 1972-1993*. Sydney: St. Paul Publications.
- Flynn, M., & Mok, M (2002). *Catholic schools 2000: A longitudinal study of year 12 students in catholic schools, 1972-1982-1990-1998*. Sydney: NSW Catholic Education Commission.
- Fullan, M.G. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Cassell.
- Goussin, J. (2003). *The mission of human and Christian education – The Gospel journey of John Baptist de La Salle*. Melbourne, Australia: Lasallian Education Services.
- Greeley, A. (2004). *The Catholic revolution : New wine, old wineskins and the Second Vatican Council*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Groome, T. (1998). *Educating for life: a spiritual vision for every teacher and parent*. Thomas More: Allen, Texas.
- Hood, F. (1958) Retreats. *The Expository Times*. Vol 69, pp. 209-211.
- Hughes, P. (2007). *Putting life together: Findings from Australian youth spirituality research*. Melbourne: Fairfield Press.
- Isaacs, J. (Producer). (2005). *Brat camp*. The television series. U.K., Channel 4.
- Ivens, M. (2004). *The spiritual exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. London: Gracewing.
- John Paul II. (1988). *Christifideles laici*. Washington: Office of Publishing and Promotion Services.
- John Paul II. (1990). *Redemptoris Missio: On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate*. The Vatican: Vatican Website.

- Kennedy, E.C. (1967). *Fashion me a people: Man, woman, and the church*. New York: Sheed and Ward.
- Kennedy, E.C. (1977). *On becoming a counselor: A basic guide for non-professional counselors*. East Malvern: Dove Communications. (New expanded and revised versions were published up to 2002 by Newleaf, Dublin)
- King, P. (1999). *Western monasticism. A history of the monastic movement in the Latin Church*. Kalamazoo, Michigan – Spencer, Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications.
- Knowles, D. (1969). *Christian monasticism*. London: World University Press.
- Lovell, G. (1994). An experience of the Ignatian exercises. *From the Circuits*. **21**, 3, 13-17.
- Lunn, H. S. (1913). *Retreats for the soul*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Maroney, M. (2008a). *An exploration of a youth spirituality among senior students in three Catholic schools*. Unpublished Doctor of Education thesis, Australian Catholic University, Sydney.
- Maroney, M. (2008b). An exploration of youth spirituality amongst senior students in three Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney. (A summary of research results) *Bulletin 113, November 2008*. Sydney: Catholic education office.
- Mogg, M., & Prout, H. (1998). *School retreat inservice program. Leader Notes*. Mount Macedon, Victoria: Marist Brothers, Province of Melbourne.
- Moran, G. (1966). *Theology of revelation*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- Moran, G. (2002). *Both sides: The story of revelation*. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.
- Moran, G. (2008). *Speaking of teaching: Lessons from history*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books.
- Moran, G. (2009). *Believing in a revealing God: The basics of the Christian life*. Collegeville Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Mottola, A. (1989). *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. New York: Doubleday.
- Mulligan, T. (1994). Marist youth team Year 12 retreats. *Catholic School Studies*. **67**(2). 54-58.
- Mundy, L. (2000). *A retreat with desert mystics. Thirsting for the reign of God*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press.
- Neville, B. (2007). The first Christian Living Camps in Adelaide in 1964. Personal Communication, 14/8/07 Operation Flinders. (2009) Quality wilderness programs for young people at risk. <http://www.operationflinders.org/index.php> Retrieved May 2009.
- Pearce, J. (1989). *Advance by retreat – using silence to come closer to God*. Nottingham: Grove Books Limited.
- Print, M. (1987). *Curriculum development and design*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Prout, H. (1995). *Marist retreats – facilitator's handbook*. Mount Macedon, Victoria: Marist Brothers Province of Melbourne.
- Rogers, C.R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.
- Rogers, C.R. (1972). *Encounter groups*. London: Allen Lane.
- Rogers, C.R. (1969). *Freedom to learn. A view of what education might become*. Columbus Ohio: Charles E Merrill.
- Rogers, C.R. (1983). *Freedom to learn for the 80s*. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill.
- Rossiter, G.M. (1975). Aims of Christian Living Camps, *Our Apostolate*, **23**, 1, 6-12.
- Rossiter, G.M. (1978). *Beyond the classroom: New approaches to personal development and religious education*. Melbourne: Dove Communications.
- Rossiter, G.M. (1981). *Religious education in Australian schools*. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre.
- Second Vatican Council, (1965) *Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. Promulgated by Pope Paul VI). Sydney: St Paul Publications. (C/f Flannery, A. (1996). *The Second Vatican Council: The Conciliar and post-conciliar documents*. Revised Edition. New York: Costello.)
- Schein, E.H. and Bennis, W.G. (1965). *Personal and organizational change through group methods: The laboratory approach*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Schillebeeckx, E. (1985). *The Church with a human face*. London: SCM Press.
- Sidwell, V. (Producer). (2007). *The abbey* (Television series). Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
- Slattery, P. (2006). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era*. New York: Routledge.
- Swan, L. (2001) *The forgotten desert mothers*. New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.
- Tacey, D. (2003). *The spiritual revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality*. Sydney:

HarperCollins.

- Tullio, R. (2006). *Senior school live-in retreats: Teachers' understandings of the nature and function of retreats and perceptions of the skills required for their effective conduct*. *Journal of Religious Education*. 54, 1, 3-12.
- Tullio, R. (2009). The senior secondary school live-in retreat: A study of the views of a sample of teachers from one metropolitan Catholic diocese about the purposes and practices of retreats. Ph D thesis in examination process. Australian Catholic University, Sydney.
- Ward, B. (2003). *The desert fathers*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- (WYD Syd) World Youth Day Sydney 2008, (2006). *World Youth Day 2008 curriculum materials*. Sydney: World Youth Day Sydney 2008.

*Rachele Tullio is Director of Religious Perspectives, Sacred Heart College Middle School, Adelaide. She has completed a doctoral research study on the purposes and conduct of live-in retreats in Catholic secondary schools.

*Graham Rossiter is Professor of Moral and Religious Education at Australian Catholic University, Sydney Campus.

Endnotes

1. The doctoral research study of Tullio (2009) was in two parts:-
 - Part 1. An historical documentary study of two areas. Firstly, the spirituality background to Catholic retreats, dating back to the origins of retreat like experiences in the spirituality of the early Church desert fathers through to contemporary retreats. Secondly, the origins and development of the communitarian school live-in retreat dating back to the mid 1960s. This included notes on youth spirituality which informed the work of retreat leaders.
 - Part 2. A qualitative empirical study of the views of teachers on the nature and conduct of senior school live-in retreats. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with a sample of teachers from one metropolitan Catholic diocese.