

A STUDY OF THE ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT  
AND CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTATIONS  
OF CHRISTIAN RETREATS

by

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR JL COYLE

OCTOBER 2006

Key terms:

Christian retreats; Biblical retreats; Spiritual withdrawal; Monasticism; Discernment; Ignatian spirituality; Christian devotions; Christian meditation; Divine-Human encounter; Christian prayer.

## Summary:

The dissertation is a study of the origins, development and contemporary manifestations of Christian retreats. It traces origins from the Biblical record until current retreats. Christian retreat is a period of withdrawal from usual activities to experience encounter with God through Christian prayer. Jesus' pattern of engagement in ministry and withdrawal is a vital basis for retreat. Other Biblical descriptions of retreat are studied. There is an examination of retreat experiences in Church history with a particular focus on monasticism, as a major expression of retreat life, and Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the modern retreat movement. Varieties of subsequent retreat types in the spiritualities of different traditions from the Protestant Reformation onwards are considered. The spectrum of study includes Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostal spiritualities. The study culminates in focusing on current Ignatian and other retreats in their many forms. This includes private devotions to lengthy periods of retreat.

Declaration:

I declare that "A study of the origins, development and contemporary manifestations of Christian retreats" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed: Hugh Jenkins -----

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## PREFACE

Christian retreats have been important to my spiritual experience and growth. They have been times of prayer and knowing God's love and presence. Retreats have not always been part of my experience. Times away in my Methodist heritage were filled with teaching, singing and fun activities. These were wonderful and precious times. When I entered the realm of the Methodist ministry in the mid 1980's there was an annual event called the "Ministers' Retreat", which was for the ordained and those in training for ordination. The annual retreat had been introduced, as far as I can ascertain, because of ministerial burnout, loneliness and many testimonies of neglecting the devotional life due to an aspect of theological liberalism that questioned the need for prayer, some Christian social activism that neglected prayer, and sheer neglect.

As I reflect, these events, which were labelled as "retreats", were more like teaching seminars aimed at theological impartation and refreshment, friendship sharing with colleagues, and free time. I noticed some appearing desperately tired or spiritually depleted who would seek out the retreat speaker or someone of our own number to share burdens. There were presentations on prayer and the wider devotional life at some retreats. Group discussions that often had value were part of most "retreats". There were also the times when we went aside to reflect and pray. These prayer opportunities were a source of spiritual refreshment and experiences of a sense of connection with God. How I longed for a fuller and longer experience guided by people who had walked further on this prayer path. However, "retreat" was a word for getting away geographically and was not used in an Anglican or Catholic sense of a time devoted to prayer, most often with a significant place for silence.

Experience within my denomination showed me that there were no closed doors to anything that is Christian and helpful. With the yearning to experience the life of prayer to a greater degree, I set about retreat experiences including periods apart at home and withdrawing into the countryside and to a monastery. As these opportunities for retreat became increasingly important on my spiritual journey, I sought to read more to see the place of retreat in Christian spirituality and to lead short retreats for congregational members. I also had the desire to investigate various strands of Christian Spirituality to

research the influences on retreats and to give meaning to the term “retreat”, which I find has been stripped of its rich background in my denomination. The result is this dissertation. I trust that my research into Christian retreats, from Biblical origins through Church history until the present, and across the broad spectrum of Eastern and Western Christianity, Protestant and Catholic, charismatic and contemplative, will inform my own role in retreats and yield helpful insight.

All Biblical references in this dissertation are taken from the New International Version (Inclusive Language Edition), except where otherwise stated.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. AIM

Christian retreating has grown greatly in recent times, even within traditions where this phenomenon was previously not practiced. Current retreating has an important place in Christian Spirituality through the retreats undertaken by clergy, as well as a significant number of lay people benefiting from retreats. What forms do such retreats take? This is one of the fundamental questions of this study. Modern examples of retreats take place in a context of drawing from Christian traditions, whether this is done deliberately or unawares. Therefore, withdrawing to pray and experience God's presence gleans from historical manifestations of Christian devotion and its roots lie deep in Christian practice. This begs certain questions and consequent research and consideration. What are the origins of Christian retreats? This leads into Biblical and early Church retreat experiences. How did the practice of retreating develop over time? A critical historical survey of retreat examples through the centuries is necessary to examine such developments. How do the earlier practices affect present experiences? Have the present retreat manifestations moved in new directions that are wider than the traditions from which they have emerged? These last two questions draw out the importance of examining current retreats in the light of the background from which they have emerged.

### 2. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Believers from many traditions currently practice Christian retreats. Retreating for deepening Christian spirituality, whether viewed in such terms or not, has become a widespread and diverse practice. Therefore, the study of Christian retreats is squarely within the field of Christian Spirituality. The experience of Christian retreat involves a wide variety of devotional practices as well as spiritual and psychological experiences. This means that the study of retreats takes place within an arena where prayer, mystical encounter and personal transformation are experienced.

The current practices in Christian retreating draw from traditions and methods, both Biblical and historical. This study examines the origins and development of Christian retreats, as well as current forms. This is because current retreats draw heavily from the Bible and practices in the history of the Church. A study of present-day Christian retreats inevitably must examine the past. Therefore, this study will include Biblical and other origins, and historical developments, as integral aspects of research. As Biblical Studies and Church History relate directly to these topics, they will provide allied areas of research. These Biblical-Theological and historical disciplines have application to methodology, namely the theological and historical approaches which are explained later in this section. They can also be used as tools in the appropriative method.

In respect of methodology, the appropriative method as put forth by Downey (1997:129-131) will mostly be used in this dissertation. In this method “the governing concern is understanding the Christian spiritual life as experience” (1997:129). Downey (1997:129) writes that such understanding comes through interpretation and application, which is designed to bring about appropriation, or “real understanding that is not just notional or theoretical but transformational.” He points out that the interpreter’s convictions and preconceptions can deliberately be called into question (1997:129). Texts are examined (which is the major type of source for this dissertation) as well as other avenues like popular devotions, persons, liturgies, songs and more.

The appropriative method, according to Downey (1997:129-130), involves three interrelated steps. The first involves describing the spiritual life as experienced or manifested. Secondly, there is critical analysis in the form of theological criticism plus appropriate analysis from psychology, sociology and other applicable fields. The third step is that of constructive interpretation. This step is designed to build on the previous two steps for, as Downey (1997:130) says, “the aim in this method is the transformation and expansion of the person in and through understanding by way of appropriating meaning.” Of course, transformation in the lives of people is not automatic because of understanding, but this method does seek to regard the experiential in spirituality as of central importance.

Downey (1997:124-128) lays out three other methods for the study of spirituality which are also of relevance for this study. The first is the theological method, which uses

concepts, theories and principles. Understanding central Christian doctrines is vital in this method. Therefore, systematic theology and moral theology are critical. Experience is not of central concern. In addition, all spiritual experience tends to be judged by certain criteria with this methodology. As a result, this approach can have weaknesses with regard to the experiential nature of spirituality. For this dissertation, with examination of Biblical accounts and the theological concepts that undergird retreat experiences, the theological method has a place. Theology is helpful in the study of spirituality where it “helps clarify, evaluate, support, challenge, and sometimes correct the experience of persons and groups, past or present” (1997:125). Seen in this light, theological reflection is integral to retreats and the life of retreatants. The use of Biblical Criticism is applicable in this method and has relevance with regard to investigation into Biblical examples of retreat.

The second method is the historical one. “The governing concern...is to gain access to authentic spiritual experience by way of examination of documents or texts which recount the spiritual experience of those who have gone before us” (1997:126). Documents and texts, as Downey (1997:126-127) relates, do not necessarily give access to actual spiritual experiences. This method has obvious application in my investigation of origins and development of retreats through the centuries. Historical investigation is clearly involved. Proposals regarding current applications and challenges require examination against the background of history. However, more than this is required for a critique of the experiential.

Thirdly, there is the anthropological method, in which the outlook is that “spirituality characterizes us first as human rather than as religious or Christian” (1997:127). This approach makes human experience the starting point and seeks “to give attention to the full range of human experience” (1997:128). The experiential is given importance but there can be an avoidance of rigorous discernment and critical evaluation. This has a place in my dissertation for retreat life is experiential and concerns reflection about the essence of our humanity, but evaluation is needed.

The appropriative method helps to take the experiential into account while keeping critical analysis as of foundational importance. The nature of this thesis with theological evaluation, critical Biblical study, historical scope, and examining psychological

experiences in retreatants, as well as the experiential in withdrawal to pray, means that an inter-disciplinary approach is appropriate.

My approach is to seek out signs of retreat from the Old Testament, as the vital textual precursor to Christianity, right through the history of Christianity to the current time. These signs can be in individuals, groups or movements. My study will investigate specific past and current retreats, seeking to cover a broad scope, as retreats have become very varied. I will engage in theological reflection concerning retreats and aspects used on retreats, but with a wider scope than only retreats regarding phenomena such as prayer, journalling, *lectio divina* and meditation. This wider approach is necessary because retreats are attended in conjunction with other aspects of devotional life, the broader Christian life and in accordance with what it means to be human. Such consideration of humanity is in terms of self-transcendence and personal integration, as Downey (1997:125) presents, or a movement in respect of God that relates to both beyond and within, as Bonhoeffer portrayed.<sup>1</sup> Peterson (2005:27), in writing of “transcendence vaguely intermingled with intimacy”, portrays spirituality in similar terms. The concern of God being among (in terms of community) is also integral to spiritual experience within the consideration of our humanity. This serves to indicate that retreats require study in relation to a wider context but within the scope of Christian Spirituality.

This study is designed to be broad in extent, investigating a large number of individuals and groups through history. However, it is not an intensive study of people and groups, except for Ignatius, who has a particularly significant place in the study of retreats. Current retreat examples are multiple and, of necessity, my study is selective rather than exhaustive. However, I have sought to ensure the types of retreat investigated are from a broad cross-section across various traditions and devotional types. My sources for research are mostly from literature and not from surveys and questionnaires, which would make for valuable study, but is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer (1997:282) wrote, “God is beyond in the midst of our life.” In another paper he wrote, “The beyond is not what is infinitely remote, but what is nearest at hand” (1997:376).



### 3. THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN RETREATS

The word "retreat" has many applications with respect to withdrawal in some way. Retreat may refer to a time away from the normal or common aspects of life. It can also refer to a place at which to be away from a working or everyday environment. Retreat can, in addition, indicate an attitude or state of mind that is withdrawn from a general mode of operation. Including "Christian" as an adjective before "retreat" implies that Jesus the Christ is the specific reason for retreating, the focus for the retreat, or a foundation for the retreat. The Christian life involves worshiping God and experiencing relationship with God through the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. The central need in Christian retreat is thus to meet with Jesus Christ. Such meeting requires communication with God through the reality of the risen Christ's intercessory help. "Prayer" is the name for such communication. Clearly, then, any study of retreats implies an allied focus on prayer which is practiced in many forms.

The modern practice of making retreats can be traced back to Ignatian beginnings. The influence of the counter-Reformation in the Roman Catholic Church saw the beginnings of organised retreats. The Jesuits, having Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* as integral to their spirituality, were the first order to make it part of their rule of life to retreat regularly (Townroe 1986:580). Of course, origins in making retreats go back much earlier than the life of Ignatius of Loyola. Old Testament examples, Jesus' own life, the spirituality of the desert and a range of other retreat examples, indicate the retreat experience as integral to Christian and Jewish spirituality.

Hudson (2000:165) notes: "Retreat is a term that tends to be loosely used, often referring to almost any event on the Church's calendar that takes place away from familiar surroundings." Retreat, however, in this study takes on a more particular focus, though seeking to embrace the variety of forms that are genuinely Christian retreats.

Scholars, retreat leaders and practitioners variously describe Christian retreats. Here follows some definitions and a variety of descriptions. We start with some definitions. According to Townroe (1986:579): "To make a retreat, in the Christian sense, is to seek God and to rest in his presence in a time set apart for prayer and reflection. Solitude, silence and stillness, in varying degrees are normally regarded as necessary conditions."

Foster and Yanni (1992:267) assert: "The only reason for a retreat is to be available to God. Everything else is wholly secondary. You are seeking to create an open, empty space in your life where God can work." Goodacre (1983:335) adds the dimension of the director in describing Christian retreat as: "A period spent in silence and occupied by meditation and spiritual exercises, under a conductor who leads the worship, gives the addresses and makes appointments with any retreatants who desire confession, counsel or discussion." Goodacre describes one type of Christian retreat, rather than embracing the whole gamut of retreats in this definition.

Other authors enlarge on these reflections in respect of reflection and giving over time to God. According to Griffin (1997:17):

Spiritual retreat is simply a matter of going into a separate place to seek Christian growth in a disciplined way. Retreat offers us the grace to be ourselves in God's presence without self-consciousness, without masquerade. Retreat provides the chance to be both physically and spiritually refreshed. It is the blessed opportunity to spend time generously in the presence of God. In such a time, God helps us to empty ourselves of cares and anxieties, to be filled up with wisdom and restores us.

Yarnold (1991:7) offers the following insight into retreating: "[A retreat] is an opportunity for a regathering of one's spiritual powers laid waste by getting and spending." Retreat, he says, is "a time for standing away from one's ordinary life in order to reappraise it with a critical eye." Moving more towards definition Yarnold (1991:7) states:

Above all a retreat is Time for God. In our ordinary lives we too easily push God to the margins of our thoughts and desires and plans. In a retreat we allow him to come back to his rightful place in the centre.

An article in *The Franciscan* (1970:157) puts across Christian retreating in this way: "To go into retreat is to withdraw to a vantage point where we can not only see the present and the emerging pattern of our lives, but where we are also exposed to and bathed in the Spirit of the Lord."

Leech (1977:180), in pointing to the need for retreat, writes of the necessity to build up inner resources of silence and stillness (which requires the particular concentration of

time in retreat). He sees retreat as a period of silence severed from one's own environment in order to offer one's self more completely to the will of God. He further asserts that awakening, new vision and new zest are part of the retreat experience.

Brother Ramon (1987:125), describing retreat as more than a physical place, says: "Retreat is to enter into a place of stillness and prayer, a place ' where prayer is wont to be made'." Elsewhere, Brother Ramon (2000:5) expresses retreat as a withdrawal from the immediate and insistent claims of the difficulties and responsibilities of life "in order to be totally available to God". He succinctly writes, "Retreat, therefore, is a withdrawal from the noise and demands of ordinary, busy life to make time for God in interior stillness" (2000:6).

Huggett (2000:63) writes that retreats "provide us with the much-needed time and space to make prayer a priority. It also frees us to open up parts of our personality which close automatically when we hurry or when we are bombarded with noise and other stimuli."

Turning to description rather than definition, other authors give insight into retreats. Silf (2002:x) sees retreating both in encounter with God and through outflow into daily life. She writes:

By making a retreat we are seeking...enlightenment for our own living. We are climbing to a hilltop place, in a sense, and seeking to remove ourselves from our everyday concerns for a while. We are allowing God to illumine the deeper recesses of our minds and hearts; we are letting his presence flow from that encounter into the plains and valleys of our everyday lives.

L'Engle indicates the need for retreat rather differently: "Every so often I need OUT; something will throw me into total disproportion, and I have to get away from everybody - away from all those people I love most in the world - in order to gain a sense of proportion" (1972:4). Underhill (1944:27) used the pictorial language of magnificent Church windows to describe the nature of retreats:

Seen from the outside they all look alike - dull thick and grubby...Then we open the door and go inside - leave the outer world, enter the inner world - and the universal light floods through the windows and bathes us in their colour and beauty and significance, shows us things of which we never dreamed, a

loveliness that lies beyond the fringe of speech.

Retreats, Underhill (1944:27) asserts, mean we "contemplate our Christian treasure from inside."

Examination of these varied descriptions of retreat, from a cross-section of authors, yields quite a portion of common ground. We can find some requirements for an activity<sup>2</sup> to be within the framework of Christian retreat. Some other aspects, while not universally essential in every retreat, are frequently part of retreat, and need consideration by any retreatant seeking diversity and depth.

Three essentials or requirements come through in the varied description of Christian retreats. In other words, without them there has been no real experience of Christian retreat. These are withdrawal, encounter and prayer, to which I now turn.

#### 4. ESSENTIALS

##### A. Withdrawal

Retreat, by its very name, implies withdrawal. Retreat is withdrawal, often in relation to place, but more especially by means of time set aside and in attitude of heart. Without an attitude of withdrawal from aspects of daily life, there is no retreat. Thus, withdrawal can be termed a requirement in Christian retreat.

The word "fasting", if taken in its broader sense, can be used here. In a wider sense than abstaining from food intake, Foster and Griffin (2000:69) explain fasting as follows: "The central idea of fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity." In this sense, retreat always implies fasting, a fasting from other daily activities. However, as fasting is most often associated with refraining from eating, "withdrawal" is a more appropriate term.

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<sup>2</sup> "Activity" could be a misleading term as "a lack of activity" may describe a retreat. However, "activity" is used because a retreat is a specifically planned time, and in a sense is an activity, even if it is a very passive one!

## B. Encountering God

A time of encounter or meeting with God, is essential to retreat. This is because withdrawal in Christian retreat is engaged precisely to meet with God. In other words, relationship with God is central to the very idea of retreat and the basis for retreating. Such encounter with God is essentially being encountered by God, rather than the retreatant being the initiator. Hudson (2000:160) writes,

I like to begin with the grace-soaked affirmation that God initiates the retreat-experience. God is the initiator, we are the responders. Or to put it another way, retreat is God's idea, not ours. We are seeking God, yet God precedes us in our searching.

Such a scenario is not always experienced in individual situations. With such a requirement underlying retreats, there needs to be at least the desire, however fragmented or focused, to encounter God. Such desire implies encounter, for even the first inklings of desire represent a gracious God encountering the one with desire. This encounter or meeting with God may be vague, remote or dominated by an experience of absence rather than presence, right through to intimate and deeply charged meeting with God. Even the vaguest sense of meeting with the divine is present if the retreatant has the beginnings of desire for God. In others, more mature forms of longing for meeting with God are present. Thus encountering God is at the core of what it means to be on Christian retreat.

## C. Prayer

The implication of withdrawal for encounter with God is communication with God, or prayer. The Ulanovs (1986:24) assert: "Prayer above all else is conversation with God. It is the primary speech of the true self to the true God." This is a helpful starting point in considering prayer, provided that "conversation" is considered to consist of listening, speaking and other forms of verbal and non-verbal communication (including bodily communication, writing and art). Relationship with God is integral for retreating. Prayer, as the communication in the human-divine relationship, is thus essential to engage in retreat. The conclusion is that it is not possible to engage in Christian retreat without praying at all. This does not box retreats into one pattern, as there are multiple avenues

of Christian prayer. The immense variety in prayer means that no one specific form of prayer is basic to retreats. However, for Christian retreat to take place there is the implication that desire is expressed in prayer, even if in the most basic form, in the name of Jesus.

#### D. Other Elements Commonly Found in Christian Retreats

Apart from the three essentials or requirements mentioned above, other elements are frequently associated with retreats. These include silence, solitude, Scripture, personal reflection, communal reflection, confession, resolution (or decision-making), meditation, worship and spiritual battle. These features of some retreats need careful consideration to have a view of the wider scope of Christian retreats, however they will not be the main focus here.

### 5. TOWARDS A DEFINITION

The wide ranging forms of Christian retreats and the diverse traditions which shape various forms of retreat makes definitive description tentative at best. From the basis of scholars and retreat practitioners, as well as the essentials identified in this section, I put forward the following description: Christian retreat is a period of withdrawal from usual activities to experience encounter with God through Christian prayer. This definition will be basic to what follows in examining various types of spiritual manifestations.

### 6. LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion in section 2 of this chapter includes scholarship from various sources, regarding the nature and description of retreat. This indicates a variety of perspectives on retreats and traditions from which retreat formats are drawn. That section therefore constitutes part of the literature review of this opening chapter. In this section, further review will follow on general spirituality survey studies, the Biblical study of retreats, the study of historical developments in Christian retreats and current retreats.

## A. General Spirituality Survey Studies

The field of Christian retreats is within the study of Christian Spirituality in modern spirituality anthologies. *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Wakefield 1983a) has an article on *Retreats*. Herein Goodacre (1983:336) describes retreats (cf. Section 3A) and asserts that communication and training have been associated with the spiritual growth evidenced through retreats. He associates the words “discipline”, “sacrifice” and “mortification” with an older style of giving retreats and notes that newer concepts such as “training”, “giving” and “being” make retreats more suitable. The desire is to meet with God rather than talking about God (1983:336). Townroe (1986: 579-581) treats the topic of retreat in *The Study of Spirituality* (Jones, Wainwright & Yarnold 1986). He briefly covers the basic idea of retreat, Jesus’ practice, the concept of the desert within the practice of making retreats, Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, developments from Ignatius’ time to the twentieth century, and the variety of retreats practiced in the late twentieth century. These articles give a short overview without presenting the wide range of current retreats. They are also too brief to show the development of retreats.

*The Study of Spirituality* (1986) also deals with aspects of retreat life and spirituality through a variety of movements and individuals down through the centuries. By searching in a number of the articles, retreat features are apparent in the strands of Christian Spirituality. Included, in this regard, are Biblical aspects of retreat (Barton 1986:47-57; Jones 1986:58-89); articles on monastics and mendicants such as Antony and Pachomius (Rousseau 1986:119-130), Benedict (Spearritt 1986:148-156), later monastic orders (Ward 1986:283-291), the Dominicans (Tugwell 1986:296-300) and the Franciscans (Moorman 1986:301-308). Tripp’s (1986:345) article on Luther yields some aspects of retreat in his prayer practices and admonitions. The articles on Ignatius (Ivens 1986:357-362), de Sales (Stopp 1986:379-385) and French Catholics apart from de Sales (Saward 1986:386-396), reveal lives in which retreat was an integral part of their spirituality. The practice of making retreats is a significant part of the history of Eastern Orthodoxy. Ware’s articles on the Jesus Prayer (1986a:175-183), icons (1986b:189-190) and hesychasm (1986d:242-254; 1986e:255-258) are instructive in this regard. Aspects of retreat, through methods of prayer and devotion, are also evident in the Puritans (Wakefield 1986a:437-445), the Quakers (Wakefield 1986b:445-448), the early Methodists (George 1986:455-459), and Pentecostals (Hollenweger 1986:549-554). In

most cases, retreat life is evident by inference rather than overt presentation. Nevertheless, this volume gives a helpful overview in respect of Christians at prayer and in other forms of devotional life that have relevance for the study of retreats.

In the three-volume Christian Spirituality series published by Crossroad (McGinn & Meyendorff 1985; Raitt 1987; Dupre & Saliers 1989), there is no specific focus on retreat. However, retreat is evident in this series through the investigation that is applicable to my dissertation. This is with respect to looking for retreat life from scriptural origins (Schneiders 1985:1-20), in monasticism (Gribomont 1985:89-112; Pennington 1985:205-217), and in monasticism's offshoots: the Regular Canons (Zinn 1985:218-228), the mendicants (Tugwell 1987:15-31; Hellmann 1987:31-49; Egan 1987:50-62; Zumkeller 1987:63-74), and Ignatius and the early Jesuits (O'Malley 1989:3-27). Further searching yields signs of retreat in Eastern Orthodoxy, especially in its monastic roots (Mantzaridis 1987:208-222; Sherrard 1989:417-431; Bobrinskoy 1989:447-457). Signs of retreat life are evident in various other articles: in the devotional life of the reformers (Lienhard 1987:268-299; Bouwsma 1987:318-333), in seventeenth century French Catholicism (Buckley 1989:28-68), amongst Anglicans (Wakefield 1989:257-293), in Puritan devotional life (Lovelace 1989:294-323; Hinson 1989:324-338; Hambrick-Stowe 1989:338-353), and early Methodist prayer (Trickett 1989:354-371). These scholarly articles examine the life of Christian movements and individuals with a critical eye. In some articles, this is allied with a deep concern about the reality of prayer. From this presentation retreat life comes through without specific presentation.

## B. The Biblical Study of Retreats

Examination of the foundational origins of Christian retreat sees scholars (e.g. Townroe 1986:579; Hudson 2000:161) turning to the Bible, and especially to Jesus as the foundational Christian example. Brother Ramon (1987:45-46) deals with retreat in the life of Jesus (cf. Ch.3.5G). Jesus' life is, in a sense, the starting point for examining Christian retreating, as Christ is at the centre of Christianity (cf. Ch.3.5A). His lifestyle is not in isolation from his Jewish heritage nor from the community he founded. Therefore, this dissertation includes examination of Biblical examples of retreat. This involves the use of searching for signs of retreat in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and using tools of Biblical exegesis and commentary. My approach is to consult commentaries on Biblical



books and to turn to the works of Biblical scholars and historians. The articles in the *The International Bible Commentary*, edited by Bruce (1986), and *New Bible Commentary*, edited by Guthrie and Motyer (1970), provide scholarly comment on the whole Bible. The presentations are brief, and in the case of the second volume conservative in outlook, but scholarship is valued in these commentaries. They therefore provide helpful insight into Biblical passages.

Old Testament scholarship includes Anderson's *The Living World of the Old Testament* (1967) and *A History of Israel* by Bright (1981). Anderson's work is a helpful scholarly overview. Bright's presentation is historical in concern but it yields insight into the life of the people of Israel, including some aspects of their devotional practices. Von Rad's (1972) commentary on Genesis is an insightful and scholarly commentary, which is useful for the retreat aspects found in this first Old Testament book.

A topic, which is integral to retreat from the Old Testament, is the Sabbath. This involves a type of weekly retreat. This is treated in Dawn's (1989) study of the Sabbath and Peterson's (2005:108-129) writing on spiritual theology, as well as commentaries on Biblical Sabbath passages. Both Dawn and Peterson are concerned about current applications of the Sabbath in creative, relevant and challenging ways. This they do with scholarship in drawing from the Old Testament, making their presentations relevant to this study.

Commentaries on the Gospels are integral to examining retreat in the life of Jesus and his disciples, as well as Mary, Joseph and John the Baptist. Hill (1972) and Fenton (1963) for Matthew, Schweizer (1987) and Nineham (1969) for Mark, Caird (1963) for Luke, and Marsh (1968) for John provide this. Consideration of Jesus' life of prayer differs in scope from commentary to commentary. Nevertheless, such is the importance of Jesus' prayer practices in the Gospel presentations that all these commentaries critically evaluate his devotional life. This yields a variety of insights into Jesus' practice of retreating. Form critical methods are also applicable to Jesus' prayers. In examining the place of retreat in the book of Acts, the commentaries of Bruce (1992), Marshall (1980) and Williams (1964) provide scholarly insight. Morris (1987) provides helpful commentary when looking for and interpreting signs of retreat in Revelation. These commentaries on Acts and Revelation help to bring historical critical methods to bear on

study of retreat aspects in the life of the apostles and other early Christians.

### C. Study of Historical Developments in Christian Retreats

Monasticism is within the ambit of retreating because of its essential feature of withdrawal in order to devote life to prayer and the encounter with God. The early post-Biblical manifestations of retreat were mostly monastic in character. Hence, examination of retreat prior to Ignatius of Loyola is largely in respect of monasticism. Apart from the articles on monasticism already mentioned, Ward (2003) gives insightful comment in her introduction to the sayings of the desert fathers. Foster's *Streams of Living Water* (1998) and Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart* (1981) give helpful examinations of the life of Antony. These are, in a sense, "devotional" presentations, but the authors have still placed high value on scholarship. Ware's *Separated from All and United to All* (1977) and Boer's *A Short History of the Early Church* (1976) give insight into the various forms of monasticism that arose from Pachomius' new approach of a communal type of monasticism and subsequent developments. Although they deal with him briefly, allied with the Christian spirituality compilations, a picture of Pachomius is gained of sufficient breadth for the purpose of this study. Guiver's work (2001), *Company of Voices*, gives helpful research into both the monastic and mainstream Church's prayer and liturgy. His work is extensively researched. I examine this research to gain insight into retreat prayer of the early monastic period. Along with articles in anthologies already mentioned, De Waal's (1999) work on Benedict of Nursia studies the role of the Benedictines in retreat. Her work is aimed at enabling the reader to put Benedictine prayer into practice in a helpful manner, but retains high value on scholarship. In addition, Chase's (2003) study of the Victorines, who were Regular Canons, yields some retreat aspects in their lifestyle. His examination is from a current Christian Spirituality study viewpoint of holding together both academic scholarship and devotional application.

I now come to Ignatius, whose *Spiritual Exercises* ([1548] 1951, L J Puhl translation) constitute a new avenue of Christian retreating. I examine this work in full due to its vital place in the origins of modern retreats and its current significant place. This work has undergone extensive study and re-interpretation down the centuries. Fleming's (1978) contemporary reading of the *Exercises* helps in this regard. *Finding God in All Things* by Barry (1991) gives historical and contemporary insight into the *Exercises*. The life of

Ignatius is integral to his spirituality regarding retreat and I use Von Matt and Rahner (1956) as a basic text for this historical investigation. De Guibert (1972) provides helpful insight into early and subsequent Jesuit retreats and Ignatius' contribution to retreats. He wrote from a Jesuit viewpoint especially for the Society of Jesus. Therefore, his work provides an inside view to early twentieth century Jesuit practices and the purposes seen for retreats at this pre-Vatican II stage.

For many Christian groups prayer took first place in devotional life. Even where it was not a first priority, prayer still had a vital place. "Retreat", as used by the Jesuits, was not prominent amongst foundational members of the Reformers, Puritans, Quakers, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals and even most Anglicans. However, prayer was seen as important in these diverse traditions. So elements of retreat life can be found in these traditions, as well as in Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Therefore, I search for elements of retreat; however tucked away they might be, in the spirituality of these diverse groups. Apart from articles mentioned in Section A, I draw from the origins of my own tradition, Methodism. John Wesley placed prayer at the top of his list of "means of grace" (cf. Ch.7.8) by design (George 1986:457). This prominent place for prayer is an example that is typical of any group with emphasis on personal relationship with God. I examine Wesley's (1944) sermons and studies on Wesley's theology and practice in Williams (1960) and Harper (1983) to draw out the retreat undertones in devotional life. These two works are especially concerned with the Wesleyan presentation of grace in its various forms and stages in believers' experience. Prayer and its relevance for retreat is presented in the context of "means of grace" which these authors, as well as George (1986), examine in a scholarly manner.

#### D. Current Retreats

There are three sources with regard to Ignatian retreats based on the classical format of the *Spiritual Exercises* which I examine. These are by Jesuit writers: Green (1986), Yarnold (1991) and Maloney (1982). In all of these retreat presentations, the *Spiritual Exercises* are treated as the standard text to be interpreted into a new context. They use eight to twelve day formats rather than Ignatius' full thirty-day presentation. The design of all these presentations is for actual retreating and can be considered devotional in intent. Green and Yarnold are also scholarly in mode in dealing with Ignatius' original

text and approach. Green stays the closest to a traditional Ignatian retreat of these three writers. Yarnold seeks to be both faithful to the Ignatian retreat model and the modern context in which he presents thoughtful interaction with other spiritualities as helpful. Maloney presents a scholarly interaction between the typical Ignatian retreat and Eastern Orthodox insights within a “standard” Ignatian retreat. It is apparent that even in mainstream traditional Jesuit thought, there is academic and devotional interaction with other spiritualities, which bears on Ignatian retreats.

Other Jesuit writers borrow intentionally from outside traditions and present various syntheses in retreat forms. Their retreat presentations are therefore not especially Ignatian in character. De Mello (1998) has a syncretistic approach, drawing on his experience in the East with other religions. Nevertheless, he seeks to aid encounter with Christ. Jalics (2002) draws from Eastern Orthodoxy and places emphasis on contemplation in a retreat context. Oliva (2001) outlines a variety of meditative and psychological tools applicable to retreats and wider. In particular, the focus will be on a form of imaginative prayer that he presents. Imagination, which is so central to Ignatian spirituality, is given an added psychological use in this case. Fitzmyer’s (2004) presentation on Paul’s letter to the Romans widens the scriptural base of Ignatian meditative focus beyond the Gospels. All of these writers show a significant tendency: to borrow from other spiritualities as and when this is deemed helpful. With the exception of Fitzmyer’s work, in which academic concerns seem to drown out devotional applicability much of the way, the writers are more concerned with encounter with God than academics. However, the description of devotional practices in retreat is vital for this dissertation, making these works valuable aids for study.

Further insights from Jesuits on Ignatian spirituality come from Lonsdale’s *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear* (1990), Faricy’s *Seeking Jesus in Contemplation and Discernment* (1989), Aschenbrenner’s *Stretched for Greater Glory* (2004), Johnston’s *The Wounded Stag* (1985) and Hughes’ *God of Surprises* (1985). These writers all write from a declared Ignatian viewpoint. The first three are concerned with various Ignatian topics, especially the application of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, using scholarly approaches. Johnston is especially presenting Christian meditation, and then not only within an Ignatian context. Hughes is concerned with psychological and spiritual applications and makes for a challenging read with reference to inward reflection while on retreat.

The influence of Ignatian spirituality has increased in recent years wider than the Society of Jesus. Two of Silf's works, *Landmarks* (1998) and *Wayfaring* (2001) and Ayer's *Guided Meditations for Ordinary Time* (1998) demonstrate this. Silf applies the classic Ignatian retreat with pictorial language into the world of everyday Christians in a popular and successful approach. While her aim is not academic, her presentation is instructive in respect of the application of Ignatian spirituality to a wider audience. Ayer presents outlines for meditation that are leaders' guides with Ignatian features. Her presentations are not academic in approach but indicate the widening use of Ignatian-style imaginative pictorial meditations that are currently in use and bear study for this dissertation.

There has been significant development of retreats in Protestant Churches from the 1960's. Ward was a pioneer in this regard, with *The Use of Praying* (1967), which was a breakthrough work amongst Protestants in its time. His proposal regarding a greater emphasis on retreats is now quite widely accepted in such circles. Job, writing alone in *Spiritual Life in the Congregation* (1997), and with Shawchuck (1987 & 1990) in their *Guides to Prayer*, have placed daily and monthly retreat models firmly on the agenda in a Protestant setting. Their helpful guidelines and programmes provide for a variety of retreat models. Their works are geared towards devotional use and noticeably draw from many sources from a wide variety of Christian traditions. Vandergrift's *Planning and Implementing Retreats* (2001) outlines retreat principles for congregational retreats. This is both a practical and theological tool for Catholic parishes, but is readily adaptable to any denomination.

The variety of retreat ideas and models that are presented are vast and sources are varied. These include Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* (1980) on prayer and meditation as spiritual disciplines, and Wiederkehr's *The Song of the Seed* (1995) with *lectio divina* (divine reading) devotions (cf. Ch.4.6). Whitcomb's presentation of one-day retreats in *Practicing Your Path* (2002), DelBene and Montgomery's set of two-hour retreats in *Alone with God* (1984), and Dove's *One Day for God* (1996) retreat with seven sessions all use a variety of meditation and reflection techniques. These are examples that indicate an increasing number of presentations which include variety in one retreat. These are all intended for actual retreats and are practical and devotional in presentation. Brother Ramon's weeklong retreat *Seven Days of Solitude* (2000), Griffin's

retreat examples in *Wilderness Time* (1997), which are various in nature and time span, and De Hueck Doherty's (1977) use of the Eastern Orthodox *poustinia* idea further these models. All of these retreat examples give material for the examination of a wide variety of current retreats. Other types of retreat are Emmaus Walks (using this movement's literature for leaders and "pilgrims" on Emmaus events), Spiritual Enrichment Encounters with Christ in Foster's *Prayer* (1992:281), Shalom Retreats described by Jud (1975), daily-life retreats (using an Ignatian outline), and the retreat elements in a Spiritual Formation Academy outlined by Clapper (1991). The inclusion of these events ensures that the investigation of retreats is a wide one. Casting the focus beyond the western Church and Eastern Orthodoxy, elements of retreat in African Christianity and culture are investigated, using *African Christian Spirituality*, edited by Shorter (1978) and Tutu's *I Have a Dream* (2004). In addition retreat in the spirituality of North American indigenous people is considered in Oliva (2001:113-124).

Numerous websites give information on current retreats. For example, the Retreat Association, in the United Kingdom, whose website is [www.retreats.org.uk](http://www.retreats.org.uk), gives details of a national retreat day in their summer, and provides notes on various types of retreats, prayer and events.

## 7. ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT FORMS OF CHRISTIAN RETREAT

### A. Overall Outline

This study will examine Biblical and historical origins of Christian retreats and the development of retreats. Then I will focus on current forms of retreat. In the thesis, I will consider Biblical foundations, the Church up to the sixteenth century with special reference to monasticism, Ignatius and the early Jesuits, developments from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century, and current forms of Christian retreat. Therefore, the outline of this study will be as follows.

### B. Biblical Foundations

Chapters 2 and 3 lay the Biblical foundations for Christian retreats. These chapters are essential to this study because origins of Christian retreat are drawn from a Biblical basis

and the Scriptures have continued to inform and shape the forms of retreat through history and in current manifestations. Biblical exegesis, with the use of commentaries, is integral to the analysis in these two chapters.

Chapter 2 will be devoted to Old Testament Foundations. This is essential for the Judeo-Christian background and basis for retreats. Vital elements for retreat in the Old Testament are Creation and the Sabbath, significant individuals who experienced retreat times, retreat in the Psalms, and retreat experiences of the Prophets.

Chapter 3 focuses on New Testament Foundations. Clearly, Jesus is the main character because the Gospel records have a number of significant incidents of retreat in Jesus' life. There will, however, first be examination of the retreat features in John the Baptist's life and then in Mary and Joseph. There follows study of Jesus' forty-day retreat at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus' lifestyle of ministry and withdrawal, the time in Caesarea Philippi, the Transfiguration, Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary, the Gethsemane Garden episode, and Jesus' suffering and the cross. Thereafter I move to examining Jesus' purposes for retreat. Focus then shifts to the twelve disciples and then to Paul. Finally, John on Patmos receives specific treatment because of the place of retreat in the book of Revelation.

#### C. The Church up to the Sixteenth Century with Special Reference to Monasticism

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the lengthy period of Church history until the sixteenth century when the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation had major affects on the Church. Special reference is given to monasticism because this way of life was the major form of Christian retreat until the sixteenth century.

In Chapter 4, the focus rests on early monasticism<sup>3</sup> and the wider Church until the twelfth century. As monasticism has evoked controversy in Protestant circles, I have included an introductory section which examines criticism of monasticism. Thereafter

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<sup>3</sup> Monasticism was a lifestyle rather than consisting of periods of retreat. Monasticism is, however, a vital area of study for retreats because of its essential retreat nature, the way monastic life influenced early Ignatian retreats, and its continuing influence on a variety of retreats (cf. Ch.4.1).

attention moves to the ancient Western Church in the form of Antony, Pachomius, and their respective followers. Examination of subsequent monastic developments follows. It is then Benedict and his followers who are studied in the next section. Thereafter follows presentation of the life of the wider Church. I then move attention to the Eastern Orthodox Church in this period before making some reflections.

The title of Chapter 5 is “Monasticism from the Tenth until the Sixteenth Century”. The overlapping of movements from the tenth to the twelfth centuries means that some backtracking to the tenth century is necessary for this chapter. Monasticism was the overwhelming form of retreat in this era, and is therefore the focus for this period. I consider monastic orders, Monk-Knights, Regular Canons, and Mendicants. Examination of monasticism in Greek and Russian Orthodoxy follows.

#### D. Ignatius and the Early Jesuits

Ignatius of Loyola provided the origins for modern Christian retreats. His role was therefore pivotal in providing a new framework for Christian retreating. His influence continues through the use of his *Spiritual Exercises*. Chapter 6 is devoted to him and the early members of the Society of Jesus, which he founded. The *Exercises* is the basic text to use in this chapter. Ignatius’ life story is also integral to examining the development of retreats. Hence, I present a section on his life before examining the *Spiritual Exercises* in some detail. Thereafter follows a short presentation on the Jesuits’ *Directory*.

#### E. Developments from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Century

Chapter 7 focuses on the period from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. The examination is many-pronged due to the diversity in retreating that manifested and multiplied in this era. I examine the Protestant Reformers. I then turn to French Roman Catholics. The Catholic examination then widens in the next section. Thereafter I examine retreating in a variety of other groups.



## F. Current Christian Retreats

Current retreats function in many and diverse forms. They draw from various traditions indicating that current retreats are, in many ways, products of the Biblical and historical origins and developments outlined in the previous chapters. Ignatian retreats continue to be used in various formats and have an ongoing vital place in consideration of modern retreats. I will examine Ignatian retreats in Chapter 8. Many other types of retreat have emerged. In Chapter 8, the first focus is on the use of the *Spiritual Exercises* in a classical manner. Attention is placed there because the basic Jesuit text continues to be faithfully followed in many retreats. I will examine presentations that are closely based on Ignatius' outline. A section on creative movements in retreats by Jesuits follows because members of the Society of Jesus have added from other spiritualities to their Ignatian heritage. Ignatian spirituality has influenced retreats outside of the Jesuit fold. Therefore I examine the wider Ignatian influence on retreats in a subsequent section. The chapter has another section on some retreat issues related to Ignatian spirituality viz. discernment, contemplation, charismatic prayer and second conversion.

Some of the vast array of non-Ignatian retreats comes under the spotlight in Chapter 9. This chapter is a study on widely diverse retreats. There is a section on extended solitude, which continues to be practiced by some Christians. The recent growth in the use of retreats amongst Protestants merits a section on this phenomenon, which then follows. A section is devoted to "centring down", which has come to be used by retreatants of various traditions. Individually given retreats, which involve spiritual guides aiding retreatants, are also examined. I follow on by focusing on personal retreats of various lengths in time. The next three sections are on the use of spiritual disciplines on retreat, the influence of Eastern Orthodoxy on Western retreats, and on journalling. Examination of various group retreats follows. The types of retreats examined in retreat presentations, reflections in journals, retreat studies and written retreat formats are very diverse. I have deliberately considered a wide variety of retreat types (including some programmes that use the word "retreat", but where careful scrutiny is needed in the description I have given of retreat). I undertake the examination of this diversity of retreats because there are many types of retreat that are indeed "Christian retreats". The volume of such retreats means that some types can be given only brief consideration. Other formats with retreat aspects are then studied: daily-life retreats and a Spiritual

Formation Academy. In seeking wider application of the retreat concept (and input into Christian retreating), I devote sections to African aspects in Christian retreats and the vision quest in Native American spirituality.

## 8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In working from the basis that Christian retreat is a period of withdrawal from usual activities to experience encounter with God through Christian prayer, I will be seeking signs of this description in the Old and New Testaments, in the history of the Christian Church and in the current Church. Signs like silence, solitude, Scripture, personal reflection, communal reflection, confession, resolution, meditation, worship and spiritual battle will also help in looking for retreat features across this spectrum. There are specific movements like monasticism and the Society of Jesus, which require special investigation, due to their basic lifestyle or rule of life. In addition, retreat presentations need examination from the basis which I have laid out. This examination begins with the Old Testament in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

# OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Retreating from other activities in order to experience encounter with God in prayerful ways finds a varied and rich background in the Old Testament. The spiritual milieu of the Old Testament shows little of the division of life into separate compartments, a perspective which comes more to the fore in Greek thought, and even more so with modern Western individualization. Hence in Hebrew understanding, withdrawal is not the only way to encounter God. Encounters are most often initiated by God who is seen as active in the realities of everyday life, but that life needs to be ordered accordingly. Hence it is necessary, in Old Testament terms, to follow the ways of the Law, or *Torah*, as laid out in the Pentateuch. This outlook did not make the need for specific times of prayer redundant. Indeed, withdrawal for spiritual purposes is in the rhythm of life in ancient Israel because of the Sabbath, which is used especially for worship and to draw aside from the activities of the other six days of the week. A survey of Old Testament teaching and experiences indicates the importance of the Sabbath in understanding retreat experience in pre-Christian Hebrew outlook.

Withdrawal in order to pray took on varied forms in the experiences narrated in the Old Testament literature. Ecstatic prayer was a widespread experience, often expressed in prophetic circles. Liturgical prayer was integral to community life in festivals, special occasions and, of course, Sabbath worship. Festivals had some liturgy, but were something like carnivals. Therefore individually offered prayers were commonly offered at such occasions, but in the context of a community experience (Barton 1986:53). Individually expressed prayer, oftentimes in retreat, is also evidenced in a number of lives in the Old Testament. Such prayer could include ecstatic and liturgical elements, indicating that people alone prayed in a manner which had links with their community experiences and worship. Individual experiences of retreat were set in the wider context of what it meant to be part of a family, a clan, a nation, and a worshipping community. In the lives of various foundational Hebrew figures, retreat experiences are recorded.

In the Psalms there is a meditative thread which indicates that the sung corporate worship influenced retreat times of prayer. The retreat and meditative experience of people finds expression in the Psalms, indicating an interaction between corporate and individual spiritual experience.

The prophets, also, represent a strain of Hebrew faith life which was, in many instances, against the mainstream and on the fringe of cultic worship. As bearers of a divinely felt message, the prophets often, in meditative times in solitude, received such messages or discerned their clarity. On many occasions, they withdrew into solitude or remoteness following the delivering of oracles. This was for various reasons including safety needs, recovery of energy, and for dramatic impact.

The theme of retreat for prayer is thus expressed in a diversity of experiences conveyed in the Old Testament literature. This chapter will focus on: the Sabbath, and its link with the Creation; significant individuals who experienced or engaged in episodes of retreat; retreat in the Psalms; the prophetic experience of retreat; and, in conclusion, Christian use of the Old Testament for the purposes of retreat.

It is significant that the attitude of early Christians to Scripture was in line with that of the Jews. Schneiders (1985:4) writes in this regard:

Every word of the sacred text was pregnant with divine meaning and everything of religious significance was expressed in the context of Biblical categories and by means of Biblical language. Consequently, the entire religious experience of the early Church was steeped in and articulated by Biblical symbolism. At first this symbolism was drawn entirely from the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Old Testament has a vital place in considering Christian retreat origins. It also functions as an integral Scriptural text for Christian retreats.

## 2. CREATION AND SABBATH

The story of the six days of creation finds the creation week completed by a seventh day of rest (Gen.1:1-2:3). In a sense, God is presented as withdrawing from the role of worker. It could be said that God goes on retreat. According to Dawn (1989:3), the

Hebrew verb *Shabbat*, from which comes the word Sabbath, primarily means "to cease or desist". Such "ceasing" is also associated with a secondary meaning of "resting" (Dawn 1989:53).

The creation account, most significantly, does not stop with the description of the creation of the entire cosmos and all living creatures. Something else, the ceasing, provides the conclusion. As Von Rad (1972:62) asserts, "it is anything but an appendix." God "completed" the work of creation on the seventh day and not on the sixth day, despite the lack of labour on the seventh day. Resting is therefore part of creating in the Genesis presentation. This resting on the seventh day is integral to the created order. "Both finishing and resting are viewed positively and characterize the seventh day as a distinct state of triumphant consummation for the Creator" (Kline 1970:83). Von Rad (1972:62) writes concerning this resting: "The declaration amounts, as it were, to the place of God himself and testifies that with the living God there is rest." God has blessed this rest according to Gen.2:3. Von Rad (1972:62) asserts that the Priestly writer (the author of this passage) "does not consider (this rest) as something for God alone but as a concern of the world, almost as a third something that exists between God and the world. The way is being prepared, therefore, for an exalted, saving good."

There is no evening and morning conclusion to the seventh day, as there is with the other six days, in this Genesis narrative. This suggests an open-endedness about God's resting, while also giving the framework of a weekly order to time. In this creation account, Ellison (1986:116) asserts that there can be no affirmation that God's work has finished, until God has shown this by ceasing. In other words, there is no completeness in the creation account until God has ceased creating and rested, as a deliberate decision and "act" (if ceasing can be termed an action). Ellison (1986:116) asserts that human work, in reflection of God's pattern, is shown to be completed by the keeping of the Sabbath, in accordance with the commandment of Ex.20:9.

God's resting is tied closely to the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy (Ex.20:8-11; Deut.5:12-15). The Exodus version of the Sabbath commandment shows a specific link of the creation week with the command to keep the Sabbath holy and not to work. The rhythm of the week thus drew in Jewish life the basis for what could be called a weekly retreat day. People are commanded to rest. This is because of the human

need for retreat. The creation account of Gen.1:1-2:3 gives a theological underpinning for the need for the Sabbath. Such need for Sabbath ceasing, or withdrawal from six days of work, is therefore interlinked with living within the rhythm of God's created order. Time and space apart from work is drawn forth out of the creation account into the Sabbath commandment. Dawn (1989:xi) asserts that the Sabbath is a gift for ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting, indeed a gift from God.

There are profound implications for retreats from the Sabbath. This includes the incompleteness of life without resting in prayer. There is the need for work to be seen as done, without the anxieties that are caused by the stress of "unfinished tasks", when one gets to Sabbath retreat. This needs to be seen alongside the reality that not all is complete until the retreatant has deliberately ceased from labour. Peterson (2005:110) asserts:

Sabbath is a deliberate act of interference, an interruption of our work each week, a decree of no-work so that we are able to notice, to attend, to listen, to assimilate this comprehensive and majestic work of God, to orient our work in the work of God.

Work can then be resumed from a new Sabbath perspective. The pattern of engagement and withdrawal, action and prayer, is needed for wholeness of response to the Creation week and the gift of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath day had further extensions in terms of sabbath years (every seventh year) and jubilee years (seven sets of seven years culminating in a fiftieth year). The regulations for sabbath years and jubilee years are recorded in Lev.25:1-55 and Deut.15:1-18. The sabbath year involved letting land lie fallow and remitting of debts. The year of jubilee included the restoration of land, freeing of Hebrew slaves and cancellation of debts, all in a celebratory spirit. Restfulness and renewal were inherent in not working the land in the seventh year. Trusting in God was also intertwined in sabbath year and jubilee observation. Not to work meant trusting God's provision. Clearly, there are retreat aspects to draw from sabbath year and jubilee observation. Rest was a divine necessity for the purpose of a new start and opportunity, along with celebration of the time of rest.

The very idea of Sabbath as integral to life is indicated in the foundational creation week. This means that the work-withdrawal or active-retreatant interaction needs to be seen as integral to spiritual life. Retreat is thus essential to spirituality in relation to creation and the Sabbath.

### 3. INDIVIDUALS WHO EXPERIENCED RETREAT TIMES

The Old Testament Scriptures contain accounts of people who were encountered by God, in their experience, through various retreat happenings. We turn to some of these individuals: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Elijah.

#### A. Abraham

Abraham is an Old Testament figure who experienced life-changing meetings with God. His experiences are, on a number of occasions, retreat encounters with God. According to Bright (1981:98), Abraham's conception of God, along with the other patriarchs, was that of the patron deity of the clan. Bright (1981:98) asserts: "In the Genesis narrative each patriarch is represented as undertaking by a free and personal choice the worship of his God, to whom he thereafter entrusted himself." Revelation of the character and the nature of God as Creator of all and the only true God thus took place over a period of time. The revelatory experiences that Abraham had were vital for this greater picture to be discerned. In the Biblical record Israel's history and faith started with Abraham, even though it is only with Moses that Israel's formulated religion began (1981:96).

The concept of covenant has a vital place in the account of Abraham. The presentation of receiving the covenant conditions is set in the context of divine encounter which has discernable aspects of retreat. Kline (1970:95) points out that the covenant was ratified first by divine oath (Gen.15) and afterwards by human oath (Gen.17).<sup>4</sup> These two accounts, in chapters 15 and 17, have been seen by various scholars as parallel accounts, stemming from different sources (Payne 1986:125). Nevertheless, whether

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<sup>4</sup> Suzerainty treaties with a vassal were characteristic of Abraham's milieu. The vassal oath was integral to such covenants. On occasion, suzerains would also commit themselves by oath, particularly with regard to land grants (Kline 1970:95). God's covenant oath and Abraham's response follows aspects of such treaties quite closely. Also involved in this happening is Abraham's devotion and prayer.

through editing or otherwise, they are presented as progressive events; an unfolding of revelatory experience for Abraham.

According to Genesis 15, Abraham<sup>5</sup> experienced that "the word of the Lord came" to him (v.1).<sup>6</sup> Such a statement is in the form of a prophetic call, frequently found in the prophetic literature and foreign to the Hexateuch (Von Rad 1972:183). The "word" was mediated to Abraham in the form of a vision. If the "vision" (v.1) covers the entire fifteenth chapter then, as Kline (1970:95) asserts, "it apparently included a variety of psychological states from sleep-like trance (vv.12ff) to a waking state with supersensory awareness (vv.5, 10f, 17)." This vision involved a conversation with God concerning an heir and the possession of an inheritance of land. The stars of the night sky were a message for Abraham of the multiplicity of his offspring (v.5). Here the vision includes a literal viewing for symbolic purposes: the stars represent descendants. A covenant is visually and sacrificially "cut" through the sacrifice of animals (vv.9-11). There follows a deep sleep for Abraham who receives further assurance of God's promises and plans for the future (vv.12-16). Abraham's dialogue with God, and his experiences of vision, dream, a message from creation, and action in covenant response, comes out of a time alone with God. This episode is portrayed as a very individual experience, possibly in a reclusive situation. This individual-divine encounter is set in the context of the foundational patriarch of the Hebrew people receiving a message which has implications for a whole nation. As such, his individual retreat experience takes on corporate meaning for the Hebrew nation.

The foundational calling experience of Abraham is in a time of encounter in prayer. Certainly, God is presented as the initiator, but the realities of the individual experience of revelation speak of withdrawal with profound effects. This opens the way for all children of Abraham and Sarah, by birth, and then by faith, to be open to encounter with God. This experience, and the sharing in it, helps those who are followers (and readers

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<sup>5</sup> At that stage he still had the name Abram.

<sup>6</sup> The use of Yahweh (Lord) in Gen.15:1 does not mean that Abram had this name revealed to him. It was to Moses that the name was revealed (Ex.3). Nevertheless, there is the correspondence between Abram's experience and Moses' in that it is considered to be the same God, the one Creator, who revealed God's self to both. Thus it was Yahweh who covenanted with Abram even though that name was not yet known in Abram's time.



of the text) to see the value of individual prayer and have openness to the withdrawal that makes this possible.

The experience of receiving a new name, Abraham (father of many), comes out of a sense of revelation from God to Abraham, as related in Gen.17. Here the revelation consists of a speech from God with Abraham's response being to fall "face down" (v.3). As Von Rad (1972:197) indicates, Abraham's call is purely spoken by God. All that is said of Abraham is a gesture of reverence. Apart from the name change, there is revelation concerning aspects of the covenant, viz. land and circumcision. The experience is individually received, though there are wider implications for the covenant people. Then this revelation enters into dialogue, as Abraham learns of God's plan for him to have a son through Sarah. Such dialogue, flowing out of revelation is certainly in the realm of prayer and this episode demonstrates a pattern of retreating: there is a "call" by God to prayer and Abraham's response. This individual call to retreat has the effect of becoming a wider call to all who will respond to God. This is especially so as Abraham is a foundational figure for all who accept covenant with God.

A different kind of experience happens for Abraham when he receives three visitors. As the account unfolds in Genesis 18 it becomes apparent that these are messengers from God. Revelation about the imminent conception and birth of the son of promise is given (v.10). Whether the messengers are human or angelic, with one perhaps divine, remains a mystery. Following their departure another dialogue between God and Abraham is presented. Dillmann (quoted in Von Rad 1972:204) calls this narrative unit "an accomplished work of epic art". The reader is drawn into a story that has developed out of the tragic destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah that was foretold and Abraham's spiritual battle prior to the events that would unfold. The graphic use of numbering in the conversation concerning the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah is in the sphere of prayer. This is emotional, animated and experiential prayer. It comes out of Abraham's reflection upon the message from the three visitors. Abraham, in his attitude, is withdrawn from all daily concerns as a result of their visit. He has bigger concerns. He enters a time of heightened spiritual awareness and encounter with God. It is not a restful time, but nevertheless an experience of agonising in retreat takes place.

Abraham's extended experience of call over a number of years bears testimony to times of encounter with God. Surprise encounters they are, but nevertheless they can be described as retreat experiences, with a particular emphasis on their revelatory nature.

#### B. Isaac

Isaac is presented as being out in a field one evening (Gen.24:63). At this sunset hour the caravan of camels with which Rebekah was travelling came into view. Isaac was in a period of waiting, knowing his father's servant had travelled with the task of arranging a marriage for Isaac. In this time of waiting, when God's guidance had been asked for by Abraham and the servant, Isaac has a time of withdrawal which is remembered in the story of his first meeting with Rebekah. The Hebrew word rendered "meditate" (Gen.24:63) in the NIV is uncertain in meaning. Von Rad (1972:259) relates: "Isaac's activity in v.63 immediately prior to the meeting is not clear; the verb is not translatable. ('To meditate' is guesswork and not even probable.)" Whatever hesitations there are as to whether Isaac is described as meditating or not, he was out in the field, probably alone, and in a time of some sort of retreat. This was preparation of a peculiarly apt nature in awaiting marriage, with all the mystery this marriage involved.

#### C. Jacob

Jacob's dream of a stairway with angels ascending and descending described in Gen.28:10-17, seems more a surprise and the unexpected message of God creeping upon him, than a specific time of withdrawal. Like Abraham, Jacob experiences a retreat time initiated by God. Whatever human decisions are taken for such prayer times, the divine initiative is integral to this, and other, retreat encounters.

Jacob was on a journey from Beersheba to Haran. Von Rad (1972:283) says: "The narrative begins by letting the lonely traveller rest at a place that has something emphatically coincidental about it." Jacob had withdrawn from the life that he knew into the unknown and would have been in a vulnerable state of mind. There was a type of space in Jacob's life, in that he was out of the familiar; something akin to a form of retreat.

Von Rad (1972:283-284) regards the dream as a combination of what were originally two separate nocturnal revelations, viz. the stairway between earth and heaven (v.12) and the Yahweh manifestation (vv.13ff). The dream shows what Jacob later calls “the gate of heaven” (v.17b), that is, “that narrow place where according to the ancient world view all intercourse between earth and the upper divine world took place” (1972:284). In respect of the stairway, the mindset of the ancient Middle East needs to be taken into account. In this view a distinction was made between the heavenly dwelling place of a deity and the earthly place of the deity’s appearing (1972:284). Thus, for Jacob, the earthly place is a house for God. Jacob was impressed in his dream with an awesome sense of God’s presence, and Bethel is a temple in embryo (Payne 1986:133). Jacob’s statement that “The Lord is in this place”, has a definite and exclusive meaning, asserts Von Rad (1972:285). “The immediate effect of this bewildering experience is a feeling of pious shuddering. The narrator has preserved here a tone of original ancient piety, the effect of whose cogent simplicity is timeless” (1972:285).

Subsequent to the dream, Jacob erects a stone pillar and anoints it with oil (Gen.28:18). Following this there is further covenant language. In v.20 Jacob bargains with God as he makes a vow. This is, however, in the context of greater emphasis being on God’s promises in verses 13-15, relating to land and descendants (Payne 1986:133). This covenant-making also needs to be seen against the wider backdrop of the covenant already made with Abraham. Jacob’s “retreat” experience was therefore linked vitally to his milieu and the broader theme of covenant, even when the unexpected nature of his encounter is considered.

Jacob’s experience of wrestling (Gen.32:22-32), was in a specific time of withdrawal. Von Rad (1972:318) asserts that this pericope underwent a long process of formation, with many generations involved in forming and interpreting it. There can therefore be no hasty and successful search for “the” meaning of this multilayered story.

Jacob withdrew from his travelling party, with his family and two of their servants, and then he withdrew entirely alone. His experience of tension was high as he was to meet his estranged brother, Esau, the following morning, after two decades of separation. These words of verse 24 are significant: “So Jacob was left alone” (emphasizing a person in a large group at last fully alone). This statement contrasts with: “and a man

wrestled with him till daybreak." This indicates a long bout of wrestling occurred (1972:320). The account sees the entrance of a mysterious figure. The aloneness opened the way for not being alone, for the divine encounter. The human/angelic/divine wrestler ensures a most surprising encounter with no less than God. This mysterious encounter opens up many possibilities for the mysterious divine encounter in retreating. Kline (1970:105) points out that in the Near East law cases were sometimes settled by an ordeal or test which, on occasions, involved wrestling. The necessity for the mysterious figure to depart before daylight "expressed God's concern lest Jacob perish through beholding His face unobscured by the darkness" (1970:105).

There is in the narrative the almost incomprehensible conception that Jacob nearly defeated the heavenly being. In v.26 the antagonist asks Jacob to let him go and in v.28 Jacob is said to have prevailed. A different picture comes through in v.25b and v.32b where the heavenly being's prevailing strength is highlighted (Von Rad 1972:320-321). The story has close parallels with sagas in which gods, spirits or demons attack a person and in which the person "extorts something of their strength and their secret...Especially frequent in such sagas is the notion that the effectiveness of these beings is bound to the night-time; when morning breaks, they must disappear" (1972:321). At many levels in the story there is a sense of mysterious divine presence. By the time the wrestler has departed Jacob is convinced that he has met with God. "He gives the place of this encounter a name which is to contain what in his own eyes was the greatest marvel of all – that God was face to face with him, and the encounter had not meant his death!" (1972:323).

Withdrawal was the vital precursor to this life-changing and name-changing (signifying character-changing) experience for the newly named Israel. In giving his name in verse 27, Jacob had to reveal his nature, and thus was able to change (1972:321). This was therefore a dramatic retreat experience, and is an example of the opening of one's life to the divine encounter through retreating.

#### D. Joseph

Joseph's dreams as a teenager came out of the experience of one who was acquainted with withdrawal. He was the youngest son, except for a much later born Benjamin. For

quite some time he was the only son of his father's favourite wife. His favoured position saw him excused from some of the farming activities that occupied his brothers. In this situation (perhaps it could be called enforced withdrawal), he dreamt dreams. Dreams were significant in that milieu. Kline (1970:107) indicates: "Professional dream interpretation is attested in much Ancient Near Eastern literature, including reference works listing dream symbols and meanings."

Dreams always come in pairs in the Joseph account (Von Rad 1972:351). According to Payne (1986:138), this use of pairs "confirms their significance and God-given character." Whether these were experienced in a waking or sleeping mode is unclear from the Biblical account in Gen.37:5-11. Von Rad (1972:351) asserts, concerning this pair of dreams: "They are quite simple, pictorial prefigurations of coming events and conditions." The dreams are not presented as a divine address (as is the case in other places in Genesis e.g. 20:3; 26:24; 28:13), yet "the narrator thinks of them as real prophecies given by God" (1972:351). As Von Rad (1972:351) notes, there is an unmistakable prophetic substance to the dreams and yet Joseph is also chided on their account. Thus, the dreams, while not specifically said to be God-directed in Gen.37, are interpreted by means of God's help if the long-term account is considered. These dreams became foundational for a bigger story that covers decades, nations, history and God's salvation plan. They are dreams out of an experience of time alone.

When Joseph hears the relating of dreams in prison, correct interpretation is only possible by God's direction, according to Joseph (Gen.40:28; 41:25). Joseph shows growing discernment while in prison. He has a contemplative awareness born out of a desire to be open to God's message, especially through dreams which had such an important place in that worldview. That awareness grew in his enforced time of withdrawal.

#### E. Moses

Moses' experience of God's call at Mount Horeb (Ex.3:1-4:17) was a life-changing retreat experience. In terms of form criticism the passage is a call narrative (Gordon 1986:157). Moses' call came during the tending of flocks of animals. It was thus during a time of farming work, and yet also through a deliberate movement away from his normal

area of operation, that Moses experienced this call. This time at the mountain was a period of withdrawal. Moses had much on his mind. The aloneness was surely time to think on his Egyptian upbringing, his Hebrew origins, the oppression and slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt, his own desires and role, and the presence of God at that mountain.

According to Ex.3:2 it is “the angel of the Lord” who appeared to Moses “in flames of fire from within a bush”. By verse 4 it is clear that it is God who has communicated. The “angel of the Lord” was therefore seen as a form of God’s self-manifestation (Jones 1970:117). The use of an angel as a description of God’s presence was a fairly common occurrence until Moses’ time.<sup>7</sup> Gordon (1986:157) notes that the flames of fire were symbolic of the divine presence.

The experience that Moses had at the scene of the burning bush that was not consumed comes across as a divinely ordered surprise. Gordon (1986:157) asserts: “Moses found his first direct encounter with God an unnerving experience.” Moses had a sense of awe, and enters into conversation with God. This is prayer at its most communicative. God assures Moses, “I will be with you” (Ex.3:12), in respect of going to Egypt. God’s self-manifestation at the mountain was to give Moses assurance for his task.<sup>8</sup>

Moses is called to lead the Israelite people out of Egypt. His objections and hesitations are many. Moses realised that what he had experienced was not so easily communicated to his fellow Israelites. Hence he expresses his concern that the Israelites would not be easily persuaded that the God of their ancestors had again visited the representative of God’s people (1986:158). Nevertheless, this is the groundswell experience to lead unstopably onwards to the exodus experience. It was thus in a time of withdrawal that Moses experienced the birthing of what was to become foundational to ancient Israel, the Exodus.

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<sup>7</sup> Jones (1970:116) regards the revelation given to Moses as a watershed in this regard, resulting in angels no longer being written of as manifestations of God. Jones (1970:116) asserts: “The ministry of angels was, until Moses, the distinctive means of revelation to the elect, but ceased to be so from the time of the Mosaic revelation, for these truths and institutions made angelic visitations unnecessary.”

<sup>8</sup> The use of the verb “to be” in this verse possibly anticipates the revelation of the divine name, the tetragrammaton in v.14. The name “I am who I am”, discloses something of God’s character. However, the name reveals and withholds at the same time (Gordon 1986:158).

This is one of the clearest retreat episodes in the Old Testament. There is deliberate withdrawal "to the far side of the desert" and it is related that Moses "came to Horeb, the mountain of God" (Ex.3:1). There is also dramatic encounter, with a call given to Moses of resounding proportions. Prayer thus unfolds in revelatory and dramatic fashion. This is retreat time oriented towards action: the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and the spiritual content of that experience.

Retreat times became essential for Moses when the people of Israel moved into the wilderness. These times were especially associated with Mount Sinai, which was the goal of the Exodus pilgrimage in its first stage (Jones 1970:131). It is in accordance with a promise of the revelation received in the burning bush experience that Moses ascends Mt. Sinai<sup>9</sup> as recorded in Ex.19:3. The promise was: "You will worship God on this mountain" (Ex. 3:12b). Moses is called or summoned to go up the mountain to meet with God. This encounter with God is integrally related to the covenant in line with the patriarchs' experience.<sup>10</sup>

Moses' retreat experience and representational role sees him acting as a mediator between God and the people. In Ex.19:7-9 he brings God's message to the Israelites and returns to the mountain with the people's acceptance.<sup>11</sup> In this regard Moses has a responsibility to pass on the effects of his retreat experience to the people as a whole. Moses later approaches God who is in "thick darkness" (Ex.20:21), which emphasizes the awesomeness of meeting with God.<sup>12</sup> Through the experience at Mount Sinai he receives the Ten Commandments and further laws. More retreat times on the mountain follow.

There was one experience of God's glory and of Moses seeing God's "back" (Ex.33:12-23). Moses' request to God is to "show me your glory" (v.18), which is a desire for a

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<sup>9</sup> It is called Horeb in Ex.3:1.

<sup>10</sup> The covenant is specifically mentioned in Ex.19:5, in which Israel is also referred to as God's "treasured possession".

<sup>11</sup> The holiness of God in meeting the people is brought across by the use of a dense cloud (v.9). Gordon (1986:169) asserts that much of chapter 19 is "concerned with the way in which the Israelites are made ready to receive the divine revelation".

<sup>12</sup> The covenant aspect of this experience for Moses involves him enabling the people of Israel to come under the detailed requirements of the covenant for their daily life and worship by means of Moses' encounter with God.

theophany (Gordon 1986:184). Jones (1970:117) asserts that in this context glory means the “visible and supernatural manifestation of the supreme and incomparable majesty of God”.<sup>13</sup> God’s “face” is not disclosed, for this means, in the anthropomorphic language used, a full disclosure of God. Instead God’s “back” is shown to Moses, that is a partial revelation of divine glory. This episode follows the account that at the tent entrance, when God’s presence was manifested in the pillar of cloud, Moses would meet with God “face to face” (Ex.33:11). This is explained as friend meeting with friend in v.11. Jones (1970:138) explains it as “unrestrained communion in which nothing is withheld and nothing is cloaked”. This episode comes across as an even more awesome encounter, presented as a unique experience, in comparison to the meetings at the tent entrance.

According to Ex.34:28, this experience on the mountain involved a forty day period of fasting. New stone tablets were received. Moses’ return to the people was marked by radiance on his face (Ex.34:29-30). The previous importance placed on the face has significance in this situation. Moses manifests the awesome effects of God’s glory and needs to be veiled when meeting with the people.

The manner in which the giving of the Law is described indicates its close association with listening to and encountering God. Withdrawal is presented as essential in order to receive God’s message and God’s ways for ordering daily life. Moses’ withdrawal times were actually for the vital benefit of the whole nation. Their blindness to this relevance is most graphically shown in the account of the manufacturing of the golden calf idol (Ex.32:1-33:6). There are thus differing attitudes about the need for, and the relevance of, listening to God out of the Mount Sinai accounts. Not to listen yields disobedience and results in tragedy, according to the Exodus account. Moses is the example of one who listens to God and whose demeanour and action reflects encounter with God. In the Pentateuch’s presentation of Moses, retreat is essential for him to encounter God and for the people to receive the *Torah*.

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<sup>13</sup> “Glory” has the sense of “weight” or “substance”, with honour stemming from God’s self-manifestation along with the awe which such revelation inspires in the beholders (Jones 1970:117).



The forty-year wilderness journey and wandering by the whole people of Israel represents a time of withdrawal in the wider history of the Israelite people. The time in the wilderness represents a retreat of a type, despite the length of the desert experience. Situated, time-wise, between slavery in Egypt and entry into the promised land, the wilderness time was an opportunity for reflection and readying for new opportunities. The centrality of the Exodus for Israel means that retreat experience was entrenched in their spiritual heritage. This forty-year period thus has retreat features in a representative way.

#### F. Elijah

Elijah is a prophetic figure who is a representative of the Hebrew prophets, *par excellence* (Anderson 1967:190). His life included significant times of withdrawal.

Elijah's prophetic zeal was opposed to the Baal promoting activities of Ahab, the king of Israel, and his wife Jezebel. Elijah announced the absence of dew or rain for "the next few years except at my word" (1 Ki.17:1). This was the announcement of a national disaster (Martin 1986:413). Thereafter follows the description of God's word to Elijah to leave and withdraw to the Kerith Ravine (1Ki.17:3). There he drinks from the brook and is fed by ravens (1Ki.17:5-6). The picture is one of solitude. Part of the reason for such withdrawal was safety. It was a situation of enforced retreat, in a time of danger. The drying up of the brook in the drought sees Elijah, under divine constraint, go and stay with a widow at Zarephath, near Sidon, which was outside Ahab's jurisdiction. There he was given the use of an upper room in her house (1Ki.17:19).

Elijah's situation continued to be one of withdrawal. It was only in the third year following his drought pronouncement that he moved back into mainstream activity. It was to be an encounter with the king and the coming of rain at last (1Ki.18:1). The moves of Elijah are presented as a result of receiving words from God. Spiritual listening was thus required on Elijah's part.

Famous events followed. There was the Mount Carmel confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Thereafter the coming of rain followed. Elijah, under the threat of being murdered, then withdrew into the desert (1Ki.19:4). Feeling drained, exhausted,

alone and depressed he could see, at first, no better than to die. Anderson (1967:217) writes that Elijah is portrayed as “a broken and fatigued man, running for his life and wishing to die because, in his efforts to crush the power of tyranny and idolatry, he had been no better than his fathers”.

Strengthened, because of angelic and physical help, he then withdrew further, going on a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb (1Ki.19:5-9). This journey means a return to Israel's religious birthplace (Martin 1986:416). This episode shows a number of features that parallel Moses' sacred mountain experiences. The time span of the journey links with the number of years spent by the Israelites in the wilderness.<sup>14</sup>

The Mount Horeb experience involved renewed encounter with God, a theophany, or divine visitation (Anderson 1967:217). Elijah learns that “the Lord is about to pass by” (1Ki. 19:11), which parallels Moses' experience in Ex.34:6-7. Elijah covered his face because of God's presence (1Ki.19:13) (La Sor 1970:345). This is reminiscent of the importance of the face with Moses, as well as an expression of the holiness of the experience. This encounter was, however, not through wind, earthquake or fire, all of which God had previously used in Israelite history, and which were traditional phenomena of God's revelation on the sacred mountain (Ex.19) (Anderson 1967:217). The use of such dramatic methods may seem to have suited Elijah's fiery mood (Martin 1986:416). Instead, God's message was in a gentle whisper (1Ki.19:11-13). God's message is ‘heard’ in the lull of the storm, in silence. Anderson (1967:217) notes that Yahweh is seen as Lord of the storm, but unlike Baal-Melkart, the sky god of storm and fertility, is not a nature god. Revelation in quietness has an impact especially in the midst of divisive and violent happenings. However, Elijah actually seemed slow to listen for following the “gentle whisper” (NIV) or “sheer silence” (NRSV), his reply to God's question, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (v.13) is exactly the same as before the silent encounter. Despite this repetitive response<sup>15</sup> about his own zealotry (meaning being jealous of God's name), Elijah receives word from God concerning the anointing of

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<sup>14</sup> Elijah's going to Horeb “raised the question of how timeless principles given in the desert could be applied in the very different cultural conditions of prosperous settled agriculture” (Martin 1986:416).

<sup>15</sup> Anderson (1967:217) regards the using of “zealous” in 1Ki.19:10 as misplaced, and belonging only at the end of the theophany. There is repetition of vv.9b-10 in vv.13b-14. This is quite possibly intentional, as La Sor (1970:345) asserts.

two for kingship<sup>16</sup> and of Elisha as his prophetic successor. The two commissions regarding kingship involved fomenting political revolutions. Hence Anderson (1967:218) asserts: "Israel's faith finds expression in action rather than in mystic contemplation." However, this comment seems one-sided for it was through a contemplative experience that action was decided upon. In this episode contemplation is the basis for action.

Elijah realises that he is not alone in being faithful to Yahweh, for by revelation he learns that there are seven thousand who are also faithful (1 Ki.19:15-18). Elijah's mountain retreat did ripple forth with actions to renew him and to affect nations and the spirituality of the time through his ministry and his influence on his anointed successor, Elisha.

The 'gentle whisper' or 'sheer silence' has particular importance for retreat times. Silence is associated intimately with retreat. Elijah's action, activity and readiness to be zealous are in contrast to silence. He is forced into silence, even though he has more expectation of wind, earthquake or fire for a divine message, than in gentle quietness. The reality of the importance of spiritual retreat is vital in this narrative.

#### 4. THE PSALMS

The Psalms, in their variety, have numerous settings of withdrawal and retreat. From tears that have been "food day and night" (Ps.42:3) to lying down in green pastures and being led beside quiet waters (Ps.23:2) there are pictures of withdrawal being opportunity for encounter with God.

The Psalter, according to Anderson (1967:484) was brought together "as a collection of hymns and prayers for use in temple worship, mainly in connection with the great festivals." There are, however, some Psalms which do not presuppose the worship of Yahweh in the Temple and in this sense may be called "noncultic" (1967:485).

Gray and Johnson (1963:818) identify the following types of Psalms: hymns, communal laments, communal songs of thanksgiving, individual laments, individual songs of

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<sup>16</sup> It was Elisha, Elijah's successor, who actually carried out these two "anointings"; Hazael was not actually anointed with oil (2Ki.8:7-15) and Elisha sent another prophet to anoint Jehu (2Ki.9:1-2).

thanksgiving, royal Psalms, oracular Psalms and wisdom Psalms. The individual laments and thanksgivings show a basis for coming forth from retreat situations. It is also possible that some communal songs were written in retreat on behalf of the worshipping community.

Meditation is an ongoing refrain in the Psalms. The basic topic of meditation in the Psalter is the Torah, the Law (e.g. Ps.1:2; 119:15, 97, 99), in which delight is expressed. Notably, Psalm 1, used as an introductory Psalm to the whole collection, is dedicated to this theme. Other dedications to meditating on the Torah are Psalms 19:7-14 and 119. These Psalms probably have a post-exilic setting when the synagogue was increasing in importance (Anderson 1967:485). Such Psalms presuppose the value of meditation beyond corporate worship. They are a stimulus to meditative withdrawal as well as to community worship. The Law becomes, in this approach to meditation, almost an object of veneration, as Barton (1986:57) points out. Meditation on the Law involved reciting "it prayerfully to oneself in the presence of God, and to study it, poring lovingly over every word, even every letter" (1986:57). This has even been termed "Torah-mysticism". Its goal was to encounter God and to order one's ways in the right path.

Other meditation foci include: the mortality of life (Ps.39:2-6), help and protection from God (Ps.63:6-8), the actions and miracles of God (Ps.77:10-15; 143:5), God's worthiness of unceasing praise (Ps.104:33-34), and God's promises (Ps.119:148). The offer from God, penned by a Psalmist is: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps.46:10). This has been received as an individual gift, but it is likely to have been directed to God's people to cease attempts to usurp God's sovereignty (M'Caw & Motyer 1970:480) or to the nations to stop their fighting and to acknowledge the supremacy of Yahweh (Baigent 1986:587).

As Barton (1986:55) notes, the experience of the presence of God is of vital importance to the Psalmists. The experience of the divine presence is integral to prayer. At times though, there is the desire expressed of an opposite nature, that is, for God to hide his face (e.g.Ps.51:9). There is also the idea of a sense of God's temporary absence in certain places in the Psalms. This is accompanied by the hope of reappearance. Often this idea of reappearance is associated with the image of the light of dawn, following the

darkness of night. This sense of hope as "waiting for God" is a persistent theme in the Psalms (1986:56). Ps. 130:5-6 is a notable example of this:

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.  
My soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Psalm 130 involves a casting of self on God's grace. It became a pilgrim psalm (Allen 1986:644) with a possible link to the Day of Atonement. There is an intensity of longing expressed with confident expectation, especially in respect to forgiveness which is in line with a retreatant attitude (M'Caw & Motyer 1970:533).

Psalm 62:5-7 illustrates this waiting, with a sense of longing:

Find rest, O my soul,  
in God alone;  
my hope comes from him.  
He alone is my rock  
and my salvation;  
he is my fortress,  
I shall not be shaken.  
My salvation and my honour  
depend on God;  
he is my mighty rock,  
my refuge.

This Psalm is one of trust (1970:489) and confidence in which an expression of certainty about God is expressed (Baigent 1986:597).

There is thus a sense of retreat nurtured by the theme of waiting with a sure sense of fulfilment. Prayer, quietness and meditation are needed in such waiting. The desire to withdraw into the desert is expressed in a song of individual lament, in Psalm 55:6-8:

I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest --  
I would flee far away and stay in the desert;  
I would hurry to my place of shelter,  
far away from the tempest and the storm."

There is a longing for getting away, rest and shelter expressed here. Baigent (1986:593) writes of the wish to run away from problems in this passage. It is, nevertheless, the Psalter's clearest cry for retreat.

A heartfelt cry is also sounded in Psalm 116:7a: "Be at rest once more, O my soul." This is in the context of a song of thanksgiving (Allen 1986:636). M'Caw and Motyer (1970:525) call Ps.116 a "peculiarly personal song". A challenge to the self is set in order to enter the blessing of a new peace of mind, by God's help (Allen 1986:637).

Looking at the broader scheme of the Psalms indicates that meditative stillness within the, in many cases harsh realities of life, is an often expressed desire. Such a notion of retreat is complementary to the Psalms being the basic text for corporately sung Hebrew cultic worship. Retreat is therefore a basic ingredient of what it means to be part of God's worshipping people.

## 5. THE PROPHETS

Hebrew prophets were spokespeople for God. Their function was to declare the word of Yahweh. Characteristically they often began a pronouncement with the words: "Thus says the Lord." The prophets generally display a "messenger style" (Anderson 1967:189). Narratives about the early prophets, especially Elijah and Elisha, are found in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. Mostly oracles are found in the Prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

Elijah was clearly a prophet who used and valued withdrawal. However, from Elisha through to Malachi specific emphasis on withdrawal is scant. It can be noted, in passing, that Jonah withdrew on board a ship and then into the belly of a sea creature, but this was out of rebellion, rather than a constructive desire for retreat.

Much of the prophetic books consist of spoken oracles which were subsequently recorded in written form. Little description is given of the process of preparation for such oracles. The prophets were not public figures all the time and it is very likely that withdrawal for listening to God and for being with God enabled the speaking of oracles in the name of Yahweh. Some of these oracles show signs of preparation which comes

through in their written construction. Klein (1963:804) asserts: "The prophetic mind was capable of unsparing self-criticism and exercised a vigilant censorship over the ideas and impulses that came to it." The manner of preparation lies largely hidden in the prophetic books. Baker (1984:978) writes:

How did the prophet receive the message which he was commissioned to convey to his fellows? The answer given in the vast majority of cases is perfectly clear and yet tantalizingly vague: 'The word of the Lord came...', literally, the verb being the verb 'to be'.

Baker (1984:978) asserts that the manner of inspiration was a direct, personal awareness, which was a basic experience of the prophet. There is, however, little given in the way of psychological explanation of inspiration, or of the mechanics of receiving God's word.

There was a tradition of ecstatic and spontaneous prophecy in Hebrew experience, especially amongst bands of prophets. However, the ongoing, long-term ministry of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel suggest premeditation for many of their oracles. Also the personal situation of Hosea as it impacted on his prophecy suggests mature reflection. Hence there are pointers to some aspects of the prophetic tradition including meditative withdrawal.

The reality of the prophetic oracles being proclaimed and then accepted as the Word of God finds explanation through intimate encounter with God. Howley (1986:106) puts it this way:

The only explanation of the originality and creative powers of the prophets lies in their vision of God and their message arising from this revelation. Each of these men had a personal experience of God that accounted for his ministry. Each taught what he had learned from God: it could not have been humanly conceived or invented.

This explanation of encounter suggests the reality of times of withdrawal in the prophetic experience.

Jeremiah cries out for such a withdrawal: "Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travellers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people" (Jer.9:2). Jeremiah's desire to flee is linked here to bitter grief over the nation's sin (Cawley & Millard 1970:634).

Jeremiah's life indicates a reflectiveness that bears the marks of such retreat. His call came out of deep reflection. Then the beholding of familiar objects, an almond tree and a boiling pot, invested with special significance, flow out of that call (Jer.1:4-14). Such beholding implies meditative reflection. Meditative reflection was also likely in deciding to use other objects and actions symbolically by Jeremiah and other prophets. Even Jeremiah's later experience of "fire in his bones" to speak out despite severe rejection (Jer.20:9), implies meditative prayer. This description is part of a unique psychological passage, loaded with feeling and a soul laid bare (Cawley & Millard 1970:639).

The Lamentations, traditionally considered to be penned by Jeremiah but anonymously written, are the result of deep reflection and great mourning. These words indicate much thought behind them. The book is set in the aftermath of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Some kind of retreat experience is indicated by the depth of the author's insight. These words from 3:22-24 indicate an insight beyond the conditions with which he was faced:

Because of the Lord's great love  
we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
I say to myself,  
"The Lord is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."

In the midst of tragedy the author finds the need for waiting in God's presence (v.24). A note of hope is struck at this stage of chapter 3, which is set in stark relief with the overwhelming tone of despair (Osborne 1986:801). The reality of the need for and practice of withdrawal is expressed by the writer who relates, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam.3:26). The author also writes of the necessity to "sit alone in silence" (Lam.3:28). Stephens-Hodge (1970a:662) asserts that the sense in this verse is that a trust is displayed that the affliction will pass, and the situation is not God's



final will. The writer was therefore used withdrawal to meet with God as an important part of his prophetic calling. His experience of sadness and rejection shows the use of retreat as a means to make these experiences spiritually meaningful. Even in the experience of emptiness there is encounter with God. This has profound impact for what it means to withdraw into retreat during times of pain, loneliness or bereavement. Such retreat times enable the retreatant to know and experience that all that has happened and is felt is within the ambit of God's care, as the author gives testimony in his own suffering.

In the book of Ezekiel there are experiences described as the Spirit "lifting" Ezekiel up (3:12; 11:1). Craigie (1983:74) regards such experiences as being in the realm of "visionary trance". Bruce (1986b:814) sees the possibility of an ecstatic element in these situations. It is difficult to describe such experiences with any certainty. These experiences were of a revelatory nature and were quite likely in a withdrawn setting. Ezekiel had a seven day period of being "overwhelmed" after coming to the Jewish exiles (Ezek.3:15). This was the required period of mourning for the dead (1986b:814). However, even more seems to be involved. Beasley-Murray (1970:668) sees the week as needed to recover from the effects of the vision. This time could be described as a kind of retreat experience. At the end of this week Ezekiel writes: "the word of the Lord came to me" (3:16). This revelatory "word" thus comes out of a type of retreat time. God's message to Ezekiel in 3:22 is as follows: "Get up and go to the plain, and there I will speak to you." The instruction includes a going away, or withdrawal. These are allusions to some aspects of withdrawal in Ezekiel's experience. However, there is little indication of how the oracles were received under the Spirit's guidance.

Habakkuk's dialogical style of questions posed to God and the recording of the divine answers indicates deep reflection before his presentation. Stephens-Hodge (1970b:769) asserts that in this process of dialogue, "Habakkuk is determined not to be fobbed off, but to receive satisfaction for his complaint." Habakkuk's description of himself as a watchman standing on a lookout tower, to see clearly (Hab.2:1), indicates a contemplative openness described in pictorial form. The prophetic book begins in a situation of anguished question and complaint. At length Habakkuk's turmoil subsides, having gone through a consideration of the Exodus events, and he emerges tranquil and

confident (Nute 1986:943). Such a spiritual journey seems to imply retreat aspects of prayer.

The Israelite and Judean prophetic tradition beyond Elijah gives little indication of the withdrawal realities. Rather, prominence is given to the written record of what had been spoken oracles. This does not exclude the reality of the retreat experience in the prophets' lives. Indeed, inklings of the great necessity for withdrawal come through and form an undergirding for the proclamation spoken. Actually, no developed prophetic tradition would have been possible without the experience of God in retreat times by the prophets.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Withdrawal to encounter God has a strong basis from the Old Testament. It was the case for the patriarchs and Moses. It was significant for Elijah and reflected deeply in the corporate worship of the Psalms. It is an underlying reality of the power of the prophetic oracle. It is clear in the Old Testament that at critical moments for a number of crucial people in the life of the Hebrews, retreat was vital in experiencing and in expressing God's call on their lives. Moreover, withdrawal from daily activity for the sake of rest and worship is built into Jewish life in the Sabbath, which traces its origin ideologically from the creation story.

Old Testament spirituality, with beginnings associated with worship of a tribal God, among and even alongside many other gods, developed through experiences of revelation. Such revelatory happenings were often in times of retreat. In the Old Testament witness encounters with God in retreat often involved the unexpected and surprising. There was a significant range of experience, material and corporate ritual brought forth due to the variety of retreat experiences.

The Old Testament witness laid the basis for New Testament experiences of retreat. The God who surprised people in Old Testament retreat experiences continued to be revealed in the extraordinary (as well as in line with the historical faith) in the New Testament, and this meant important new realities for retreating. Out of the Old Testament there were significant aspects that impacted on what retreating for prayerful

divine encounter meant by New Testament times. These included: the use of the Sabbath; the Hebrew ancestors' faith shaping events that impacted daily life and worship for generations; the community worship using The Psalter which showed the importance of individual meditation as well as the corporate expression of reverence for God; the prophetic voice due to inspiration from various types of meditation; and the rich resources of types of prayer. Indeed, retreat experiences were integral to the spirituality reflected in the Old Testament.

## CHAPTER 3

### NEW TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ, as the founder of Christianity, sets forth the importance of retreat at the very beginning of his public ministry with a highly significant period of forty days of retreat. John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, also placed significance on withdrawal. The beginning of the New Testament therefore immediately shows the importance of retreat.

In this chapter there will be a special focus on Jesus' ministry. Before that John the Baptist's use of retreating is examined. Joseph and, especially, Mary show retreat aspects of significance, and their experiences of retreating are examined. There follows investigation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness, and then his public ministry. There are significant episodes of retreat during these three years. Focus is placed upon Jesus' whole lifestyle in which an alternation between activity and retreat is evident. Particular attention is given to the withdrawal into the Caesarea Philippi region, the Transfiguration, the episode involving the sisters Martha and Mary, Jesus' Garden of Gethsemane prayers, and Jesus' suffering. Thereafter the perspective moves to a wider vista: Jesus' purposes for retreating.

Jesus' lifestyle, in which withdrawal had such importance, naturally had an impact on his followers. Hence there follows presentations on the twelve disciples, Paul, and John on Patmos.

The spirituality reflected in the New Testament shows the interweaving of prayer in Jesus' ministry, the epistles and in Revelation. Retreat, in order to experience concentrated times of prayer, is therefore integral to the New Testament witness of faith.

#### 2. JOHN THE BAPTIST

All four Gospel writers preface their accounts about Jesus by presenting John the

Baptist (Matt.3:1-12; Mk.1:2-8; Lk.3:1-20; Jn.1:6-8). According to Luke 1:80 "he lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel." Bruce (1982:146) asserts that this desert or wilderness would presumably have been the wilderness of Judea, since his parents' home was in the Judean hill-country. Luke's account gives no indication as to whether John was in a community or alone in the wilderness. There is no clarity from any other Gospel writer either. The presence of an Essene community in John's time, and specific discoveries about a community at Qumran (which may have been an Essene community), has led to speculation that John may have been brought up in an Essene or similar community (1982:146). According to Robinson (1968:277): "It is possible that John the Baptist had some sort of contact 'in the wilderness' with the Qumran community on the shores of the Dead Sea -- not necessarily as a member of the community but perhaps as one who shared their asceticism and some of their views." Ablutions had an important place in the Qumran community, and even at Qumran there was awareness that external washing alone could not engender purity; conversion was required (Lohse 1976:111). There may be a link with John's prominent use of baptism with such washings. John was of priestly birth and the importance of the maintenance of a pure priesthood in a withdrawn community may have appealed to John or to his relations when he was young. This linking of John to any such community is in the realm of speculation, and on the basis of available evidence can be neither proved nor disproved.

John the Baptist's wilderness lifestyle, most likely, was expressed as a hermit style of life. Much of his life seems to have been spent in retreat. He is presented by Luke as a desert dweller who, under the compulsion of the word of God, preaches and baptizes in the region of the Jordan River in connection with the central theme of repentance (3:2-3). This would not have been far from Qumran. John's washing of baptism was not an often repeated set of washings, as was the case with the Qumran community (Lohse 1976:111). His engagement to public ministry is not in the Essene mould, but rather in prophetic terms (Bruce 1982:146). The wilderness clearly had significance for John. Bruce (1982:146-147) goes to the extent of asserting that: "To John, as to the men of Qumran and other Essenes and related groups, the wilderness was the expected place of divine epiphany." The Biblical saying of Isaiah 40:3, "A voice of one calling: 'in the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God'", had prominence for John (Mk.1:3), as it had also had in Qumran (Lohse 1976:111). This movement into ministry saw many coming to hear his message (Luke

3:7; Mark 1:5; Matt.1:5). John deliberately entered into a more public domain, even though his sphere of intersection with wider society was still in the wilderness. His actions, as part of his ministry, were not of the isolated nature of the Essenes. His dress and diet indicate a desert habitat. John is thus a kind of archetype for a retreatant who responds to God's message in the wilderness to engage in ministry without bending to people's manipulations.

John had an eschatological element vitally linked to his message of a call for repentance. He proclaimed that a day of judgement was about to dawn, which was linked to his preparing the way for a coming one (Mt.3:7-12; Lk.3:7-18). Some who heard John's message became his disciples (Mk.6:29; Jn.1:35; 3:25). He taught these disciples some form of prayer, as can be deduced from Luke 11:1, of which Bruce (1982:151) asserts, "the eschatological note of his preaching was struck." He also imposed a schedule of fasting (Mk.2:18). There was thus both the drawing of followers by the Baptist, and a pointing away from himself towards the coming one, who is Jesus. Nevertheless there was a community which formed around John as a result of his ministry, although he may have been largely a solitary figure prior to public interaction. He may have continued especially as a solitary despite having disciples. He could be viewed as the founder of a kind of monastic community, or perhaps of a pilgrim community. These are possibilities hesitantly put forward due to lack of information.

John the Baptist is a powerful example of a retreatant with a significant ministry. His direct impact on Jesus who submitted to his baptism ensures him an important place in Christian spirituality. In addition, Jesus' response following his baptism is to go into the wilderness for an extensive time of retreat lasting forty days. Certainly, John the Baptist is a foundational figure for Christian retreating due to his close association with the wilderness and with Jesus.

### 3. MARY AND JOSEPH

Mary, the mother of Jesus, went into a time of withdrawal by staying with Elizabeth for three months, following the realisation of her pregnancy (Luke 1:56). There was probably the desire to ponder the meaning of her pregnancy and to escape the gaze of her village's people for a time. It was during this withdrawal time that Luke (1:46-55)

presents Mary's song, the *Magnificat*. Such words of praise and meditation on social and spiritual realities come through in a time of retreat. Mary uses especially the song of Hannah which is recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. There is also an echo of Leah's utterance in Genesis 30:13. It is not surprising that she drew on the Hebrew Scriptures in order to express deep feelings and profound hope. Such genuine feeling and expression is not lost because of the drawing from sources. Plummer (1896:30) calls the *Magnificat* "a meditation; an expression of personal emotions and experiences". The *Magnificat* is a hymn that is detachable from its context (Burn & Fuller 1963:611). As such, it has been readily stripped from Mary.<sup>17</sup> Ellis (1984:727) asserts:

The hymn need not be regarded as Mary's spontaneous or exact reply. But neither should it be considered merely as an editorial reconstruction. Its significance for Luke lies in the fact that it is Mary's prophecy, that is, that its contents sprang from her lips and express her mind and heart.

Luke presents a response in a retreat situation which draws from Old Testament devotion. A hope is expressed which is not only future oriented but which is presented as being "fulfilled precisely in the Christ-event" (Burn & Fuller 1963:611). Porter (1986:1189) seeks to uncover Mary's attitude in this retreat situation, when he says, "Her emotion was evoked first of all because the unbelievable had come to pass: she was to be the mother of the Messiah." The Lukan presentation of Mary's reflection in this situation makes her to be a profound model for meditative use of withdrawal time.

In Matthew's account there is a time of enforced retreat for Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus (2:13-15). This is due to Herod's murderous plan to kill young boys in the Bethlehem region. The result is a hasty retreat by Jesus' parents, with Herod's intended target carried away to Egypt. Matthew describes that Joseph, along with Mary and Jesus "left for Egypt" (v.14). "Left" or "departed" translates the Greek word *anachorein*. This term is characteristic of Matthew's style and thought (Fenton 1963:48). Fenton (1963:48) points out that in later times, this word would be used as a technical term for monasticism that is, withdrawal from the world. From this word comes the term anchorite for a monastic person.

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<sup>17</sup> Burn and Fuller (1963:611) assert that the *Magnificat* emanated from circles associated with John the Baptist, which were still looking for the Coming One. This is, however, only one of a number of theories.

While this escape episode is hard to verify historically, it is possible that it took place as Egypt was used as a getaway in Maccabean times (Hill 1972:84). There are also theological aspects to this speedy withdrawal. There is the underlying theme of Old Testament fulfilment (Hill 1972:84) and echoes of the Exodus come through from the going into and coming out of Egypt. A kind of recapitulation of the Exodus deliverance is presented (1972:85). This time of retreat in Egypt culminates in a God-directed return to Israel, through an angelic messenger in a dream that Joseph has. A further dream sees the family go to Nazareth in Galilee (Matt.2:19-22). Significantly, the message of God is clearly discerned while in enforced withdrawal. Furthermore, the details of the messages are obeyed. The going to Galilee is, in verse 22, again described by Matthew as a withdrawal as in verse 14. The word *anchorein* is used in verse 22. This can be seen as a withdrawal from unbelief, to a place where there can be faith, according to Fenton (1963:51).

Mary is presented in Luke 2:51 as pondering within herself the meaning of the events of Jesus' childhood, and surely also his conception and her pregnancy. There is an element of withdrawal necessary for such meditative pondering. Mary comes across as a retreatant in the midst of the realities of her daily life.

In the infant narratives concerning Jesus there is to be found a significant place given to withdrawal for meditative purposes and to hear God's message in a variety of ways. Retreat linked to encounter with God is therefore prominently seen in these narratives.

#### 4. JESUS' FORTY-DAY RETREAT

Jesus' preparation for ministry was marked by a time of wilderness retreat. Forty days were spent in the wilderness (Matt.4:1-11; Mk.1:12-13; Lk.4:1-13). The wilderness was considered the home of evil spirits, and was therefore the scene of the headquarters of evil for Jesus' time of testing (Fenton 1963:63). There is thus a battle with dark powers during this time culminating in the three-fold satanic temptation to turn stones into bread, engage in a dramatic temple jump, and to worship Satan for the sake of temporal powers. Economic, religious and political temptations, and more besides, were in the picture.



There is the possibility that Matthew composed the temptation account with his particular slant.<sup>18</sup> Jesus can be seen as fulfilling the role of Israel, passing through similar temptations as the Israelites in the wilderness, “but where Israel had failed, Jesus is triumphant” (Fenton 1963:62). It is nevertheless quite possible that the use of Deuteronomy was in Jesus’ mind and study in the wilderness. It was a fitting text for such a time and setting. Jesus’ use of Scriptures from Deuteronomy to refute these temptations shows a strong basis for Biblical usage in times of retreat.

This time of retreat was entered into through the leading of the Holy Spirit (Matt.4:1). Jesus’ entry into the wilderness shows some parallels with the desert wanderings following the Exodus. As Fenton (1963:62) indicates, Jesus undergoes testing, or temptation, in line with the experience outlined in Deut.8:2: “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was on your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” In the chronological sequence in Jesus’ life, it was a time of deep reflection following a dramatic Holy Spirit encounter through his baptism, in order to consider key elements of what kind of ministry Jesus would undertake. Issues of perceived relevance and human need (with the stones to bread temptation); being noticed, and using the spectacular, showy and miraculous (with the temple jump temptation); and exercising of power (with the kingdoms of the world temptation) had to be grappled with. Bruce (1982:160) describes Jesus’ experience in the following way:

From his wilderness retreat he emerged with his baptismal resolution confirmed. The ministry to which he knew himself called must be discharged in a spirit of complete trust in God. He would not exploit it as an instrument of his own advantage; he would not demand its validation by any spectacular sign; he would not fulfil it by the methods of military conquest or political power, which the Messiah of popular expectation was expected to employ.

Jesus’ wilderness withdrawal had immense impact on his own ministry, and by

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<sup>18</sup> The quotations from Deuteronomy in his account agree with the Septuagint rendering. Fenton (1963:63) regards this as significant in Matthew’s presentation, asserting that he probably composed his own version. Luke’s version has substantially the same material, but notably a different order in the temptations (4:1-13).

implication, decision-making in withdrawal can have great impact on Christian ministry. Caird (1963:81) asserts: "Each of these three temptations attacked Jesus not at a point of weakness but at his greatest strength - his compassion, his commitment, his faith. In each case he recognised that he was dealing not with God's will but with the wiles of the devil." A major concern for Jesus was how he would use his strengths, even as he experienced weakness in withdrawal. Jesus comes through victorious over Satan in this wilderness experience.

Hill (1972:99-100) says, with regard to the Matthean narrative of the temptation of Jesus:

Although the narrative is...theological (strictly Christological) rather than biographical, it certainly implies the reality and historicity of Jesus' temptation and spiritual struggle, else it could hardly have been composed: the form and content of the temptations, as here given, possibly represent imaginative dramatization, although it is not improbable that hints of Jesus' real and continuing struggle against temporal and political ideas of Messiahship were given at some time by him to the disciples, from whose memory they would enter the tradition.

The forty days of retreat represent a significant and foundational event from the life of Jesus for the desire for and need of time in withdrawal. Jesus' wilderness experience is, indeed, of first importance in considering Christian withdrawal.

It is significant that Jesus' first action following the indication that the time for public ministry had come was to go into an extended time of retreat. His "action" was, seemingly, the opposite of being active. It was withdrawal. This was linked to the reality that it was decision time. Jesus' retreat into the wilderness has immense impact on what Christian ministry, and discernment for such ministry, means. His action of being "inactive" for a period of time has repercussions of great weight concerning the need for and the value of Christian retreats.

## 5. JESUS' MINISTRY

### A. A Lifestyle of Activity and Withdrawal

Jesus' years of ministry are marked by an alternation between active ministry and

withdrawal. Some time away was taken with his disciples and he took some time away alone.

Mark 1:35 tells of a time of early morning retreat engaged in by Jesus: "Very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." This comes after a time of ministry which gained the attention of a great crowd of people. This would have been very draining on Jesus' resources. As Nineham (1969:83-84) notes, Jesus' times of prayer in Mark's Gospel are associated with times of stress. Jesus then discerns the need for solitary time. It is significant that he does not respond in the way that Simon Peter and his companions expected and for which they asked. The reference to prayer at this stage of the Markan narrative is, as Nineham (1969:83) says, a reminder that the power that Jesus wields is dependant on, and subordinate to, the will of God. The outcome of time alone in prayer is, for Jesus, to move on to other places, rather than fulfil the longings of the Capernaum crowd or the expectations of his followers. Commenting on this passage Schweizer (1987:56) says:

We are told again and again that Jesus prayed alone. Prayer was an essential part of his service and he continually guarded that service from overactivity as well as indolence. It was at the same time a refuge from an enthusiastic recognition on the part of individuals who did not desire to become disciples.

It is significant that Schweizer, correctly, recognises prayer as integral to the service of Jesus' public ministry. Time and priority for such prayer was not to be compromised by Jesus.

Withdrawal from the crowds with his disciples was needed by Jesus for rest, reflection and teaching of his disciples. Mark describes such a withdrawal in 3:7a: "Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake." Such deliberate expressions of withdrawal are far from incidental in Jesus' time of public ministry. Rather there is a pattern of withdrawal from ministry for a variety of reasons and from various situations, for reflection and prayer, which is then followed by reengagement in active ministry.

The decision-making with regard to finalizing his group of twelve disciples was allied with time alone by Jesus. Luke presents this prelude to their designation as members of this core group as follows: "One of those days Jesus went out to the mountainside to pray,

and spent the night praying to God" (6:12). This was an all-night retreat, which involved critical decision-making which would vitally affect Jesus' public ministry. At this time, according to Caird (1963:100), Jesus needed to decide "how to act in view of the mounting hostility of the Pharisees". By the appointing of a specific twelve in the inner core of disciples, it has been asserted that Jesus inaugurated a new Israel, with the twelve appointees corresponding to the twelve tribes of the old Israel (1963:100). Such an idea seems to be in the Lukan presentation (from Lk.22:30). Teaching and healing follows immediately after the appointment of the twelve, in Luke's presentation. The teaching comes in the Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49). This teaching and the healing is, therefore, the follow-up from the retreat time in the Lukan account. All-night prayer thus brings forth a particular group (which can be viewed as a new Israel), healing action by Jesus and new application of the Jewish Law.

Following the reception of the news of John the Baptist's brutal death Jesus sought out time in a solitary place (Matt.14:13). Mark speaks of the intense pressure of the crowds of people upon Jesus and his disciples: "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest'" (6:31). The need for rest is paramount in the Markan presentation.

The need for such solitude was clearly related to Jesus' grief in Matthew's presentation. In Matthew 14:13 the word "withdrew" is used, as was the case in Chapter 2 (verses 14 and 22). Jesus withdraws due to the news of John the Baptist's death. Matthew also records Jesus drawing aside in 12:15 due to threats on his life. As Hill (1972:213) says in respect of the situation of pressure and death threats against Jesus, "He requires peace and quietness in his ministry." Indeed, this was a great need. After relating this threat, Matthew links Jesus to the servant figure by quoting from Isaiah 42:1-4. Verse two of this passage from Isaiah presents a quiet figure: "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets." On another occasion, according to Matthew 15:21, Jesus went to the area of Tyre and Sidon. These two places were coastal Gentile cities. The withdrawal into this region gave Jesus and his disciples the opportunity to be out of the gaze of the corporate Jewish eye for an extended time. Much needed retreat time and experience was what was sought out and gained.

Withdrawal following the news of the Baptist's death was hard to come by. A great crowd intercepted Jesus' movement and the narrative proceeds on to the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus again sought solitude. He dismissed both the crowd and his disciples and went on a mountainside to pray by himself (Matt.14:22-23). Later in the night he comes to his disciples, with a few surprises, for he walks on the lake to them. In the Matthew 14 narrative Jesus' need for time alone comes across as a great need, for he persistently seeks solitude and time apart.

#### B. In the Region of Caesarea Philippi

The withdrawal to the region of Caesarea Philippi (Mt.16:13; Mk.8:27) is a time of retreat from mainstream ministry for Jesus. Caesarea Philippi was north of the Sea of Galilee, and according to Schweizer (1987:171), on the boundary between Jewish and Gentile territory. He says: "This is the place where Jesus must decide whether he will abandon Israel or do the exact opposite - set out on the perilous journey to Jerusalem." While this may be reading more into the decisions for Jesus than was the case, there is decision-making for Jesus as well as for his disciples. The fact that Jesus speaks of his impending death immediately after Peter's response (which is to Peter's dismay) (Mt.16:21-23; Mk.8:31-33), indicates deep reflection from Jesus, surely at that time and from long before. This is also a time away to engage the disciples in their understanding of his personhood and mission. Hence come Jesus' questions, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" and, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt.16:13, 15). Time and opportunity away is time for reflection for both Jesus and his disciples.

It is noteworthy that when Jesus poses such critical questions regarding his identity that it is done in a withdrawn context. Such a situation makes possible evaluation and reflection less pressurized from external factors. It gives the opportunity to mentally survey what has happened and consider Jesus' identity. This could be done in the context of considering past events. The disciples could reflect on their relationship with Jesus in a different situation and a retreat environment.

#### C. The Transfiguration

Mountains were used by Jesus for retreat times. This has come through in the prayer

time for choosing the Twelve, and in Jesus' time alone following the feeding of the five thousand. This use of mountains links with the significant place that the mountain had in the Mosaic tradition and wider in the Old Testament. Another significant time of retreat on a mountain followed with the transfiguration experience (Matt.17:1-9; Mk.9:2-8; Lk.9:28-36). Jesus' withdrawal with the twelve disciples is followed by heightened withdrawal with the three disciples with whom Jesus appears to have been the closest: Peter, James and John. This took place "after six days" (Mk.9:2), indicating that this had already been a considerable time of retreat apart for Jesus and the twelve disciples. Fenton (1963:276) writes: "Jesus takes a small group of the disciples apart, in order to reveal something to them." It was during this time of withdrawal that a transforming happening was experienced, in which even Jesus' appearance changed. The profound experience that it was must have been difficult to put into words, but it was a manifestation of Jesus in a glorious dimension. It was in the realm of heightened spiritual encounter.

The experience was certainly one of divine encounter for the three disciples, and of glorification for Jesus. The transfiguration must, according to Caird (1963:132), "have been a crisis in the religious life of Jesus." Caird (1963:132) continues:

Luke draws our attention to this point in his usual manner: Jesus, he tells us, was praying; and his comment is borne out by the researches of Evelyn Underhill and others, who have shown that the intense devotions of saint and mystic are often accompanied by physical transformation and luminous glow.

The episode has a vital place in the Gospel narrative. Following as it does soon after the declaration by Peter of Jesus' Messiahship, and Jesus' description of his coming suffering, it is placed at the hinge point of the Gospel narrative. After this critical junction, there is an inevitable movement towards the cross, and therefore the path of suffering is embraced by Jesus. The time of withdrawal yields the experience of glorification, but it is a preparation to take on this journey of suffering by going to Jerusalem to experience the fullness of that suffering.

Luke's Gospel presentation has a journey theme with a setting forth on the journey by Jesus described in 9:51. This verse indicates that: "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem", the place of passion and

death. There is preparation for this setting out in the transfiguration experience, which is described earlier in the same chapter by Luke. The transfiguration gives a foretaste of heaven. In this case the retreat experience is linked with Jesus' glorification.

In Luke 9:31 the word "departure" or "exodus" is used. Luke presents the account like this: "Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem" (Lk.9:30-31). This, naturally, has echoes of Old Testament divine deliverance in the Exodus from Egypt. However, this is also an experience of decision-making for Jesus. Caird (1963:132-133) highlights the uniqueness of the decision that lies before Jesus in this transfiguration happening:

At Jerusalem Jesus was to accomplish the New Exodus, leading God's people from a greater bondage than that of Egypt into the promised land of the kingdom. Like Moses of old, he was now standing on the brink of a great sea, the ocean of iniquity through which he must pass and in which he must accomplish another baptism (12:50). He has always obeyed the Father, but the road he has travelled hitherto has been well marked by the feet of prophets and forerunners, like Moses and Elijah. Now God is about to lead him into a path never before trodden by human foot, a path which will lead him to Gethsemane and Calvary. Henceforth, as pioneer of our salvation..., he must journey alone, and not even Moses and Elijah can bear him company.

The manifestation of God's presence includes the experience of a cloud with divine meaning attached (Mt.17:5; Mk.9:7; Lk.9:34). This has parallels with Old Testament manifestations of God's activity through the presence of cloud, particularly on Mount Sinai. There are reminiscences of Ex.34:29ff where Moses' radiance of face, as a result of encounter with God, is described. The transfiguration is a retreat experience of the most profound and numinous nature. It indicates that there is the possibility of the unexpected, of the most glorious nature, in times of retreat.

Peter had the desire to make the experience have some permanence. He thus had the idea of erecting three shelters. Instead, Jesus and the three disciples are soon thrust into ministry. Rather than continuing with the glories of Elijah, Moses and the transfigured Jesus, they move into a difficult situation. They encounter a demonized boy who engages their attention following their mountain retreat. Jesus' alternation between

retreat and engagement in ministry is starkly presented in the transfiguration and descent to the people below. It is, of course, part of a wider pattern presented in the synoptic Gospels.

#### D. Jesus' Visit to Mary and Martha

The account of Jesus' visit to Martha's house, where Martha and her sister Mary are present (Luke 10:38-42), has been much used with regard to the relationship between the contemplative and active modes of life. The passage was used in the Middle Ages, and at other times, to pronounce authoritatively the preference for the contemplative over the active life (Caird 1963:149).

The incident is not the record of a retreat time for Jesus, except that he may have been able to withdraw from public notice by entering a home of friendship. There Jesus engaged in teaching (v.39). Martha, as host, was engaged greatly in preparation of the meal and serving, resulting in distractedness (v.40). Mary, by contrast, sits at Jesus' feet and listens to his teaching (v.39). Jones (1986:65) asserts that the contrast is between the many cares of Martha and the one preoccupation of Mary, rather than a contrast between the active and the contemplative. Certainly, serving, in itself, is not condemned, and sadly the passage has been used by some to make contemplation and action exclusive from each other.

In verse 42, "one thing is needed", is recorded. This is a textual variant not found in all the manuscripts (Caird 1963:149-150), making it possible that extra emphasis was placed on Mary's action through a later textual amendment. Some commentators see the "one thing" needed as a reference by Jesus to the need for only one dish and not for a great spread (Porter 1986:1206). Marshall (1970:905-906) asserts that the story is meant to teach that service of Jesus must not be misdirected to such an extent that a person has no time to learn from Jesus; thus honour to Jesus is given more by listening to him than by excessive activity. A Johannine perspective on similar concerns is found in John 6:27: "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."



This account shows the validity and even priority of listening to Christ, and gives value to contemplation. It is not a narrative for setting contemplation against action. After all, in many places in Jesus' teaching, to which Mary was listening, there is exhortation to action. Notably, Mary takes the pose of scholar by listening to teaching, a most unusual activity for a woman in that situation. Therefore the priority to listen to Jesus can take on counter-cultural responses and working against prejudice. Such is the possibility of experience in retreat in order to be attentive to the message of Christ.

The narrative gives input into the importance of listening to Jesus, and therefore to listening in retreat. It is, however, not an overarching text for the supreme value of the contemplative life. Rather, it is a stimulus to really seek to listen undistracted to the words of Jesus.

#### E. The Garden of Gethsemane

The Gethsemane garden represented a place of withdrawal for Jesus and his disciples. Its associations are especially with the pre-arrest wrestling with a "cup of suffering" for Jesus (Matt.26:36-46; Mk.14:32-42; Lk.22:40-46). A cup was a Jewish metaphor for punishment and retribution, which here involves suffering and death (Hill 1972:341). Gethsemane was a known place for Jesus and his group of disciples to be used for purposes of withdrawal. The fact that it was known by Judas suggests that it had been used on a number of previous occasions by Jesus and his disciples for retreat. Notably, it was able to be used for betrayal purposes by Judas Iscariot who knew it as a retreat place for the apostolic band. The garden of Gethsemane became a place of charged significance as Jesus withdrew to battle in prayer over the looming reality of his upcoming death. It was the scene of him praying both alone and with the desperate need of companionship, although his communal need got mostly a sleepy response. The hour of suffering and the hour of decision-making were faced, significantly, by a deliberate time of retreat by Jesus.

The Gethsemane withdrawal is marked by great distress for Jesus. Struggle marks his prayer, with a kind of bargaining taking place. Jesus comes to accept "the cup of suffering", which is the path of suffering all the way to death. The deep agony of Jesus' suffering is made more prominent by the repetition of his prayer in the accounts in

Matthew and Mark (Schweizer 1987:314). According to Hill (1972:341-342), Jesus perhaps contemplated the possibility of setting up the kingdom without preliminary suffering. While this seems hard to ascertain, Jesus' decision-making certainly involved huge wrestling of the will and emotions.

Jesus' prayer in the garden links with the clause in the Lord's Prayer (Mt.6:9-13; Lk.11:1-4), for his desire is for God's will to be done (Mt.26:39, 42; Mk.14:36) and for his disciples to watch so as not to fall into temptation (Mt.26:41; Mk.14:38; Lk.22:40). Jesus' own method of prayer is therefore used in this crisis situation, according to the synoptic evangelists' record.

In the Garden of Gethsemane grappling of prayer and conversation with his disciples, Jesus contrasts the spirit and the flesh, or body: "The spirit is willing but the body is weak" (Mk.14:38; Mt.26:41). This may originally have been an independent saying (Nineham 1969:392). The victory of the spirit is over the difficulty of bodily suffering for Jesus, and it is not that the body is automatically an obstacle to the spiritual. That would deny the full impact of the incarnation in Jesus. As Nineham (1969:392) points out, there may be an allusion to a battle with demonic powers in this saying. The call to "watch and pray" (Mt.26:41) is to combat the weakness of the flesh (1969:392).

Jesus submitted to the will of God in the garden. The desire for such submitting, with acceptance of God's will, however difficult such a course of action can be, is surely the basis for retreat time when withdrawal involves a struggle in making a decision. Therefore Jesus' experience speaks with great insight and empathy in retreat times of turmoil or wrestling in making a decision.

#### F. Jesus' Suffering and the Cross

The acuteness of Jesus' suffering prior to going to the cross and time spent hanging on the cross represent a forced period of a kind of withdrawal experience for Jesus. Indeed, his aloneness was never so acute as when he was on the cross. His cry out of his sense of abandonment indicates this and has profound implications for retreating with a sense of forsakenness by God. Therefore, the implications of Jesus' experience of forsakenness on the cross and his salvation action through "inaction" on the cross has

significant impact for what it means to encounter God on retreat; even if, and especially if, there is a sense of abandonment or emptiness.

#### G. Jesus' Purposes for Retreat

The Gospel accounts of Jesus' public ministry indicate that he had a lifestyle in which retreat times were built in and given priority. Luke indicates this with a summary sentence in 5:16, "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Such a wanted and busy person, who also suffered much rejection, as is the case with Jesus, is a figure whose life (along with great activity) is marked by prayer. It is only possible for the Gospel writers to give a largely unseen activity of prayer such prominence because Jesus made it a priority to retreat in order to pray.

Brother Ramon (1987:45-46) identifies four reasons for Jesus' times of retreat. These are as follows. Firstly, Jesus longed to dwell within the bosom of his Father. His incarnation as a human and the trinitarian need for fellowship within the Godhead made this a strong desire. It can be added that the basic human spirituality of Jesus, which he shares with all humanity, is the desire to experience a meeting with and dwelling in the presence of God, manifested as a loving Parent and friend. Secondly, there was the need for physical, mental and spiritual refreshment for Jesus. Tiredness required rest and a different level of activity for Jesus, even as this is a common human need. Thirdly, Jesus needed guidance and direction. Time out from activity was needed for continued action on the right path. For such direction to be clear, communion with God, contemplation of God, adoration of God, and reception of direction from God, were all necessary for, and very much part of, Jesus' experience. They are also necessary for each follower of Christ. Fourthly, there was spiritual warfare for Jesus. This was not to be undertaken while distracted or unguarded. Full focus was needed and hence retreat times saw the most significant victories. Most especially these were in the forty days of wilderness fasting and in the garden of Gethsemane prior to Jesus' arrest.

Jesus' public ministry is especially the source from which to draw for Christian retreat. The balance in Jesus' life between action and stillness, and between compassion and prayer, speaks to every Christian life. Jesus' example is thus integral to what it means to enter into retreat and what such retreat means in respect of active ministry.

## 6. THE TWELVE DISCIPLES

Jesus' twelve disciples<sup>19</sup> were regularly drawn into times of retreat by Jesus. This has come through in examining Jesus' public ministry, where three of his closest disciples were companions on retreat on a number of occasions, and at other times all of the twelve were drawn into retreat. This is apart from Jesus' times of solitude.

Following Jesus' death, with the accompanying bereftness, there follows withdrawal by the disciples. The gathering as a group behind locked doors was a withdrawal experience, whatever negative connotations of fear there were for the disciples. This withdrawal saw encounter with the risen Jesus, no matter the lack of expectation (John 20:19-23). Notably, the disciples hear the words of peace from Jesus, in greeting, but having a depth of impact even greater than in greeting (v.19 & 21). Such an experience of peace is often needed in withdrawal times. The disciples are also sent out by Jesus (v.21). There is a similarity between the sending of the disciples, and the sending of Jesus by the Father (Marsh 1968:643). Retreat encounter thus evokes action here. The receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit is needed for this missionary action, and is bestowed by Jesus (John 20:22). The personal and community experience of the Spirit becomes a vital aspect for retreat times because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is described in relation to the Pentecost festival and experience by Luke in Acts 2:1-13. The special emphasis of their going out involves forgiveness (John 20:23), which becomes so central to the Christian message. This retreat time thus has enormous impact on later action. The encounter a week later when the previously absent Thomas is now present, is again an encounter with Jesus when the disciples had withdrawn from the rest of the community (John 20:24-29).

A different situation, that of Galilee, is presented in John 21. Yet it is again a resurrection appearance to disciples (seven this time) who have withdrawn. Marsh (1968:660-661) points out that the evangelist takes his readers back to the narrative of the first appearance of Jesus to his disciples in Galilee (Jn.1:45). Reminders therefore come

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<sup>19</sup> "Disciple" is a term used not only for the Twelve, but also for others who followed Jesus. Here I am referring to Jesus' core of twelve designated disciples, in line with Mt.10:1 & 11:1. They were also designated as twelve apostles (Mt. 10:2; Lk.6:13), or simply as the Twelve (Mk.6:7; 10:32; Lk.9:1).

forth in this retreat situation. On this occasion they have decided to go fishing, the old occupation of a number of them. Retreat time, once more, is an experience of encounter with the risen Christ. Yet again, it is an experience of surprise and mystery, full of meaning, too.

These disciples spent a night without catching any fish and yet are invited to breakfast, which includes fish (v.13), by one who seems to have done no fishing. Jesus "can feed them without their aid" (Marsh 1968:665). This meeting includes elements of the miraculous and is experienced as a divine encounter. The stranger on the shore of the lake, who is then recognised as the risen Jesus, gives bread to them too. This has a eucharistic feel about it, as is also the case with the conclusion of the Jerusalem to Emmaus walk (Lk.24:13-35). There is also a reminiscence of the feeding of the five thousand (Jn.6:1-13) (Marsh 1968:667) because of the presence of both bread and fish, as well as the miraculous sense on this occasion.

This retreat time is thus a deep encounter experience. For Peter there is great significance with the three-fold questioning of his love by Jesus, and then exhortation to ministry (Jn.21:15-19). The resurrection appearances to the disciples are thus in retreat times, however mixed up the attitudes and motives of the disciples were.

Following the ascension, the disciples go into retreat on Jesus' instructions: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about" (Acts 1:4). Their response was, according to Acts 1:14: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." Williams (1964:58) asserts that the prayer mentioned in this verse was a liturgical form of prayer, probably based on Temple or synagogue worship. Being Jewish-based prayer, there would certainly have been liturgy used in this waiting time of retreat, but not necessarily exclusively so. In obedience to the command to wait in Jerusalem, the group of believers "were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1) when the day of Pentecost came. They were in retreat and then the empowering came and the advancing started in a new way as a result of the gift of the Holy Spirit. These foundational events for the disciples are thus marked by retreat.

In later experience, Peter's three-fold vision of a sheet with animals was experienced

during prayer at about noon (Acts 10:9-16). This was not an appointed time of public prayer (Bruce 1992:205). It is, however, likely to have been one of the daily times of prayer used by pious Jews who prayed three times a day (Marshall 1980:185). It could be considered as a time of retreat, more especially of daily retreat, in which Peter was engaged. This visionary experience was critical as a watershed moment in the life of the Church and the spread of the Gospel, for it set Peter on the path to extend the impact of the Christian message to Gentiles.

## 7. PAUL

Subsequent to Paul's Damascus road conversion experience he went to Arabia for an unspecified time, according to Gal.1:17. He writes, "I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus." A period of three years before going to Jerusalem is written about by Paul in verse 18, but the time spans in Arabia and Damascus are not mentioned. It is possible that other unmentioned visits took place in this period. Luke makes no mention of this trip to Arabia in the Acts account of Paul's conversion and the subsequent events of his life. As a result, our knowledge of the time in Arabia is minimal. Cole (1989:90-91) says that by "Arabia", Luke presumably means "the district in the immediate vicinity of Damascus, although Nabatean 'Arabia' covered a far larger and ill-defined desert area as well." Despite the little information given by Paul, the time in Arabia appears to have been some kind of retreat experience, and mostly solitary in nature, for Paul relates his experience of the revelation of God's Son and the call to preach to the Gentiles in these terms: "I did not consult any human being" (Gal.1:16). Reading between the lines, it seems likely that Paul needed some time away and alone to process the sudden and dramatic encounter with the glorified Christ, and that this was a time especially devoted to prayer.

Fasting, which requires some kind of withdrawal at a minimum, is mentioned in Acts 13:2-3 and 14:23. Marshall (1980:216) regards the fasting mentioned in chapter 13 as being used "to concentrate on serving God and receiving his guidance". Each situation involves the appointing of people to roles and tasks. In the first instance, Paul and Barnabas are set aside for mission work. In the second case, elders are appointed by

## Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.<sup>20</sup>

There is little specifically mentioned by Luke in Acts by way of retreat times during Paul's missionary journeys. Paul had times of less intensity along the way, e.g., while waiting in Athens (Acts 17:16). He was also open to listening to God's direction which required withdrawal from active ministry, e.g., a vision of a man from Macedonia begging for help (Acts 16:9-10). Luke seems more interested in action than in the times of prayer and reflection in his Acts account. Nevertheless it is clear that Paul was a man of prayer, as is shown in his expression in jail with prayer and hymn singing (Acts 16:25), and in storms and shipwreck situations, with even an angelic vision (Acts 27:23). Indeed Paul's prayers in crises show a devotional reality that was clearly embedded in his daily life.

Travelling long distances was integral to the missionary journeys. This meant different activity between towns as compared to ministry in them. The pauses from ministry while on the road or sea lent themselves to various kinds of withdrawal, meditation and prayer which were surely practiced by Paul and his companions.

## 8. JOHN ON PATMOS

The Book of Revelation comes out of a situation of exile. It is likely that John<sup>21</sup>, the author, was on the island of Patmos due to being on the receiving end of persecution. He describes being there "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" and as a "companion in the suffering" (1:9). Ramsay (1985:89) asserts that banishment on Patmos was vital to be a recipient of the vision; such a condition of withdrawal and suffering made such receptivity possible. Beyond that, he was also "in the Spirit" on the Lord's Day (1:10). John also mentions being "in the Spirit" in 4:2, 17:3 and 21:10. "In the

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<sup>20</sup> According to Bruce (1992:280), it is uncertain whether Paul and Barnabas would have recognised converts of a few weeks' standing as leaders of Churches. Marshall (1980:241) says that "elders" might be an anachronism as no mention is made of elders by Paul prior to the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim.5:17; Tit.1:5). It is, nevertheless, clear that, at the least, Paul and Barnabas encouraged those with leadership qualities and potential through a process involving prayer and fasting. Bruce (1992:280) also points out that Paul provided spiritual guidance, by letter, to the Churches which he had founded, and encouraged members to recognise and respect leaders (1 Cor.16:15-18; Gal.6:6; Phlp.1:1; 2:29; 1 Thess.5:12-13).

<sup>21</sup> The question of the identity of this John, and thus of who wrote Revelation, is beyond the scope of this section.

Spirit", according to Morris (1987:52), "may denote something like a trance. It is certainly a state in which the Seer is specially open to the Holy Spirit and ready to see visions". Bruce (1986c:1599) describes this as being "caught up in prophetic ecstasy."<sup>22</sup>

While in exile he had a time of retreat which unfolded in the revelations recorded in the Book of Revelation. This revelation includes well-thought out reasoning, with letters to seven Churches, as well as being rich in imaginative and symbolic language. It is the culmination of contemplative and intellectual reflection. As Ramsay (1985:89) points out, Revelation is the product of long and deep contemplation: "It was not the vision of a day; it embodied the contemplation and insight of years." The complexity and variety that is within Revelation indicates that it was not the musings of fantasy alone, nor the rushed report of a vision, nor merely a convoluted presentation of symbols. Rather, Revelation is the outworking of an experience of retreat. This revelation was received through withdrawal for prayer, through divine encounter during this time of retreat, and through reflection in further time of retreat to put across the received vision using symbols, Scripture and visual-type description. Revelation is therefore the one Biblical book which is completely, or near completely, the result of prayerful reflection in retreat.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Christian retreats without the use of the New Testament is hard to imagine. As with the Old Testament, the New Testament functions as an up-to-date and dynamic source in contemporary retreats. This is, very often, the source upon which to meditate as a means to meet with God. Imaginative use of New Testament texts has great meaning for retreats. As the New Testament contains Christianity's foundational documents it holds the place of priority as the most important source of all for Christian retreats.

Withdrawal in retreat finds sufficient basis in Jesus' forty days in the wilderness alone. If

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<sup>22</sup> A contrary view, that "in the Spirit" refers simply to an experience of elevation, attributed to God, and not necessarily to the Third Person of the Trinity, is drawn on the basis of there being no reference to the Spirit with the adjective "Holy" in Revelation. The Spirit is nevertheless clearly synonymous with the Holy Spirit in Rev.22:17a: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" It is therefore likely that the spiritual experience of John on Patmos, which is presented specifically in Christian terms, can be seen as experienced because of the action of the Holy Spirit.



a modern disciple thinks retreat is only for foundational and critical decision-making times of life, then Jesus' overall lifestyle in public ministry points definitively to the ongoing need for withdrawal. It was a significant aspect of Jesus' years of ministry. In the synoptic Gospels we find an alternation between active ministry and deliberate withdrawal. That a withdrawn activity of prayer, some of it alone, should make such an impression to shine through the Gospel record, shows that prayer apart was a significant and integral aspect of Jesus' life. Jesus is thus the leading and clearest example for retreat in the Christian experience.

From a wider perspective, it is apparent that the followers of Jesus saw withdrawal in prayer as something of integral importance in responding to Jesus. Retreat times had an impact for the twelve disciples of Jesus and for Paul and others as well. The Old Testament importance of retreat was reconfirmed in the preparations for the coming of the Christ in the lives of John the Baptist and Mary and Joseph. The New Testament examples of retreat need application to current spirituality. In the Christian discipleship tradition of seeking to live following Jesus' lifestyle, there is no way for the modern believer to avoid the need for retreat, especially in being alone with God. There is thus, from Jesus' example, an imperative of the need for retreat.

A strong foundational tradition of the need for retreating for encounter with God is therefore multi-layered in the New Testament. In order to draw from the spirituality set forth in the New Testament, retreating for prayer to meet with God in the context of a living relationship is thus presented as essential.

## CHAPTER 4

### EARLY MONASTICISM AND THE WIDER CHURCH

#### 1. APOSTOLIC CHRISTIANITY THROUGH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURY

The early Christian experience just after the New Testament period was marked by a number of important characteristics in the life and spirituality of believers, including an eschatological dimension to early Christian spirituality. Messianic expectations in Judaism which were eschatological in nature were seen by Christians as fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Emphasis was placed on Jesus' passion and resurrection, although the whole of Jesus' historical life also had importance (Zizioulas 1985:24). The anticipated return of Christ, the parousia, also shaped spirituality. Various responses to the anticipated parousia included fervent expectation, withdrawal, and willingness (and even desire) for martyrdom. Such responses were often coloured by what was conceived of as a delay in the parousia.

Vital aspects of the faith of the early Christian communities were, according to Zizioulas (1985:26-29): the worship of Jesus Christ and the important role of his priestly function; the place of the Holy Spirit; the Church as community; baptism associated with new birth; and the eucharist. The Church took on different forms in various places, with community being variously emphasised. In time, the institutional nature of the Church took on more prominence in some centres.

The Church functioned within wider society. There was antagonism towards the Church from the Roman Empire for a time. There were also societal ways which were seen as anathema to Christian discipleship. These included certain pagan practices, sexual immorality, dishonesty and materialism. There arose the perceived need to withdraw from the "world" for the sake of Christian purity. This sometimes happened in attitude, while people were still living and functioning in mainstream society. For others a call physically to withdraw from society was discerned. Both responses were linked to retreat, though very different in form. The most notable and clearest form of retreat came with the hermit style response, or monasticism.

The monks sought to retreat as an entire lifestyle to be constantly engaged with God in prayer. This is clearly different from later retreat models of time apart from ministry and daily concerns. Monasticism is therefore not immediately comparable to the concept of specific periods of retreat. Nevertheless, monasticism was the major form of “retreat” from the third to the fifteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Due to monasticism having prominence for this major period of history, as well as monasticism having an influence until the present, the monastic life requires investigation for studying retreats through the centuries. Some of the significant aspects, which are used in retreating like *lectio divina*, spiritual direction and some ascetical practices, have monastic origins. This gives credence to investigating how the monastic movement has had an impact on retreats up to the present.

Jesus’ example was not of complete withdrawal. His retreat life was withdrawal from busy ministry into time with God, with whom he intimately communicated as “*Abba*”. The monastics therefore followed the Jesus example with regard to his hidden life, but not usually in respect to Jesus’ active life. The monastics’ lifestyle of prayer means that they are a vital part of the study of retreats in the broader sense, and the most significant for a number of centuries.

Early monasticism thus plays an important part in the forms retreating took, and as background for Christian retreats in modern times. Emphasis in this chapter will be on monasticism because of its dominant role in the area of retreating for the period from the third century through to the twelfth century. As time divisions tend to be somewhat arbitrary there will be some overlap, in terms of time, with the next chapter.

In this chapter there will follow: some introductory remarks on monasticism; an examination of some foundational figures in the monastic movement and their influence on retreating: Antony, Pachomius and Benedict; the presentation of some aspects of the life of the wider Church; and then investigation of retreat-related developments in the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

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<sup>23</sup> Monasticism was not the only form of retreat in this period, but the major one. For example, mendicants and penitents had forms of retreat in the thirteenth century.

## 2. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON MONASTICISM

From the late third century onwards, monasticism became the most formalized way of retreating for the purpose of Christian prayer. Such retreating took forms that were radical, generally life-long, and were a total withdrawal from mainstream society. This readily created a dichotomy between two ideas of what it meant to be Christian. On the one hand, being Christian meant following Jesus' way within the realities of social activities, including marriage, parenting, work, child nurture and other forms of social interaction. On the other hand, being Christian meant nothing less than withdrawing entirely from marriage, "secular" work and social contact and leading a life withdrawn from the "world". Devotional life in the former expression centred especially around community worship. This was so because Christianity was mostly an urban phenomenon at the outset. The result of this marked distinction between monastics and non-monastics meant that Christian retreat was largely associated with monasticism for a long period. The nature of monasticism meant that withdrawal for Christian purposes was an all-embracing concept for monastics. However, for those outside monastic life it was largely non-existent.

For those who took the call to discipleship of Jesus seriously, there was always the need for a detachment from selfish concerns. As Ward (2003:ix) states: "At first this was done in the urban centres of Christianity, but gradually a need for a more absolute retirement for this way of life caused people to seek places of solitude away from social, political and economic demands."

Christian monasticism's origins were not highly organised nor designed to be a particular stream within Christianity. Rather, its origins are to be found in individualistic and hermit responses that only later took on communal aspects to any degree of organisation.

Christian monasticism was used to give expression to the idea of withdrawal for the sake of discipleship. Ward (2003:ix) puts it this way:

The early Christian ideal of standing where Christ stands was gradually combined with a much older and essentially dualist way of life, common to all religions, i.e., the way of the monk, the *monos*, 'the one', who lived not in company with another but

alone before God. Thus there emerged in the third, fourth and fifth centuries a Christian version of the ancient form of religious life known as monasticism.

According to Tinsley (1969:222):

The solitary monk was, through grace, being approximated to the image of the simplicity and unity of God. His very solitariness and his liberation from the passions gave his life a symbolic character as a pointer to the ineffable unity and simplicity of God.

Tinsley (1969:222) notes that the ideal of perfection was interpreted in monasticism as detachment from the world. This found expression through the surrender of material possessions (poverty), the surrender of personal will (obedience), and the surrender of sexual life (celibacy).

Bonhoeffer (1959:38) highlighted the contrast between monastic and mainstream Christianity:

Monasticism was represented as an individual achievement which the mass of the laity could not be expected to emulate. By thus limiting the application of the commandments of Jesus to a restricted group of specialists, the Church evolved the fatal conception of a double standard - a maximum and a minimum standard of Christian obedience.

Bonhoeffer (1959:38) asserted that these dual standards in the Church saw the secularisation of the mainstream Church, which "could always point to monasticism as an opportunity of living a higher life within the fold, and thus justify the other possibility of a lower standard of life for others."

Bonhoeffer's (1959:38-47) call was for all Christians to follow the way of, what he called, "costly grace." The presence of monastic life gives no one the licence to follow a path of "cheap grace". While Bonhoeffer (1959:239) was not at odds with the contemplative life of monastics, he saw engagement with the world, using Luther's coming out of the monastery as a noteworthy example, as essential. Bonhoeffer's two criticisms of monasticism: firstly, of two standards in the Church because of a so-called higher way of monasticism, and secondly, of withdrawal from the world, represent views commonly held by Protestants of monasticism. The Protestant view has also, to

a great extent, been that monasticism runs the risk of ending up in a doctrine of salvation by works (Tinsley 1969:222). However, Bonhoeffer's analysis does point to the particular role given to monasticism to seek to show the way of dedicated discipleship, which needed to be practiced far wider by the Church. Withdrawal for the sake of the Gospel, both for prayer and away from worldly attachments, meant being pointed in the monastic direction, and mainstream Christianity started to avoid its responsibility.

### 3. ANTONY AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Christian monasticism's origins lie especially with Antony (c. 251-356), who was an Egyptian. Although there were Christian hermits who predated him and others who sought out the desert at the same time as him, Antony is a foundational and archetypal character, especially due to Athanasius' popular biography of him and because of those who followed in his footsteps. At about eighteen to twenty years of age, Antony heard in a Church gathering the Gospel reading, "Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor...then come and follow me" (Matt.19:21). He regarded these words of Jesus as directly for him to live out. For a time he lived as a poor labourer at the edge of his village, but he then withdrew into the desert. This was not a short sojourn, but a time of twenty years of solitude. These were, not surprisingly, years of great trial. Antony went into the desert to discover intimacy with God and to fight the devil. Temptations included memories of what he had left behind, the intrusion of foul thoughts and sexual temptations. Some of the demonic battles were described in very physical, violent and combative forms (Foster 1998:26-27). The stories of spiritual battle deal with the conquering of self, as well as demons. As Foster (1998:28) says of Antony's experience of spiritual warfare:

Throughout the stories there is a penetrating element of self-scrutiny, self-knowledge, self-mastery. The demonic stood not only for what was *hostile* to human nature but for what was *incomplete* in human nature. Always the demons seemed to manifest themselves in exactly those guises that would make the desert monks the most needy and the most susceptible to temptation. All of the stories carry with them the sense of growth in grace, of character formation, of clarifying the motives and intents of the heart.

Spiritual discipline was thus fostered by the desert withdrawal. Athanasius wrote of Antony: "It was not his physical dimensions that distinguished him from the rest, but the stability of character and the purity of the soul. His soul being free of confusion, he held his outer senses also undisturbed, so that from the soul's joy his face was cheerful as well" (Foster 1998:29).

By means of surrender to Christ, Antony came through his long period of solitude being recognised as a person of holiness in disposition. People then sought him out for counsel, direction, healing and help (Nouwen 1981:19-20). Antony thus had the tension between solitude and interaction with others as a ministry in Christ's name. Solitude continued to be his primary focus, but the reality of those in need and those who wanted to follow in his hermit footsteps meant guarded interaction with others in the context of being alone having special priority. Louf (1977:19) points to Athanasius' account of Antony as showing him to be invested with a kind of universal fatherhood which made him available to "all people" without jeopardizing the solitude which he sought above all else. Antony died in about 356 having gone into deeper solitude in his old age.

Antony, as the "father of monks", sought out solitude some half a century before Constantine's grip on the rulership of the Roman Empire became secure in 312 A.D. Christianity was still the target of some persecution and the secular world was seen as full of snares. There was thus an outlook among some Christians that society was a "worldly" system from which it was necessary to flee. The constraint to flee from mainstream Christianity, as well as society at large, became a significant factor when Christianity became more formalized, and accepted by the state and society. Christianity became more readily ritualistic, outward in practice, and ceremonial without necessarily being heartfelt and life changing. Ward (2003:ix) states that the withdrawal movement "was given a further impetus with the end of persecution at the beginning of the fourth century under the first Christian emperor, Constantine, when the Church, as a recognised and legal institution, began to turn world-forsaking Christians into respectable citizens of this world." Thus a new dimension was a major factor in seeing Antonian style monasticism gain in adherents. As Ward (2003:ix) states: "Many who found the new ways of Christian life alien knew themselves called to continue to live in an eschatological dimension that they could now only find outside

the cities. The places especially used in this way were the deserts of Syria, Palestine and above all Egypt."

Merton (1960:3), in respect of the desert spirituality of the early hermits says: "Society...was regarded [by the Desert Fathers] as a shipwreck from which each single individual man had to swim for his life...These were men who believed that to let oneself drift along, passively accepting the tenets and values of what they knew as society, was purely and simply a disaster." Antony and his followers withdrew for the purpose of encountering God in prayer without the distractions of society and fled from perceived seductions. Austere practices in lifestyle and self-denial in conversation, marriage, sexual expression, company, food, shelter and more went with desert withdrawal. Monasticism was associated with asceticism from its origins, and asceticism grew as a vital, and varied, aspect of spiritual withdrawal.

Withdrawal was thus not only from society, but also from a multitude of practices. A life of retreat into monasticism thus meant an accompanying call to asceticism. Withdrawal was not only in respect of location, but also into silence, solitude, simplicity and celibacy. A necessary part of Antonian hermit life was a withdrawal from material possessions, except for the most basic of items. All of these aspects of retreating were for the positive purpose of being able to focus on prayer and discipleship.

Antony's example attracted interest, not only for consultation, but also imitation. Aspirant hermits withdrew into the desert to be near Antony and to seek to be like him, while others went into the hermit life further afield. Later in history others continued in imitation of his lifestyle. Thus a movement was born. This movement had solitude as vital to its aim, which was to follow Christ's call and to experience unity with God. This was achieved through meditation, prayer and worship. The monks who followed Antony's way generally lived alone, although not necessarily far from fellow monks. Their prayer was done alone and they secured their own food (Boer 1976:129). There were some who lived together, but even then, the idea was to give priority to solitude. Occasional times of communal meeting were also practiced.

Christian guidance had an important place in the fourth to the sixth centuries in the life of the desert monks. According to Corcoran (1985:446), one of the strongest factors in



attracting people to the monastic life in those centuries was the desire to find an "elder", who was an experienced ascetic and spiritual teacher, seen as capable of leading others to a greater experience of God. Antony's change in the desert and his disposition was such that Athanasius (in Foster 1998:29) wrote concerning Antony that "simply by seeing his conduct, many aspired to become imitators of his way of life."

Antony was considered a founding "father", and the desert elders were addressed by the Aramaic terms of "*abba*" (father) and "*amma*" (mother). The sayings that emerged from these desert elders were transmitted, at first orally. They were seen as responses of wisdom gained in withdrawal. As Corcoran (1985:446) states concerning the sayings: They were "simply the elder's response out of the deep life in the Spirit to the persons, situations and problems that were encountered." It was not a systematic teaching that emerged from the personal and particular interactions of elder-disciple. Rather it was situational wisdom, born out of prayer and meditative withdrawal. Corcoran (1985:447) writes:

The great spiritual guides displayed extraordinary patience, gentleness and forbearance with their disciples -- but also the necessary strength to confront and admonish. The desert elders had remarkable insight, delicacy, and compassion in dealing with the weaknesses of others. Charity and nonjudgment were, without question, the outstanding qualities of the desert fathers/mothers.

In the desert monastic setting a disciple was encouraged to make known to the *abba* or *amma* all that was going on in the disciple's interior life. This was to aid true self-knowledge and to enable the disciple to deal with distracting and burdensome thoughts, so as to experience an inner peace with a centred awareness of God. This "manifestation of thoughts" (*exagoreusis*) required a relationship of deep trust (Corcoran 1985:448).

Discernment was seen as a vital aspect of growth in desert monasticism. Dependence on the Holy Spirit was acknowledged. Desert elders became known for their discernment in the lives of others, as well as in respect of their own lives. Such discernment grew out of the life of prayer associated with the hermit prayer lifestyle.

The Antonian hermits had no daily office. They centred all of their waking hours on perpetual recitation of the Psalter, according to Guiver (2001:54). Such use of the Psalms had not occurred in Christian worship prior to this, as far as is known (2001:54). With regard to coming together for corporate meditation, amongst Antonian monks this would only take place on Saturdays and Sundays (2001:55).

Antony's vision of monastic life was thus of the hermit-type. It was retreating not only from mainstream society, but also retreating into solitude. Desert spirituality of this style thus gave a most radical and early underpinning to the concept of retreating for the sake of Christ. Its lifelong nature, emphasis on solitude and severe asceticism meant, however, that the response of withdrawal to serve Christ better was only taken up by a few and by those whom some might term in modern jargon "the lunatic fringe". Nevertheless, important foundations regarding retreating as integral to Christian discipleship had been laid and adaptation would see new developments and wisdom and lessons for succeeding generations.

#### 4. PACHOMIUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS

The tension between solitude and community which saw emphasis placed on solitude by the hermits, also saw other monastic expressions spring up. Pachomius (c. 290-346), an Egyptian, was to become a foundational figure for communal monasticism. After a period in Constantine's army and then living the Christian life in a village, he lived the life of hermit style monasticism for a period. For a while he was joined by his brother, which was not a wholly successful venture. Nevertheless, Pachomius clearly had a new focus: the developing of community. He encouraged the adherence of local villagers, and then moved on to encourage disciples on more formal terms from further afield (Rousseau 1986:128). According to Gribomont (1985:96), after initial difficulties, Pachomius concluded that complete poverty and unquestioning obedience were essential to achieve success in the coenobitic life. Gribomont (1985:96) points out that Pachomius' biographer "stresses that Abba Palamon had taught Pachomius all the virtues necessary for an eremitical life and that it was by no means out of weakness that he chose a coenobitic life." Within a few years he had a following of about nine thousand monks (1985:96). Gribomont (1985:96) notes: "In some cases already established communities joined him in search of firmer control and discipline." Pachomius moved monasticism

both into a communal focus and a structured lifestyle. Community, naturally enough, required structure that was unnecessary for hermits.

Pachomius sought to live out his first promise to God which was, "I will serve your will all the days of my life and loving all people, I will be their servant according to your command" (Rousseau 1986:128). This pledge thrust him into more communal ways and he and his followers stressed in various ways "the enduring theme of mutual support" (1986:128). With regard to the Pachomian sense of community, Rousseau (1986:128) says: "The chief purpose of community was the sharing of responsibility for material welfare and spiritual growth, which explains why Pachomius adopted above all the guise of a servant among his followers."

Pachomian communities had a communal pattern for both liturgy and manual work, as well as a communal meal. Eucharists were celebrated and they also observed the "synaxis", which consisted of Scripture readings, interspersed by periods of silent reflection and corporate saying of The Lord's Prayer. Another session in the evening involved a greater degree of discussion (Rousseau 1986:129). According to Guiver (2001:54-55), the communal meditation of these twice daily sessions was on the Psalms which were read through in numerical order. The monks continued with their own recitation of the Psalms when they did their manual labour.

Pachomian style monasticism had the desire for and expression of the need for prayer and meditation. Such prayer was shared together in community. Regulation of the day was seen as necessary, so that prayer could take place communally. With regard to retreating, Pachomian type monasticism represented, firstly, a retreat from the world; and secondly, a pattern of retreating from daily manual work into corporate prayer, which included silent prayer. Physical work times were considered to be necessary and to be prayer times too, though in a different dimension of prayer compared to specifically focused corporate meditation.

## 5. DEVELOPMENTS IN MONASTICISM

Monasticism spread from the Egyptian desert into Palestine and Syria and into Europe. Although the hermit style of monasticism was tried in Italy and Gaul at first,

communal monasticism soon held sway in the monastic movement in Europe. In Celtic Christianity a type of hermit style monasticism took root. However, even in Ireland hermits tended to group together for a sense of community, even if most did not live in one monastery.

European monasticism developed more communally. Antonian monasticism, with the use mostly of rudimentary shelters, was more suited to warmer and drier weather than is prevalent in most of Europe. Extremes in individualism and asceticism did not hold overall sway in Europe. There was, in addition, the developing concern to train the many aspirant monastics, which could more readily be tackled in communal monasteries. Hence monasticism took on communal ways in Europe.

Hermit style monasticism continued to be practiced in Eastern Christendom, but this was not the exclusive pattern. Monastic forms were, and continue to be varied. The monastic way of life, in all its variety, was reduced to three basic forms. John Climacus, who died in about 649, describes these as follows: firstly, ascetic withdrawal and solitude, or the eremitic life; secondly, hesychastic (which refers to stillness)<sup>24</sup> with a few companions that is, the semi-eremitic or middle way, which had tended to be lived in a monastic cottage, termed a skete or lavra with, generally, two to six in such abodes or in a group of cells; and thirdly, patient endurance in a coenobium or community monastery that is, the coenobitic way. The eremitic life finds its founder in Antony. The coenobitic life's founder is seen as Pachomius. The middle way was mapped out by Ammon of Nitria and Macarius at Scetis (Ware 1977:30-31).

The need for the inner dimensions of prayer which attracted people to the monastic way of life along with communal needs meant that solitude was in creative tension with community in monastic life in an ongoing way. Naturally, due to monasticism's origins silence and solitude were built into what it meant to be part of a communal monastery.

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<sup>24</sup> Hesychasm is a term derived from the Greek word *hesychia*, meaning quietness, stillness or tranquillity. It can denote, in a general sense, the way of inner prayer, as taught and practised in the Christian East from the fourth century onwards. In a narrower sense, it can refer specifically to the repetitive use of the Jesus prayer, particularly in association with breathing. The term is also used to signify prayer that is, as far as possible, free from images and concepts. "Hesychast" refers to a hermit, as contrasted with a monk living in community (Ware 1983b:189-190).

Monastic community, inevitably meant exploring how best to live this life devoted to prayer, with others, who could be a stumbling block to the life of prayer as well as an aid to such a giving over to God in prayer.

## 6. BENEDICT AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Community inevitably requires an ordering of life and rules or guidelines for the consideration of others, in pursuit of a common purpose. Monasteries thus developed rules. The most significant and long-standing rule comes from Benedict of Nursia. Born in about 480 in Nursia, Italy, he went to Rome to study liberal arts. However, he abandoned these studies and went to Affile for about two years. Benedict then lived the hermit life for about three years in a cave in the area of Subiaco. Apart from the ministrations of a neighbouring monk who brought him food from time to time, he remained in solitude (De Waal 1999:2).

However, the pull to communal monasticism was heard. It came through people who sought Benedict out and eventually found him. There were probably also health concerns and a desire for community within Benedict himself. Benedict established twelve small monasteries with about a dozen monks in each. In about 528 or 529 he went south to Monte Cassino. There he organised the building of a new monastery, following the destruction of a pagan shrine at that site. He spent the rest of his life there until his death in 547 (De Waal 1999:2).

There are older rules than Benedict's. By his time communal monastic life had, to a great extent, become the gathering of novices seeking out a holy man or woman and asking to learn from that person. The concentration of wisdom and power in one person, a sage (or abbot, in a formalized monastery) was reflected in one of the earlier rules, called the Rule of the Master. This rule emphasised the concepts of "master" and "school". Benedict rather sought to emphasise the community of the monks and to acknowledge the spiritual experience of more than just the abbot (De Waal 1999:4).

The monasteries of the sixth century, which emerged in Benedict's lifetime were intended for groups of about twelve and were small and simple. Few of the monks were priests or scholars. In Benedictine monasteries the day had a rhythm around

seven times of corporate prayer. Domestic and agricultural work took up much of the rest of the waking time, but periods were also set aside for study and reading (De Waal 1999:5). According to chapter 48 of Benedict's Rule: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul, and therefore the brothers ought to be occupied at fixed times in manual labour, and again at fixed times in *lectio divina*." That meant about six hours per day in manual labour in early Benedictine monasteries and four hours daily of *lectio divina* (Spearritt 1986:155).

*Lectio divina* was used as a method of prayerful meditation based on Scripture passages.<sup>25</sup> Classically, *lectio divina* encompasses a process of four stages. The first is reading (*lectio*), and is a slow, meditative reading, in which there is a "listening" for a particular word or phrase. The second stage is meditation (*meditatio*), which involves a meditative repeating of the word or phrase found. The third stage is prayer (*oratorio*), which is about loving communication with God. The fourth stage is contemplation (*contemplatio*), in which there is simple restfulness in God's presence which is experienced beyond words (Schultz 1993:98-110). These four stages are specifically laid out in a twelfth century work of Guigo II, the Carthusian, called "The Ladder of Monks" (Vest 1996:106), but the delineation of these stages may be earlier. *Lectio divina* functioned, in a sense, as a kind of private prayer, although not usually in a very personal sense. As Spearritt (1986:155) points out: "Private prayer is hardly envisaged at all in the *Rule*, at least not in a sense distinguishable from *meditatio* on the one hand and the silent pauses after the psalms for listening to the word of God on the other."

Western monasticism grew most especially using the Benedictine Rule and pattern. However, monasticism began to have a very different role in society and Church compared to its Antonian origins. In those original years, the desert had been sought as a place of refuge from a comparatively sophisticated life. The seventh century onwards saw the monasteries become much larger. They also became centres of learning, rich liturgical life and intellectual community life. Monasteries became houses of significant manuscripts, relics and works of art. In addition, they became places of

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<sup>25</sup> The Benedictine monasteries kept the practice of *lectio divina* alive in the following centuries (Vest 1996:106).

accommodation and hence venues of pilgrimage and hospitality. In a situation where political uncertainty, barbarian activity and military and violent methods were the order of the day, the monasteries were, in many ways, sophisticated centres in a backdrop of uncertainty (De Waal 1999:6).

As far as retreating is concerned, the monastic life was still an avenue by which to retreat into a lifestyle of withdrawal from society at large. However, this reality was compromised and challenged by political and ecclesiastical responsibilities and the power that monks started to exercise. There was also the challenge of the requests of outsiders to retreat from their world for a time, by using the hospitality and resources of monasteries. The practice of monasteries and convents being used as places of retreat for those outside the monastic life for a period of time continues to this day. Retreatants are then able to participate in the life of the monastery or convent to varying degrees.

## 7. THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH FROM THE FOURTH CENTURY

Monastics accounted for only a small portion of the Christian believers, even with their popularity. Yet when considering pre-Reformation prayer in withdrawal, focus tends to be on the monastics because such prayer was found in particular in the monastic movement. However, prayer was also taking place within the life of the wider Church, and people had times of prayer that constituted periods of retreat. This we briefly turn to, still acknowledging that monasticism had an impact on the wider Church and that monastics drew from the background and resources of the wider Church.

The heart of the prayer of general believers from the fourth century onwards was in the Sunday liturgy, including the eucharist, and the people's office on weekdays (Guiver 2001:104). Devotional life thus revolved especially around congregational liturgical gatherings. If a believer was unable to attend public worship, the substitute was praying on one's own or with family. These prayers, according to Guiver (2001:104), would have been based on what went on in the public office, without necessarily doing this slavishly or in full detail. Hours of prayer were to be the same whether prayers

were said privately or communally.<sup>26</sup> The content of private prayers was thus, in general, based on simplified versions of the common hours of prayer. This meant the use of Psalms that were known by heart and liturgical formulas, including the Lord's prayer, the *Kyrie Eleison* and the *Gloria Patri* (Guiver 2001:105-106). With books being scarce, it meant that private devotional life was based on the memory of liturgy. Despite the scarcity of literature, the prayer of private retreat times was mostly liturgical, rather than extemporaneous.<sup>27</sup> The use of a "quiet time" or private devotional time using spontaneous prayer was a later Christian development. Pre-Reformation withdrawal for prayer is clearly inextricably linked to the liturgical basis from which it flowed.

Any concept of daily times of retreat outside of monastic settings was linked to what was considered as private prayer at that time. Thus ideas of retreat from the fourth century into the Middle Ages were tied to roots of congregational liturgical practice. Merton (1969:65) highlights an essential and vital link between personal devotion and public worship:

The early Christian tradition and the spiritual masters of the Middle Ages knew no conflict between 'public' and 'private' prayer, or between the liturgy and contemplation; this is a modern problem, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say it is a pseudo-problem. Liturgy by its very nature tends to prolong itself in individual private prayer, and mental prayer in its turn disposes us for and seeks fulfilment in liturgical worship.

Merton (1969:65) adds: "The doctrine of the early Benedictine centuries shows us that the opposition between 'official public prayer' and 'spontaneous personal prayer' is a largely modern fiction."

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, a Council of Toledo of 400 A.D. decided to stop people praying the prayer offices themselves without a priest being present (Guiver 2001:104-105). However, this was not a universal ban but a local rule.

<sup>27</sup> Monasticism developed its offices too. The development of liturgy saw monasticism borrow from mainstream Christian communities and the other way round as well. Monastic communities had their prayer hours which were not strictly based on mainstream communities' schedules, despite the borrowing of ideas. Monastic prayer was liturgical at its basis. Accompanying the use of the specific hours of prayer in the daily life of monastics were two other vital dimensions of prayer: silence and *lectio divina*. These practices had an effect beyond monasticism too.



## 8. EASTERN ORTHODOX DEVELOPMENTS

In Eastern Christendom hermit-style monasticism continued to hold sway in the monastic movement in the centuries after Antony, he being the foundational example. In the Orthodox Church at large hermit life was held in high regard, yet various forms of solitude and community interaction were practiced in the monasticism of the East.

The methods of prayer used and developed in the early Church of the East bring forth two major types of prayer, which were used in various forms of withdrawal. The one type is apophatic prayer. This is non-discursive or imageless prayer. The other type is cataphatic prayer which deliberately uses images.

Out of the monastic experience of the Christian East, the "Jesus Prayer" and the method associated with it emerged into a set form in the period of the fifth to the eighth centuries (Ware 1986a:176). The prayer has been used as a basis for apophatic prayer. It had been practiced through the centuries, with its use becoming more widespread in the fourteenth century, especially associated with the monasticism of Mount Athos (Ware 1983a:223). The Jesus Prayer gained wider use than ever before in the twentieth century, even in the Western Church. The prayer takes the basic form of "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me".

Ware (1986a:176) distinguishes four elements which are integrally involved with the Jesus Prayer. Firstly, there is devotion to the name "Jesus", which is used in a semi-sacramental way as a source of power and grace. Secondly, there is the appeal for divine mercy, accompanied by compunction and contrition. Thirdly, the prayer requires the discipline of frequent repetition. Fourthly, there is the quest for stillness or hesychasm, with imageless, non-discursive prayer. While being used repetitively the prayer's use is designed for experiencing God's presence beyond words in stillness.

Three writers associated with Sinai in the period from the seventh to the tenth centuries, St. John Climacus, St. Hesychius and St. Philotheus recommend using the Jesus Prayer. All three link the prayer with breathing (Ware 1986a:181-183). Whether the injunction is to recite the prayer in rhythm with the breathing is unclear, but likely. Later use of the prayer involved rhythmical repetition in conjunction with breathing.

References to the Jesus Prayer are found in Coptic sources of the seventh and eighth centuries. In the Coptic Macarian cycle the invocation is explicitly linked with breathing (Ware 1983a:223).

Apophatic prayer was regarded by its proponents, including Evagrius, who lived in the fourth century, as the superior way. The idea was to encounter God without intermediaries of imaginative form so as to experience true unity with God in stillness. Cataphatic prayer took various forms, with the imagination and pictorial use of the mind being aids to prayer.<sup>28</sup> Discursive prayer was also especially linked with literal pictures in the Orthodox tradition, in the form of icons. Icons are works of liturgical art that function as a place of divine meeting (Ware 1986b:197). In Orthodoxy icons fulfil a sacramental function, constituting a channel of divine grace. Icons were a source of dispute in the Iconoclast controversy from 726 until the middle of the ninth century. The conflict was about the legitimacy or idolatry of icons.<sup>29</sup> The value of icons was affirmed with the definitive restoration of icons to Churches in 843 (Ware 1986b:196).

The Jesus Prayer and prayer with icons illustrate two methods of prayer from early Eastern Christendom that have impacted on types of prayers used on Christian retreats, and while different, these methods add to the variety and richness of Christian prayer.

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<sup>28</sup> Examples of cataphatic proponents are St. Barsanuphius and St. John, known respectively as “the Great Old Man” and “the Other Old Man”, two hermits who lived close to a monastery outside Gaza in the fifth century. They did not envisage prayer as imageless, although they urged watching over the thoughts (Ware 1986a:179).

<sup>29</sup> The Iconoclast controversy involved a dispute regarding the legitimacy and veneration of icons. The iconodules (‘icon-venerators’) drew a distinction between worship that may rightly only be ascribed to the Trinity and the “relative honour” that may be given to created persons or objects associated with God. The iconoclasts (‘icon-smashers’) accused the iconodules of idolatry. However, the iconodules prevailed in Orthodoxy, with icons being regarded as integral to the liturgy, for they are seen as liturgical art. Worship was not to be restricted to the mind alone, which was one of the accusations against the iconoclasts by the iconodules. The decision endorsing the use of icons was made at the seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 (Nicea II). The conflict only came to an end in 843 with the definitive restoration of icons to the Churches (Ware 1986b:196-197).

## 9. SOME REFLECTIONS

The first few centuries of monasticism made apparent that there was a call to Christian retreat which was followed by various disciples of Jesus in a number of ways. The radical call to solitude for prayer was taken up in monastic life with a severe asceticism at times. Nevertheless monasticism soon had a profound effect on the wider Church. Such was the impact of the early monks that spirituality tended to have a monastic prominence even in the wider Church in both East and West. The spirituality of solitude and monastic community was seen as applicable in various ways to society and Christian community. In effect, the call to prayer was not only for monastics, but for all Christians. What was learnt by monastics was seen as having application to the life of prayer for people who were not monastic. Naturally enough, not everything applied in very different settings from the desert and monasteries.

There does, however, appear to be a paucity in spiritual reflection from those outside the monastic fold in the fourth to twelfth centuries compared to those within the monastic life. One of the reasons is the notion, sometimes specifically stated and sometimes an underlying perception, that the monastic calling was a higher calling than a calling in “ordinary” society. Another reason was the perception that monastics devoted their lives to prayer and were therefore the leaders in the devotional life. These ideas meant that the monastics were looked to by the mainstream Church as examples for the practice of prayer.

When considering the early monastics in respect of retreating we can include the following aspects, which have application in a wider and more modern context.

First, meditative and listening prayer requires quietness, solitude and time. The hermits showed the extreme example in this regard, but the principles of solitude and stillness have ramifications in the lives of people busy with many wider activities.

Second, spiritual battle is an integral aspect of solitude in prayer. This has applications with regard to the psychological inner work of the soul, as well as structural and personal demonic struggles. Retreat times are certainly times of dealing with issues, and even inner turmoil, as was seen in monastic foundations.

Third, retreat is not to be an escape nor is it an end in itself but an expression of a solitude-community dialogue. Even in the most extreme forms of hermit-type spirituality there was the reality of relating to the world, and in particular the suffering in the world. This involved challenges with regard to specific people and communities. Thus retreat relates to the reappraisal of ways of relating in one's community and one's general orientation with regard to specific issues in society.

Fourth, there are various forms of retreating, which can be done alone or together with others. The suitability of a type of retreat at a particular stage in one's life, along with various degrees of solitude or community finds precedent in the manifestations of monasticism.

Fifth, the content of personal prayer and corporate prayer (which links with liturgy) was explored by the early monastics in their use of psalms, their prayers together, the use of the Jesus Prayer and other prayers, meditation and study methods, the Eucharist, and the inspiration gained from sharing with and being with others. This constitutes a rich source from which retreatants can draw.

It is noteworthy that many Christians from a variety of traditions who are concerned about the depths of prayer draw from early monastic sayings and practices. This suggests a relevance from monasticism for modern, busy contexts, provided that the difference in situations be taken into account.

While monasticism maintained an exalted place in what it meant to be spiritual or called, retreating for non-monastics seems to have been limited. Retreating was mostly another form of daily liturgical services. Yet monasticism, drawing on its rich heritage, provided many creative models and gave prominence to retreating for Christian believers.

## CHAPTER 5

# MONASTICISM FROM THE TENTH UNTIL THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Rule of Benedict became the norm in Western Christianity to such an extent that, up to the tenth century, Benedictine monasticism accounted for Western monastic life, save for Celtic monasticism which exhibited some hermit features and skete<sup>30</sup> type communities.

Shifts started to take place in the eleventh century. There were great centres of monasticism at places like Cluny, Gorze, Bec and Canterbury, which had abbeys. An increase in the number of monks was also accompanied by growth in the influence of monasticism. Spirituality shifted to having an increasingly monastic basis, even beyond the monasteries. Ward (1986:285) asserts that for clergy and devout laypeople spirituality came to be thought of especially in ascetic monastic terms. A mode of retreat life became increasingly part of what it meant to be a devout Christian from the eleventh century throughout the Middle Ages.

In this era, new forms of monasticism were emerging. The new was allied to the old though, in the sense that the roots of monasticism were re-examined and a re-emergence of the practice of the hermit life sprung up in Western monasticism. Ward (1986:285-286) states:

This impulse was widespread and characterized by the desire for a simple, solitary life without many of the structures of established monastic houses and their involvement with society. Poverty, solitude, fasting, manual work characterized these new ventures; their inspiration was the literature surviving from fourth-century monasticism, interpreted according to the outlook of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The movement took two forms: there were many hermits, living alone in individual solitude;

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<sup>30</sup> A skete is a monastic village consisting of monastic cottages, sometimes called "kalyvai" or "kellia", with two to six (and sometimes more than six) monastics per cottage (Ware 1977:30-31) (cf. Ch.4.5).

there were, secondly, groups of monks living together in corporate solitude. These groups overlapped and produced the new orders of the twelfth century.

This chapter contains a brief examination of some of these new orders with regard to their contribution to the monastic background of retreats. The broader framework of monasticism, as it developed in Western Christianity, includes monastic orders, canons and the mendicant orders.

Monasticism also held a prominent place in the life of Christendom in the East. Retreat in the Orthodox tradition of the period of the tenth to the sixteenth centuries was largely about the monastic option. Monasticism greatly influenced the prayer life of Orthodox Christians in general. This prayer life had an impact on retreating in both East and West. Hence, there is a brief examination in this chapter of monasticism in Greece and Russia during this period.

## 2. MONASTIC ORDERS

### A. The Camaldolese

The desire for retreatant monasticism with hermit expressions of the monastic life had sprung forth in reaction against what Benedictine monasticism had become: mostly large and influential communities whose retreating from the world had become blurred because of monasticism's influence on the Church and, most importantly, on wider society.

The first leader of a significant number of solitaries that heralded a new era in monasticism was Romauld of Ravenna (950-1027). He left a Cluniac monastery to set up monastic life on the pattern of Egyptian solitude of the earliest monks. He created a 'desert' of Camaldoli near Arezzo. There a community of monks was set up living in small houses. The monks met together for prayer and meals. From the same community Peter Damian and John Gualbert formed a group at Vallombrosa, near Florence (Ward 1986:286).

## B. The Carthusians

This community was founded by Bruno, who was born in about 1030 in Cologne, at the Grande Chartreuse. The community was based in a remote mountain valley with individual houses for monks. Prayer and meals were carried out in solitude except for weekend communal meetings (Ward 1986:286). Their life was marked by austerity. The Carthusians had a system whereby a group of monks in closer community enabled the solitaries of the community to live in the way that they did. There was thus a kind of monasticism in tandem, with both hermits and communal monks in one community. This was an expression of diversity that enabled various forms of the retreat life to be fostered in one setting. Solitaries and communal monks, at their most charitable, saw their differing roles as mutually beneficial to each other. This diversity also meant that the new impetus in monastic creativity had some variety and this gave a broad understanding to what it meant to be in withdrawal for the sake of encounter with God.

## C. The Cistercians

The Cistercians derived their name from the place, Citeaux, where they founded a new community in 1098. Rather than setting out on a new path, they sought to live out the original Benedictine ideal, along with the ascetic origins of monasticism. Their declared intention was to live out the Rule of St. Benedict "to the last dot" (Ward 1986:287). This intention resulted in a more retreatant form of monasticism than was practiced by the other Benedictine monasteries of the time. Cistercians were driven by a desire to return to original undiluted monastic life, feeling a sense of sorrow for where the Rule of Benedict had been transgressed (Pennington 1985:207).

The desire for strict and complete observance of Benedict's Rule was accompanied by an exclusivist outlook in spirituality. Only members of the Cistercian Order were permitted at their monasteries. The Cistercian concept of monastic life was, according to Ward (1983:88), "a separation from the world by a group intent on the same way of life." This way of life was integrally linked to the concept of corporate solitude. The monk's calling was seen as integrally linked to solitude, and in Cistercian practice, this solitude was lived out in the context of a community cut off from outside influences.

The first Cistercian communities were set up away from towns on previously unused land. Manual labour received more emphasis than in other monasteries. This was due to the Cistercians' desire to be self-sufficient to maintain their exclusivism. Overall, the emphasis on manual labour saw what Ward (1986:287) calls, "a certain non-intellectual slant in Cistercian spirituality." There was thus the attempt at living out practical aspects of life in relationship with the emphasis on prayer and asceticism by the Cistercians. The Cistercian monasteries related to other Cistercian monasteries in an international way, which was new to monastic life (Ward 1986:287). Therefore their idea of withdrawal was not totally inward looking and their exclusivity was sometimes challenged from within their own midst.

Bernard of Clairvaux (c.1090-1153), who came to Citeaux in 1113, was sent two years later to establish a monastery at Clairvaux. His influence in spirituality meant that the Cistercian impact inevitably went beyond its own borders; a kind of contradiction for the Cistercian retreatant and exclusivist outlook. Bernard's mystical theology had a special focus on love with respect to the human soul's relation to God. His theology had an impact on wider monasticism of his day and on later times and wider circles.

Cistercian emphasis was placed on mystical experience. The stages of the spiritual life, in Bernard's thinking, need always to lead to "the quiet of contemplation" after the painful fatigue of action (Pennington 1985:208). This contemplation was to experience the fullness of the love of God; self-knowledge is needed on the path to this fullness. Such thinking laid foundations, not only for Cistercian spirituality, but wider too. Contemplation was given an exalted place in Cistercian thinking. It was seen as the road to love, experienced in "the realisation of union with God in Christ" (Pennington 1985:210).

The implications for retreating as seen in Cistercian spirituality and experience involve: firstly, the significant place of contemplation for divine encounter, which involved withdrawal; and secondly, the necessity of action, especially in manual labour. Clearly, these two aspects, withdrawal and activity, and their relationship with each other, have a vital place in what retreating is about. The practice of monks refraining from manual tasks and leaving such work for lay brothers meant an unresolved tension in Cistercian



experience.<sup>31</sup>

Questions arise out of the Cistercian pattern. Is contemplation a means for all believers, or practical only for a few who are set apart? Does this make contemplation impractical for mainstream Christian spirituality? Obstacles to an integrated experience of the action-contemplation relationship in early Cistercian practice raised up these critical questions. Within Cistercian thinking some helpful answers were put forward. The idea of prayer as a “reservoir” for activities such as preaching, teaching and mission (Ward 1986:289) arose from Cistercian spirituality. This added the sense of mission to retreating. This was allied with the ongoing goal of experiencing union with God.

#### D. Monk-Knights

The era of the crusades brought forth new monastic orders which embraced unlikely combinations in their outlook and activity. In these orders the ascetic life was combined with the activity of helping pilgrims, and in some cases, monks formed regular armies. The Knights of the Temple, or Templars, saw their task, from about 1095 during the First Crusade, as protecting pilgrims to the Holy Land. The Knights of the Order of the Hospital of St. John in Jerusalem (later called the Knights of Rhodes and the Knights of Malta) especially ministered to the sick during the crusades, but moved on to form a regular army in the warfare of the crusades (Ward 1986:289).

In thinking of the monastic orders of that time, the members of which acted as monk-knights, did so out of a contemplative ideal which was seen as requiring action in the urgency of the situation.<sup>32</sup> This activism allied to, or stemming from, a monastic calling was a new way of considering monasticism. This meant new challenges as to what

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<sup>31</sup> A compromised kind of situation developed in that lay brothers were used as so-called full members of the community, but they were neither ordained nor choir monks. They were often kept in illiteracy so that they would function as labourers. They had fewer obligations to prayer and more to manual labour than the choir monks. It was the role of these lay brothers that made possible the emphasis on the purest form of monastic life. However, the reality of different classes of members of the community meant that a criticism of the lack of integrity in the living out of the retreatant calling could be levelled against the early Cistercians.

<sup>32</sup> With hindsight the Christian role in the Crusades has largely been severely judged in our time. The methods used to maintain or spread Christianity are highly suspect due to the violent means used.

retreating for the sake of the contemplative life could embrace. Monastic life had squarely to consider the most appropriate way of expressing the activity-withdrawal dialogue in actual lifestyle and community. Action needed to be in accordance with Christian reflection, and often appeared to stem from a lack of prayerful focus in withdrawal.

### 3. REGULAR CANONS

Regular canons are deacons and priests who live in religious community under a rule which requires personal poverty. Communities of such canons first appeared in Italy and southern France in the mid eleventh century (Zinn 1985:218). Although certain groups lived under other rules, the Rule of St. Augustine of Hippo<sup>33</sup> came to be used by the vast majority of the Canons Regular.

These canons practiced a way of life which had similarities to monasticism. Zinn (1985:218) points out: "These included asceticism, common hours of liturgical prayer, contemplation, an enclosed life, and the like." Clergy criticized them for their strictness and austerity, while monks found their communities too close to monastic life without being fully monastic.

Regular canons, being priests and espousing poverty, lived in such a way that an ascetic challenge was added to what it meant to serve in the priesthood. Their spirituality was integrally linked to a deeper withdrawal from worldly ties than other clergy. Regular canons, as Ward (1986:290) points out, were largely indistinguishable from monks, except through their concern with the care of souls through liturgy and teaching. Their austerities showed many similarities to the Cistercians. Monastic ideals of withdrawal and asceticism thus penetrated into the clergy in a significant way with the canons regular. This was also part of the reason for the impact that monastic forms of spirituality made on the wider Church in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This monastic withdrawal spirituality influenced the general devotional life of Europe of the time. Ward (1986:291) asserts: "Many of those concerned with reform in the Church in this period

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine's (354-430) name was used, although the Rule comes from much later. The Augustinian Order arose from communities of hermits who combined and accomplished union in 1256 (Zumkeller 1987:63) (See Section 4D on the Augustinian Order).

were also monks of the new orders or under their influence, and saw monastic life as the ideal Christian way. This led to a monasticization of Christian spirituality to an exaggerated extent."

A community of Regular Canons who had a particular impact on the spirituality of their time and beyond were the Victorines. They were a community at the Abbey of St. Victor near Paris which originated in the twelfth century. It was William of Champeaux who began the religious community in 1108. The abbey became, as Zinn (1985:220) states, "a centre for creative scholarship, liturgical development and contemplative life." The contemplative emphasis of the community meant its retreat focus for Christian expression was central. Yet, at the same time, scholarship was seen as an accompaniment to mystical experience, and the Victorines emphasised the importance of the expression of compassion in the Christian life. This meant that in Victorine spirituality strands that had readily been pulled apart, were held together quite integrally. Chase (2003:13) relates this inter-relatedness in the following way: "In Victorine spirituality contemplation gives birth to charity."

The Victorine inter-relatedness of study and prayer, meditation and action, creativity and liturgy, within a community essentially in retreat, opens new possibilities of what retreatant communities can embrace in order to have an impact on the world.

The canons' emphasis on Christian discipleship, expressed in active ministry, while living in monastic style communities, meant that retreat was seen not only for prayer but also for service. This challenged the very basis for secluded Christian communities. Further challenge came from the mendicant orders.

#### 4. THE MENDICANTS

The twelfth century saw a new response in spirituality apart from the Cistercians and the regular canons. These were the mendicants. The mendicant response was within the monastic call in the broader sense but gave a new expression to withdrawal from the world. The pull towards the hermit life was evident in the mendicants, and thus was in general alignment with the monastic call. However, there was another dimension to their response, which brought something new. Tugwell (1986a:294) indicates this in this way:

"In reaction against the formality and splendour of the monasteries, many people sought something more austere and evangelical. The penitential, insecure life of the hermit found a new appeal, and so did the call to wander around in drastic poverty, preaching the gospel." Mendicants lived by means of begging and handouts; it was a call to an austere life, an embracing of poverty, along with proclaiming the Gospel.

The mendicant call thus embraced a withdrawal from many attachments of the world. In that sense, it was always a call to retreat. Yet there was the call to preach, and live out the Gospel lifestyle. Jesus' instructions to his disciples as recorded in Matthew 10 had special significance for the mendicants. These instructions were about taking only what was strictly necessary and not being sidetracked by distractions or possessions along the way. This call resonated with the first mendicants as applicable to themselves as followers of Jesus. The mendicant movement's adherents were considered friars, rather than monks.

The mendicant orders arose in various ways. The Dominicans and Franciscans set out as mendicants against the mainstream from the outset, while the Carmelites and Augustinians moved into mendicancy due to particular circumstances.

#### A. The Dominicans

The Order of Preachers, popularly known as the Dominicans, was founded by Dominic Guzman (c.1170-1221) in 1216. Dominic had been a canon in Soma, Spain. Before the official founding of the order Dominic and his companions had been preaching, while travelling on foot, without funds, and begging from door to door. This style had been suggested by Dominic's bishop, Diego of Azevedo (Tugwell 1986b:296).

In Dominican view and practice, preaching was seen as having priority over all other spiritual exercises. This immediately set the Dominicans at variance from monastics. The Dominicans were itinerant, rather than having settled monastic communities. This clearly had an impact on what prayer life meant for them, being in a more variable situation than in the monasteries. The Fifth Master of the Dominican Order, Humbert of Romans (c.1200-1271), said that those with the grace to be preachers should prefer preaching over all disciplines and practices including prayer, reading, liturgy and

sacraments (Tugwell 1986b:297). Poverty was integral to the life of the order, but seen as secondary to preaching. It was a practical aspect rather than the central feature of their apostolic calling. In 1220 the Order officially gave up all its possessions and revenues, retaining only their houses and the contents of these houses. In 1474 permission was granted by the Pope for the Dominicans to own possessions, for a new situation had dawned and poverty was not the essence of the order, but a means to be faithful in the Gospel proclamation (Tugwell 1986b:297).

With stress placed on preaching, especially doctrinal preaching, the Dominicans put emphasis on study. With respect to devotional life, prayer was subordinate to and a kind of servant of preaching. This meant, as Tugwell (1986b:298) asserts, "The Dominicans were characterized by a pragmatic attitude to piety." Contemplation requires communication with others in Dominican spirituality.

With regard to a retreat model, the Dominican viewpoint finds ready translation into other settings. For those who, like the Order of Preachers, share a mission-minded and Gospel telling imperative, there is still the need for the contemplative life. This contemplative ideal is vital to the Dominicans due to their monastic style spirituality. Retreating into prayer is thus still seen as essential (even if not first priority) in order to be "apostolic", as the Dominicans would say, or actively engaged in ministry.

## B. The Franciscans

Francis of Assisi (c.1182-1226) experienced a radical call out of a life of material privilege as the son of a wealthy merchant into a life of following Christ. His life coincided with a time of change and challenge in the Church. Monastic life had become mostly materially prosperous. The clergy were, to a large extent, poor and ill-educated, and the age of the crusades was well underway (Moorman 1986:301). The "flight from the world" had shifted from the monastic life, which had become increasingly linked to stability, to the practices of pilgrimages and crusades, which had journeying motifs, and therefore were characterized by instability.

Francis took up a mendicant call. He followed a way of extreme poverty and preached, especially to the poor. When others sought to embrace this way of life along with

Francis, the birth of the Order of Friars Minor took place.

According to Moorman (1986:302), by approximately 1219 there was a shift from the focus on poverty to simplicity. Houses were being built and property acquired, and the Order was growing considerably. Francis' spirituality, as Moorman (1986:303) summarises, "was created out of four aspects: his total obedience to Christ, his prayer at all times, his desire to suffer with Christ, and his love of nature in all its forms". Francis' devotional desire for prayer in all things saw a remarkable integration of the variety of life's experiences and of creation within the life of prayer.

Notably, as the Franciscan order grew and sought to become more grafted into the Church, Francis withdrew greatly from the Order's activities. Francis' emphasis became the seeking out of quiet places for prayer and meditation (Moorman 1986:303). A pattern of increased retreat thus developed in Francis. His particular focus in the last few years of his life was on communion with God without the distraction of ministry, which had been so essential earlier in his calling. In 1224 he spent a number of weeks on a mountain, La Verna, during which time he received the stigmata, the five wounds of the crucified Christ (Hellmann 1987:36).

Francis was active earlier in his life in many ways, including preaching, tending to the suffering (including lepers), guiding his community, and writing the Order's guiding rule. However, his life was also marked by continuous prayer (Moorman 1986:302). Francis' example was thus of an active, Spirit-inspired response to Christ's call, interwoven with a life of contemplation. In addition, the need for definite withdrawn times of prayer show the reality of the need for retreat in Francis' experience and spirituality.

Doyle (1983:160) asserts: "The Franciscan order has been described as contemplative-active." Doyle points to how apostolic works need to flow from and lead back to prayer, as is given prominence by Franciscans. Francis made provision for the eremitical life in his Order (1983:160). Francis wrote a *Rule for Hermitages*. Such hermitages were to have no more than four inhabitants, with the directive that two friars be devoted completely to prayer, and with the other two making such a life of prayer possible. The latter pair thus needed to be more active in their lifestyle.

Franciscan spirituality holds in creative tension activity and contemplation, mission and prayer. This action-withdrawal interaction is evident in Francis' life, in his directives and in his followers down through the centuries. The reality of the ministry and prayer of Franciscans brought to the fore the need for specific times of contemplative withdrawal, which took on more specific forms in the centuries after Francis' life.

### C. The Carmelites

The Carmelites gain their name from a tradition linking the Order to Mt. Carmel. There is also a connection, by legend, to Elijah who encountered the Baal prophets on Carmel. There is no specific founder of the Carmelites (Egan 1987:50), although Thompson (1983:71) asserts possible founding by St. Berthold in about 1155. He may have settled on Mt. Carmel along with other hermits.

The Carmelites' strict Rule, which involves long periods of prayer, was drawn up by Albert of Jerusalem in the period 1206-1214 (Thompson 1983:71). During the thirteenth century Mt. Carmel was abandoned by the order as a result of the aftermath of the crusades. Their sphere of operation shifted to Europe. With this move the hermit lifestyle of the Carmelites was not easy to maintain. The change in locality and the major shifts in the spiritual climate in Europe meant adjustment was needed.

In 1229 the Carmelites were placed under the mendicant orders by Pope Gregory IX. Then in 1247 the Carmelite Rule was revised to accommodate a more active life, which included preaching and teaching (Thompson 1983:71-72). This created an interesting perspective on the active-withdrawal dichotomy. A basically retreatant order sought to become active in ministry without losing their contemplative foundation. Hermits became friars, and this involved internal and external critical evaluation. Egan (1987:52) asserts:

The revisions of 1247 also established the tension that has existed ever since for the Carmelite friars, the paradox of the call to a contemplative solitude and at the same time a call to ministerial service out of the context of communal living. The once simple hermits had now to prepare themselves to preach, to teach, to administer the sacraments - in fact, to be ready to respond to the religious needs of their neighbours, as the Dominicans and Franciscans were doing.

Among the Carmelites there was the difficulty of seeking to live a mostly retreating lifestyle while being pushed into ministry of a more active nature through historical circumstances.

Carmelites have made a significant impact on the wider Church. This has happened especially through Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), John of the Cross (1542-1591) and Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897). St. Teresa and St. John have given insights into mystical prayer, presented (in its highest forms) as abandoning all intermediary aids (Thompson 1983:72). This is the presentation of the desire for nothing other than God.

This centrality of contemplation to experience union with God has pressed Carmelite spirituality back to its origins. This includes the need for retreat for a movement which has become more focused on active ministry than was the case in its initial expression.<sup>34</sup>

#### D. The Augustinians

The Augustinian Order arose out of the union of communities of hermits around the Rule of St. Augustine of Hippo. This union was accomplished by 1256 when Pope Alexander summoned the Augustinians from seclusion to active life. They thus became mendicant friars with involvement in Church, university life and foreign missions (Zumkeller 1987:63).

According to Zumkeller (1987:63), the emphasis of the Augustinians is charity, expressed as love for God and neighbour. The hermit origins of the order have been held as important, along with the emphasis on charity in a mendicant lifestyle. This means that the challenge of both retreating and active charity is integral to Augustinian spirituality. This places the need for retreat in the context of integrating it with loving service in Augustinian thinking.

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<sup>34</sup> The Carmelite nuns, including Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux, have retained the original contemplative focus. The Carmelite men have blended the contemplative and active lifestyles.



## E. Summary of the Mendicants

The mendicants brought together what, in many ways, had been kept apart for centuries viz. a contemplative lifestyle and active charity. The active aspect of mendicancy put pressure on the priority of place given to contemplation. Creatively, this meant re-examining the vital relationship between prayerful withdrawal and actions of mercy. The results were to include, in time, a new emphasis on retreating in order to keep prayer as vitally important, even in an active lifestyle.

## 5. EASTERN ORTHODOXY

### A. Greek Orthodoxy

Later Byzantine spirituality, from the tenth century onwards, saw emphasis placed on two seemingly opposite features, the transcendence and immanence of God. There was, on the one hand, a strong insistence upon the divine mystery, in an apophatic approach to God, who was regarded as utterly transcendent, beyond all images and human understanding. On the other hand, there was a sense of God's nearness, knowable in the here and now through direct personal experience. The symbolism of light was also emphasised, with Christ's Transfiguration having special importance (Ware 1986c:236-237).

The transcendence-immanence debate took on exceptional importance in the fourteenth century in Greek Orthodox spirituality. The "Hesychast controversy" took place during the period 1337-1347. The central figures were Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) and Barlaam the Calabrian (c.1290-1348). Palamas' views were vindicated by the Greek Orthodox Church at large.

The Hesychast controversy was, according to Ware (1986:249), essentially a conflict within the Greek East, and involved different ways of interpreting Dionysius the Areopagite.<sup>35</sup> Ware (1986d: 249) expounds the controversy in this way:

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<sup>35</sup> Dionysius (or Denys) the Areopagite had a number of works attributed to him, including *Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology*, *Celestial Hierarchy*, and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. In the sixth century,

For Barlaam, the Areopagite was a philosophical theologian, using negative, apophatic language to affirm, on the level of reasoned argument, the radical transcendence of God. For Palamas, the Areopagite was above all a mystical theologian; the 'unknowing' of which the Dionysian writings speaks is not merely a philosophical theory, for within and beyond the 'unknowing' they affirm a direct and personal experience of union with the divine. It is here, over the question of whether or not direct experience of God is possible here and now, in this life, that the basic difference between Palamas and Barlaam is situated.

Barlaam's criticism of Hesychasm involved three main points (Ware 1986d:250). The first concerns the knowledge of God. He asserted that such knowledge can only be indirect in this life, using Church tradition, Scripture, signs and symbols. This is in contradiction to the hesychast claim that direct experience of God and unmediated union with the divine can be experienced in the here and now. The second point relates to the vision of God. Barlaam denied the possibility of seeing the uncreated light of God with physical eyes, while Hesychasts claimed to see such light. Barlaam asserted that it must be physical light which they saw. The third point was with regard to denouncing the physical technique of the Hesychasts.

Palamas acknowledged that God is unknowable. He speaks of God as, "the beyond-essence, anonymous, surpassing all names...[who]...in a manner beyond all being transcends every being" (Ware 1986d:250). However, Palamas held in creative tension this transcendence of God with God's immanence. In order to do this Palamas distinguished between the "essence" or inner being of God, and God's "energies" or acts of power. He saw God's essence as radically and eternally unknowable by human beings; but that God is dynamically revealed to humanity in energies, which permeate the universe and in which humans participate (Ware 1986d:250-251).

Palamas endorsed what was his inheritance as a monk of Eastern Christendom. This

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these works were claimed to be by the Dionysius converted by Paul's speech on the Areopagus. The spiritual power of these works was felt by Orthodoxy and by the seventh century his authority was accepted in both East and West, despite the pseudonymity of the writings (Louth 1986:185). Louth (1986:189) describes Dionysian spirituality as follows: "a spirituality deeply sensitive to the manifold variety of God's manifestation of his inexhaustible being in creation and redemption, and at the same time a spirituality that longs to encounter God in himself in the mysterious darkness of unknowing."

included the integral use of the Jesus Prayer. The physical technique associated with the prayer finds developed description in Greek sources only from the late thirteenth century, from Nicephorus the Hesychast. According to Ware (1986d:244-245) there are three main features in the physical technique that are described. The first relates to bodily posture. The person praying is to sit with head bowed with the chin on the chest and back bent. This was to be accompanied by a gaze towards the navel. The second relates to the slowing down of breathing. This was to precede the recitation of the prayer to aid calmness and concentration. It was only in the late fourteenth century, after Palamas, that it is clearly taught that the tempo of breathing should be coordinated with the actual words of the Jesus Prayer. This was in the teaching of Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos. The third concerns an inward searching for the place of the heart, enabling a uniting of the intellect and the heart.

The physical technique was regarded as an aid rather than being the essence of the Jesus Prayer. For Palamas, according to Mantzaridis (1987:211), "the position of the body and the words of the prayer do not have a magical power, but they are useful in guarding the concentration of the mind in its yearning for undisputed communion with God and the vision of his glory." Palamas drew on the spiritual tradition represented by people like Symeon the New Theologian, Nicephorus, Gregory of Sinai and Maximus of Kapsokalvia.

Barlaam believed unceasing prayer, which was so much the goal of monasticism of the Christian East, was acquiring a habit of prayer in a passive and intellectual sense. For Palamas, however, praying without ceasing was a continuous and living communion with God (Mantzaridis 1987:217).

The controversy was, in a sense, about whether it is possible and experientially discernable to encounter God in a relational and uniting way. The following question was involved in the controversy: Was the way of prayer in the Eastern Orthodox tradition a means to actually encounter God? Hesychasm would not restrict the realities of divine encounter to sterile explanations and to life only after death. Eschatology was thus part of the conflict. Barlaam's assertion was that meeting with God in a direct way was reserved for the future life. For Palamas there is the possibility, and the prayerful reality, of meeting with God in the present. This is, therefore, an "inaugurated eschatology",

which indicates that the first fruits of the future life can be experienced in the present (Ware 1986d: 250).

St. Kallistos and St. Ignatios Xanthopoulos continued Hesychast teaching towards the end of the fourteenth century, when the controversy had died down. They again emphasised the place of the Jesus Prayer, having monks in mind:

This all-holy and most sweet name should be our uninterrupted task and study, and we should always carry it with us in our heart, in our intellect, and on our lips. In it and with it we should breathe and live, sleep and wake, move and eat and drink, and in short do everything (Ware 1986d: 254).

While monasticism played a critical role in the spirituality of the Greek Orthodox Church the experience of monks and the call to prayer was regarded as transferable into a much wider setting. The need for unceasing prayer was not seen as only for hermits and communal monks. Nicolas Cabasilas (c.1320-c.1391) seems to have been neither a monk nor a priest. He saw, as did Palamas, continual prayer as the vocation of all (Ware 1986d: 255). The call to prayer for non-monastics was to be exercised in the sacraments, the liturgy and in devotions which drew from monastic input. There was, however, no developed sense of retreat apart from the monastic call. Monasticism of the Greek East continued in a very retreatant form into the Middle Ages and the hermit still held a prized place in the Orthodox tradition.

From origins in Orthodox monasticism the development of breathing in conjunction with the recitation of the Jesus Prayer, has seen the development of other breath prayers, that is, prayers that are short enough to say in a breath and are said in rhythm with one's breathing. The Jesus Prayer represents the most used of such prayers, but other individually or communally formulated prayers are used as breath prayers in a similar fashion to the Jesus Prayer. Breath prayers are used in private prayers and in some retreat settings with retreatants being invited to formulate their own breath prayers and then rhythmically pray them, or use a given breath prayer.

## B. Russian Orthodoxy

Christianity only came to Russia in any significant numbers in the late tenth century. It

was received from the Byzantine Church. The Russians gained access to monasticism through their Byzantine teachers. Hackel (1986:262) points out that this monasticism was largely dependant on centres like Mount Athos and the Studios Monastery in Constantinople. The Studite Rule came early to Russia and remained the norm for centuries to come. This Rule was adopted by the Kievan Caves monastery, which was to exert some influence. The founder of this monastery was St. Antonii (d.1073). His monastic life, and the monastery's ethos at first, was marked by severe asceticism.

This stern asceticism, which included rigorous fasting, extreme seclusion and the use of penitential iron chains, was not to hold sway for long, however. A moderate way soon became the predominant path in Russian monasticism. A particular individual identified with this way is St. Feodosii, otherwise spelt Theodosius, who died in 1074. He brought the Kievan community out of the caves in 1062 and introduced the cenobitic Studite Rule at Kiev. The monastery became known for its concern for and practical action in respect of the outside community. This included feeding prisoners in Kiev and speaking out on occasions against the local prince's actions by Feodosii (Hackel 1986:262-263).

It was in the fourteenth century that monasticism spread into the sparsely inhabited and uncultivated central and northern regions of Russia. Political factors due to the action of the Mongols played a part in this as did a renewal of monastic life itself. St. Sergii of Radonzeh (c.1314-1392) is the individual especially associated with this renewal. It was during his lifetime that Byzantine and eastern European Hesychasm began penetrating into Russian spirituality (Hackel 1986:264).

Hesychasm developed in Russia in the fifteenth century. Nil Sorskii was the monk of that era who ensured hesychast prayer became much more widely used in Russian monasticism. He had spent time at Athos and thus drew from Greek hesychasm. According to Hackel (1986:265), Nil set up a skete north of the Volga River. There he taught fellow monks to combat passions and practice hesychast prayer. Such prayer was used to enable the practitioner to be lead beyond prayer "to be drawn to what is divine" (Hackel 1986:265).

The issue of possession of land by monasteries was to have critical importance for the

development of Russian monasticism in the sixteenth century and beyond.<sup>36</sup> Nil's viewpoint was that the vow of poverty taken by monks precluded monasteries from owning land and using peasant labour. The Non-possessors, of whom Nil was a leader, became less influential as the Possessors' viewpoint held sway. The Possessors were headed by St. Iosif of Volokolamsk. He argued for the necessity for hospitality by monasteries due to owning land. Shelter and food could be provided from monasteries and hence organised charity and social work became part of Russian monasteries (Hackel 1986:266).

Russian monasticism also became increasingly ritualised from this time on (Hackel 1986:266). Emphasis was placed on liturgy, and the role of the hermit and semi-eremitic monk waned. Russian monastic life, in its features, shared much with Greek Orthodoxy: an important role recognised by the wider Church, an emphasis in some of its life on Hesychasm, and an important role for icons and liturgy. However, in Russian monasticism the hermit lifestyle had less prominence than in Greek Orthodoxy. Russian monasticism instead was marked by greater institutionalization.

The Russian Orthodox Church at large was marked by an increasing prominence of ritual. Prayer was especially engaged in through communal liturgy. Retreat was thus largely associated with monasticism, but the hesychast type of praying was practised by some laity and clergy as well as monks.

### C. The Contribution from Orthodoxy to Retreats

From its origins, Eastern Orthodoxy had a vital place for monasticism which touched the Orthodox Church as a whole. This meant that monastic type prayer was seen as applicable within the mainstream of the Church. As a result retreatant aspects of spirituality have been integral to Orthodox Christianity. Orthodoxy has given us hesychast style prayer as a method that has impacted on retreats. Although adapted in the West, it has brought forth the need for stillness in prayer and the use of breath prayers. The use of icons has also had an impact on some forms of retreating out of the Orthodox tradition and has helped to focus on the importance of the senses.

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<sup>36</sup> The matter was debated at the Moscow Council of 1503.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Eastern Christendom's monasticism became especially ritualised and dominated by liturgy with a minority of hermits and semi-eremitical monks. Retreat was seen as the monastic option and, by some, as hesychastic prayer. There was a greater variety of expression in Western monasticism and semi-monastic communities. In some of these expressions the specific use of retreats emerged. This is not to say that Orthodoxy has had little influence on retreats, though. After all, prayer as espoused and practised in the Christian East has impacted on the Church, and on the nature of some retreats in the West.

The shifts in Western monasticism beginning in the tenth century were to see monastic life take on varied forms, which impacted on what it meant to retreat for the purposes of prayer and following a life of Christian discipleship. These forms included the following. Firstly, there was the continuance of institutional Benedictine monasteries which often exerted influence on wider society and the Church, though the extent of their influence was to wane with the passing of time and the new forms of monasticism which emerged. Secondly, there was the reaction, especially by the Cistercians, against a loss of simplicity in Benedictine origins. This resulted in extreme withdrawal from those outside the community, but it was still expressed in communal monasticism. Thirdly, there was more diversity in monastic expressions, from hermit expressions to thorough-going engagement in societal issues, even to the extent of engaging in war by some monk-knights. Fourthly, the influence of monasticism was such that the ideals of monasticism, and even its lifestyle, were adopted by those who came to be known as Regular Canons, which saw a “monasticising” of clergy. Fifthly, with the mendicants a new form of religious life arose. Their itinerancy and emphasis on ministry raised awareness of new needs. This focus on ministry within a monastic type mindset was to bring forth the need for specific times of retreat. It was this background and later Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* which would bring to the fore a particular focus that undergirds Christian spirituality: the need for retreat times for prayer for all engaged in active ministry, service or work. The fully retreatant option was still maintained through the monasteries.

Monasticism of the Middle Ages showed up some important aspects with regard to

Christian retreats. Firstly, there was the perceived requirement to draw from the roots of monasticism. The clearest example of this is with the Cistercians, seeking to live out the Rule of Benedict in an unadulterated fashion and wanting to live in accordance with the spirit of monastic origins. In effect, in the monastic movement of the Middle Ages, as a whole, there was a tension between seeking to remain faithful to the origins, yet changing because of new circumstances. This tension impacts on retreats because retreats draw on Christian roots, Biblical and historical, as well as from devotional and contemplative experience, so to be relevant in a particular situation evokes the need for variety. This often means drawing from various sources in different traditions.

Secondly, the action-withdrawal debate of monasticism in the Middle Ages impacts greatly on the use of, and the form of, retreats. The emergence of the mendicant movement indicates this most particularly. While the mendicants drew enormously from monasticism they were neither hermits nor in fixed communities. It was ministry lived out from a monastic background. This new mendicant type of life meant that monasticism as *the* method of retreating would come under question. Greater activism also raised the question of what prayer meant in a more active situation. Thus the need for retreating for the sake of relevant Christian service began to emerge. Christians who seek to give priority to both prayer and active involvement face an ongoing analysis. Hence retreat has importance in the midst of such an action-withdrawal dialogue.

Monasticism of the Middle Ages in the West saw a variety of expressions coming forth which influenced contemporary spirituality. They also heralded the way for further expressions from the sixteenth century onwards. One of these to be given birth to in that century was Ignatius' Society of Jesus, which was to have particular relevance for Christian retreat life, and is the focus of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 6

### IGNATIUS AND THE EARLY JESUITS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ignatius of Loyola was the person who was to give a radical shift as to what retreating meant within the Roman Catholic Church and ultimately beyond. Two central reasons for this are as follows. Firstly, there was the impact of his *Spiritual Exercises*. They held, and continue to hold, a central place in the life of the Jesuits. Their influence also extended much wider than their own group. Secondly, the order of which he was the first leader, the Society of Jesus, made a radical shift to activism, while still showing some features of monastic life. With this movement, the place of retreat in the midst of a lifestyle of service took on a vital role. A greater emphasis on retreating was seen to be needed in order to still have an emphasis on prayer and self-reflection, within the reality of an active lifestyle. The active expression of love by the Jesuits was never to push out the vital role of prayer. Rather, prayer linked with genuine self-examination was viewed as vital to carry out acts of mercy and teaching with spiritual relevance.

The spirituality of Ignatius was integrally linked to his life experience. Therefore any consideration of his impact on the nature of retreats requires knowledge of his life. Hence there follows a brief treatment of Ignatius' life. This includes examining certain incidents in his life that had particular influence on his spirituality in general and on his *Spiritual Exercises* in particular. An examination of the *Spiritual Exercises* will then follow, for they have had a profound effect on Christian retreating.

#### 2. THE LIFE OF IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Inigo, born in 1491, who was to adopt the name Ignatius some four decades later, was from Loyola in the Basque territory of Spain. He became set on a military career. Describing the Inigo of his early adult years at Arevalo his friends said he was "reckless at games, in adventures with women, in brawls and deeds of arms. He was assailed and overcome by temptations of the flesh" (Von Matt & Rahner 1956:11).

Inigo's military career involved the defence of Arevalo Castle, beginning in 1517. In defending the territory against the French, he was injured at Pamplona by a cannon shot on 20 May 1521. One leg was broken and the other also injured. He was transported to his home town of Loyola where he experienced fever and his broken leg was set crooked. He insisted that it be broken again and re-set. By 24 June he was near death (Von Matt & Rahner 1956:17-20).

However, Inigo slowly began to recover. Laid low in recuperation, he sought literature and read Ludolph of Saxony's *Life of Christ* and the *Golden Legend*, a book on the lives of saints by Jacopo da Voragine (O'Malley 1989:3). He dwelt on the accounts of Christ and saints like Francis and Dominic. His mind also focused on the desire for military honour and the favour of women. Writing of his own experiences in the third person, he later described his mind experiences as follows (Von Matt & Rahner 1956:23-24):

When he concerned himself with worldly thoughts he found great pleasure in them. But as soon as he tired of the thoughts he grew exhausted and depressed. If, however he conceived of the idea of going to Jerusalem barefoot and feeding on nothing but wild herbs and taking on himself the other penances of which he had read in the saints' lives, then he not only found great comfort as long as he dwelt on such thoughts, but he remained happy and serene even after the thoughts had departed. Gradually he began to recognise the distinction between different spirits, the spirit of the devil and the spirit of God. That was the first reflection he made upon the ways of God.

Inigo saw the weeks he spent in Loyola in recovery as an experience of "transformation of soul" (1956:24). It was a foundational time for his later emphasis on the ideas of desolation and consolation.

A pull towards solitude followed. One night while lying awake Inigo had an interior experience of Mary and the Christ child. He felt a deep disgust towards the sins of his life. In addition, he showed an ongoing concern for acknowledging one's own sins. Thus early in his spiritual pilgrimage Inigo saw the value of withdrawal. Inigo's experience of repentance was integrally linked with withdrawal. He also set his course towards a pilgrimage to Jerusalem via the port of Barcelona. On the way there he made a vow of perpetual chastity at a night vigil at Aranzazu.

At Igualada, below the mountain of Montserrat, Inigo examined his conscience for three days. Such examination of conscience was to be recommended by Inigo to others to experience spiritual freedom. For Inigo, spiritual freedom required honesty in confession, along with spiritual illumination into the inner life. It was at this stage that Inigo received from a Benedictine monk, Juan Chanones, a Spanish edition of the "Exercises" of Abbot Cisneros. Through these exercises Chanones sought to guide Inigo in the ways of prayer (1956:29). Inigo's use of exercises for himself and to guide others indicates that Abbot Cisneros' Exercises had a profound effect on Inigo's spirituality. His introduction to the use of spiritual exercises was a vital beginning for Inigo and saw him adapt the exercises for his own situation. It was at this time that Inigo gave up his fine garments and sword (1956:29). This outer renunciation was a sign of a deep inner happening that took place in Inigo. This happened through the practice of prayer exercises and other factors in his spiritual life and decision-making.

Inigo sought a quiet spot before continuing to Barcelona. Manresa was nearby. A cell in a Dominican convent there was to become his base for ten months. It was during this period that Inigo wrote in his notebook the beginning of what were to become the *Spiritual Exercises*. Inigo devoted seven hours daily to prayer there. Severe asceticism in fasting and penance, as well as ill-health, marked this time. Following the initial joys of spiritual breakthrough while at Manresa, Inigo now experienced extreme spiritual darkness (1956:31-34).

Inigo duly made his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. On his return to Europe, he put a plan into practice that had emerged from his time in the Holy Land. This involved searching for men who, like himself, would be ready, in the spirit of poverty, to preach Christ to unbelievers. He discerned in this emerging call the need for study, as well as asceticism (1956:46). The beginning of the idea of a community which would be of vital importance later in Inigo's life is noticeable at this stage. The discerning of the necessity of study saw the desire for training emerge for Inigo and those who would share his calling.

Study followed in Barcelona (1524-1526) and then in Alcala. Inigo led others through the *Spiritual Exercises* and drew companions to himself. Accusations of heresy emerged in

1527.<sup>37</sup> Inigo was forbidden to direct souls for a period of three years. Studies at the University of Salamanca followed, but there fresh investigations of heresy surfaced, resulting in a time of imprisonment for Inigo. His volume of the *Spiritual Exercises* was examined in detail. Nothing heretical in its teaching or in the behaviour of Inigo's companions was found. However, because of a view of the difficulties of guidance in moral theology and inadequacy in Inigo's training, four more years of study were required (1956:55). Inigo took the decision that a different environment was needed, and went to Paris in 1528. At the University of Paris the name of Ignatius of Loyola was first recorded (1956:59). There Ignatius met fellow students who were to become founding members of the Society of Jesus.

In 1534 Ignatius took seven men through the *Spiritual Exercises*. These men resolved "to adopt the way of life of Ignatius" (1956:61). According to one of them, Diego Laynez, who reported later, the decision was "to abandon the world completely and to dedicate themselves to the way of Poverty and the Cross" (1956:61).

A community had been formed. Their desire and decision was to make a sacred vow upon the conclusion of studies. The vows decided on were to: serve God in complete poverty, be chaste, and travel to the Holy Land. The vows were not monastic in essence. The emphasis was on service. This meant that the emerging Jesuits were not to be a group characterised by withdrawal, nor integrally retreatant in lifestyle. This had vital consequences for their future work and the importance they placed on specific times of retreat. The last vow had some clauses to allow for change if circumstances made it impossible to fulfil. The plan was made to place themselves at the disposal of the Pope if they remained in Europe or had to return from the Holy Land. War between the Venetians and the Turks made the journey to Israel impossible.

The desire was to call the group the "Society of Jesus" (1956:73). This community travelled to Rome, where Ignatius settled (1956:75). In Rome, Ignatius' group was recognised as "pilgrim priests" or "reformed priests". They were not yet a recognised

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<sup>37</sup> In the accusations of heresy Ignatius was tainted with suspicions of links with the *Alumbrados* in Spain, who put great emphasis on phenomena such as visions, revelations and raptures. Thereafter he was careful to make clear his distancing from the *Alumbrados*. Ignatius also fought the tendency within the Society of Jesus, especially in Spain and Portugal, to subordinate ministry to contemplation and to spend extra hours in daily prayer (O'Malley 1989:15).

religious order. However, requests were coming to the Pope for some of Ignatius' followers to be sent overseas.

These requests brought some decision-making to a head. In 1539 it was decided that the group wanted to use their chosen name. They desired to remain permanently in an order and take the vow of obedience to a superior whom they would choose. There was to be no special dress or penitential practices. They would not sing the Divine Office, and houses of study for young members were to be set up. These houses could possess revenues. Ignatius arranged these points in the "*Summa Instituti*", the first outlines of the Constitutions of the Society (1956:79).<sup>38</sup> The Society was ecclesiastically recognised on 27 September 1540 (1956:80).<sup>39</sup>

The development of the Society of Jesus saw the inevitable tension between absolute poverty and training in studies (1956:88). There was also the tension between active ministry and prayer in the Society. In a sense, these tensions were resolved by taking a kind of middle way, while seeking to maintain the importance of considering both poles of the tensions.

Ignatius died on 31 July 1556. The founder of the Society of Jesus, commonly called Jesuits, had created a Society that continues to this day. Ignatius, as Ivens (1986:361) points out, discarded or rewrote monastic rules. His shift from monasticism to emphasizing active ministry, meant retreat forms of spirituality had broadened. This had happened with the practice of Jesuits doing the *Spiritual Exercises* and by guiding exercitants through these exercises in retreat. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* are a legacy which has had a profound impact on the meaning and form of Christian retreats down to the present.

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<sup>38</sup> Ignatius' *Constitutions* are significant for the Society of Jesus. They show a disposition which digresses from monastic rules. Ivens (1986:361) notes that Ignatius puts across an approach to poverty and obedience worked out in terms of the order's corporate commitment to a diversified and international apostolate. The *Constitutions* have not had the impact beyond the Jesuits that the *Exercises* have had because of the wider applicability of the *Exercises*. It is, however, in the *Constitutions* (288) that the famous exhortation to "find God in all things" is found.

<sup>39</sup> In 1544 a clause limiting membership to a maximum of sixty was removed.

It is to the *Spiritual Exercises*, which have a vital place in the study of Christian retreats, to which we now turn.

### 3. THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* were first published in 1548 (Fleming 1978:xv). They were drawn from other formulated exercises, Ignatius' own spiritual experiences, and Scripture. The *Exercises* are a retreat manual, and as such were designed to be used with some flexibility by a leader to guide retreatants. The *Exercises* are, despite a fairly definite structure, "nonprescriptive", as O'Malley (1989:6) puts it. Ignatius' ([1548] 1951:6) instructions to the director of exercitants (people undertaking to do the *Exercises*) includes that the director "should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord." The *Exercises* are thus regarded as a tool rather than a limiting structure in Ignatius' framework.

Ignatius ([1548]/1951:1) explained what he meant by his *Exercises* as follows:

By the term "Spiritual Exercises" is meant every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation, of vocal and mental prayer, and of other spiritual activities ...For just as taking a walk, journeying on foot, and running are bodily exercises, so we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul.

Ignatius ([1548] 1951:11) gives the purpose of his *Exercises* as "the conquest of self and the regulation of one's life in such a way that no decision is made under the influence of any inordinate attachment." Ivens (1986:360) sees the *Exercises* as being derived from Ignatius' conversion, and then being intended to lead others to God in the school of experience. According to Fleming (1978:21), the purpose of the manual is to lead the retreatant to a true spiritual freedom. Other views on the purpose of the *Exercises*, without being mutually exclusive, include: enabling the arrival at some kind of decision, being in a school of prayer, being an instrument of bringing one into union with God, and helping cultivate a deep awareness of the ultimate meaning of life (English 1974:30). The *Exercises* are set in the context of Ignatius' time, which includes a hierarchical societal structure, largely taken for granted by Ignatius. In addition, Ignatius draws on his

military background for some of his spiritual terminology. A major devotion to Mary, popular in the Roman Catholicism of Ignatius' milieu, is also evident in his presentation.

According to Barry (1991:14-17), Ignatius has the following four presuppositions in respect of his *Exercises*. Firstly, God wants a personal relationship with people and acts in the world to bring about such a relationship. Secondly, the *Exercises* are a way of helping people become more aware of being recipients of God's communication, and they enable divine-human encounter to be experienced. Thirdly, the *Exercises* are to be used as a result of the desire to become more aware of God's presence in one's life and to develop a conscious relationship with God. Fourthly, the path through the *Exercises* is not expected to be smooth.

The *Exercises* are divided into four weeks and, when done in full and uninterrupted, normally take thirty days. Hence the four weeks make up this month of retreat. However, the "weeks" are not necessarily strictly seven day periods, as some flexibility is allowed. Ignatius ([1548] 1951:8-9) suggested another way of doing the exercises in his nineteenth annotation. This involves doing the exercises while still involved in normal working life, but setting aside time on a daily basis over an extended period. Ignatius ([1548] 1951:9) recommended a time of an hour and a half daily.

The basic themes of the four weeks are as follows: first, sin, hell and the kingdom of Christ; second, the life of Christ and his call; third, Christ's suffering and death; and fourth, Christ's resurrection.

#### A. The First Week

The first week, with its focus on sin and its effects, is designed to enable deep sorrow, contrition and confession to take place. Here our sin is set in contrast against God's love, and there is a focus on the rejection of this love through sin (Fleming 1978:7). Ignatius' own experience of deep sadness for his sin and a number of lengthy examinations of his sins gave a personal basis for the importance he placed in this focus on sin.

The personal examination in the first exercise of the first week involves meditations on the angels who rebelled against God, the sin of Adam and Eve, and a person who has gone to hell. Christ on the cross is then placed at the centre of meditation with a suggested colloquy (conversation or communication) with Christ on the cross. This leads to consideration of what response has been made in the past to Christ, and a present decision, especially a new commitment (Fleming 1978:37).

The second exercise seeks “the gift of a growing and intense sorrow” for personal sins, with tears if necessary (Fleming 1978:39). This involves an in-depth examination of the retreatant’s life. In this process, the weight of evil then needs to be felt. Following this, the sense of personal sin is contrasted with the three-fold reality of God as the source of love, how God has sustained the retreatant in the world, and the help of others (1978:41). The exercise leads to the conclusion of a proposed amendment of life by God’s grace.

The third and fourth exercises involve repetitions of the first two in order to again cover the vital ground of the retreatant’s life, with the notion that not all vital aspects are covered in the previous meditations.

The fifth exercise is a meditation on hell. The idea is to experience the vividness of the pain, despair, hatred and emptiness of hell.

Some guidelines for prayer are given in the first week notes. This is because prayer is integral to what it means to undertake the *Spiritual Exercises*. These notes include the use of the following (Fleming 1978:49-63). Firstly, there is recollection. This involves the use of prayer at specific junctures of the day and the attempt to be prayerful throughout each day. Ignatius includes the use of “colloquies”, which are loving, open-hearted and intimate conversations with God. Secondly, there is position. The use of bodily posture to help in prayer is mentioned by Ignatius. Thirdly, there is the use of a review. This involves reflection upon how specific prayer times have gone. Fourthly, there is mention of environment. Ignatius writes of ensuring that there is an environment that is, as conducive as possible for prayer. This means aspects like closing doors and curtains to aid concentration. Fifthly, there is penance. The need for interior penance, or internal sorrow for sin, is highlighted by Ignatius. He also refers to outward forms of penance



related to eating, sleeping and bodily penances. Sixthly, Ignatius speaks of the Examination of Conscience and Confession. A formal review of how the day has been spent is recommended by Ignatius. He sees this as a daily practice.

Ignatius' focus on sin, in line with his worldview, is highly personalised in character. He does not have a developed view of corporate and structural sin. This does not stop any retreatant from focusing on participation in corporate sinful systems, which often requires a deliberate mind shift, as well as meditating on personal sins.

The first week of the *Exercises* is designed to bring contrition and then change. It is also meant to help build good devotional habits.

## B. The Second Week

The focus of the second week is on the earthly ministry of Jesus. Ignatius invites participants to use imaginative meditation methods to experience a kind of "stepping into" the Gospel stories. This involves imaginative use of the five senses while being, in some way, part of the accounts of the Gospel writers. Ignatius spells this out in his fifth contemplation of the first day of the second week. The application of the senses involves, in the modern rendering by Fleming (1978:79), "a total submersion of myself into the mystery of Christ's life this day."

The Gospel meditations are, as Barry (1991:78) says, "aimed to fire the imagination with desire to know Jesus better in order to love him more and to follow him more closely."

The contemplations which Ignatius sets out in the first three days of the second week are: Day One, the Incarnation of Christ, and the Nativity; Day Two, the Presentation in the Temple, and the Flight into Exile in Egypt; Day Three, the Obedience of the Child Jesus to his parents, and the Finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple.

The fourth day digresses from the general pattern of the "week" with meditations called the "Two Standards" and "Three Pairs of Men", or as Fleming (1978:93) re-titles the latter, "Three Types of Persons". The meditation on Two Standards concerns Christ's ways and Satan's ways. It is designed to help the retreatant unmask Satan's strategies

and to make a decision firmly for Christ. As Barry (1991:100) notes: "Ignatius' military history comes out in the imagery he uses." While the contrast between the two standards is vast, the reality of choice can be very subtle. Reflecting on this reality, in relation to Ignatius' meditation, Sobrino (1978:409) asserts that the real problem is choosing between what *seems* to be good and what *is* really good.

The three types in the latter meditation of the fourth day can be characterised as follows. The first type consists of the person who is "a lot of talk but no action". The second type seeks "to do everything but the one thing necessary". The third type has the attitude that "to do God's will is my desire" (Fleming 1978:93-95). This meditation is designed to help the retreatant to get rid of attachments which get in the way of fulfilling God's call.

On the fifth day there is a return to Gospel accounts. This continues until the twelfth day. From the fifth day onwards only one Scripture passage is assigned per day. Integral to the second week is the clarification of a choice the retreatant may make, aided by Scriptural and other meditations. Such a choice could involve marriage, priesthood, life in a religious order, career, lifestyle or some other matter.

The Gospel passages from the fifth to the twelfth day are on Jesus' baptism, his desert temptation, the disciples' following due to Jesus' call, the eight Beatitudes, Jesus' walking on water, his preaching in the Temple, the raising of Lazarus, and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Ignatius then has notes on three kinds of humility. The third and desired kind of humility is indicated in the following manner by Ignatius ([1548] 1951:69): "to imitate and be in reality more like Christ our Lord."

In his notes in the second week Ignatius also gives two sets of guidelines about making "a sound and good election" that is, a good and correct choice. His first set of guidelines are interpreted by Fleming (1978:109-111) as follows: firstly, clarify what the decision is about; secondly, seek to be in equilibrium or balance; thirdly, pray for guidance; fourthly, list advantages and disadvantages; fifthly, consider what is most reasonable; and sixthly, ask God that what has been decided may be for God's glory.

The second pattern given by Ignatius in making a decision involves the following: Firstly, check if the love of God motivates the decision; secondly, consider the advice you would give to another in a similar situation; thirdly, consider the situation as if you were at the point of death and would from such hindsight consider the decision wise, and fourthly, consider if being before Christ as Judge, whether the decision would seem wise (1978:111-113).

In the second week Ignatius ([1548] 1951:45) recommends the reading of the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, the Gospels and biographies of holy men and women. Clearly, there is great flexibility in the second “week”. It is designed to last twelve days and not seven. It is stripped to a bare passage per day for the last eight days; yet other reading is also recommended. Vital decision-making may be involved in the life of the retreatant and the *Exercises* deal with this very situation, yet the *Exercises* are also for those who are not at a critical decision-making stage in their lives.

Sobrino (1978:404), in his Christological analysis, sees the second week of the *Exercises* as a consideration of the historical Jesus, in which the exercitant is concerned with a personal election or decision to serve in God’s kingdom. Barry (1991:89) sees the second week as using the Gospel as a vehicle that allows Jesus to reveal himself to the retreatant. This allows the retreatant to react to Jesus in terms of Jesus’ life, values and call.

### C. The Third Week

The third week involves a focus on Christ’s passion and death. In line with practices set out in the second week, the retreatant is invited to “participate” in the events of Christ’s passion, and even to be with Christ in his suffering, noticing what he does.

The contemplations from the Gospels on Day One (this “day” is designed to start at midnight) are on the Last Supper and Christ’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Days Two to Six have two contemplations a day. These Biblical meditations follow Jesus exiting Gethsemane, through his trials, to his death and burial. The sixth day includes meditating on Mary’s waiting in sorrow. Day Seven involves contemplation over the events of the whole passion that is, the same ground is covered again.

Ignatius ([1548] 1951:89-91) also gives attention in his third week notes to eating and drinking. He puts across the idea that helpful habits in eating and drinking be employed with an emphasis on abstinence to aid prayer. He asserts that meal times can be used to aid in the establishing or strengthening of the rhythm of prayer in the day. This is done by using meals as occasions for meditation.

The focus on Christ's suffering and death for a whole week is linked to the centrality of Jesus' passion and death in Christian faith as well as in Ignatius' own faith experience. There is the need in this week for the retreatant to identify with Jesus' death, in the sense of what needs to be renounced or "put to death" in the retreatant's life. The third week can thus be a kind of purging experience.

#### D. The Fourth Week

The central theme of the fourth week is Christ's resurrection. The week involves contemplations on the resurrection appearances. Ignatius calls these appearances "apparitions", which is not entirely satisfactory naming with regard to the modern meaning of the word.

The first contemplation indicates Ignatius' special focus on Mary, Jesus' mother. This is evident because this meditation is on Mary's experience of encountering the risen Jesus, despite there being no Scriptural passage to which to turn.

The recommendation from Ignatius ([1548] 1951:96) is to make four exercises (or periods of prayer) in the fourth week rather than five as in the previous weeks. This is in keeping with the atmosphere of relaxed consolation in this week (Fleming 1978:135).

Ignatius ([1548] 1951:101-103) includes a "Contemplation to Gain Love" as a kind of appendix to the fourth week. This is a meditation on the love of God so that this love is experienced and expressed through actions. It is designed to be undertaken to manifest in change in the retreatant's life.

Ignatius has notes on three methods of prayer subsequent to his fourth week. They can be introduced earlier than the fourth week in the practicing of exercises. Their position at the end of the notes of the fourth week means that the way is open in this week to broaden and develop prayer in the atmosphere of celebrating the resurrection of Christ.

Ignatius' "First Method of Prayer" involves meditation on the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins (pride, anger, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice, and sloth), the three Powers of the Soul (memory, understanding and will), and the five bodily senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch). In each case a preparatory time is envisaged, followed by the consideration of the particular subject matter with an asking for the required disposition. This is designed to lead on to intimate conversation with God.

The "Second Method of Prayer", "contemplating the meaning of each word of the prayer", is as Fleming (1978:149) puts it, "contemplating the meaning of each word in a traditional prayer formula."

The "Third Method of Prayer" involves rhythmical prayer in line with the retreatant's breathing. This involves saying the Lord's Prayer, or another prayer with one word per breath, to help concentration on the words of the prayer.

Ignatius gives guidelines on discernment in his notes in the *Exercises*. He places emphasis on the two terms, Spiritual Consolation and Spiritual Desolation.

Consolation refers to one's interior life when one or more of the following three indications are displayed (Fleming 1978:207). Firstly, this can be an experience of being so on fire with the love of God that everyone and everything is seen in the context of God. Secondly, this can involve being greatly saddened, even to the point of shedding tears, due to the realisation of infidelity to God. It is closely accompanied by a thankfulness to know God as Saviour. This is a deep realisation that we are sinners in the face of God who loves us. Thirdly, this can be finding the life of faith, hope and love strengthened and emboldened by the joy of serving. An increase in these virtues accompanied by a sense of deep-down peace is also experienced.

Desolation also refers to personal interior life. Ignatius again gives three indications of desolation. Fleming (1978:207) interprets these as follows. Firstly, there can be an enmeshed turmoil of spirit. This is an experience of being weighed down by darkness or being burdened. Secondly, there can be an experience of lack of faith or hope or love. Here there is distaste for prayer or spiritual service, or restlessness in carrying on serving God. Thirdly, there can be rebelliousness, despair and selfishness.

Ignatius advises patience with experiences of desolation. He also gives three reasons for the undergoing of desolation (1978:211). The first is not having lived a life of faith with perseverance. This is thus a shallow spiritual life. The second is that one is living in a trial period allowed by God. This involves being tested as to whether love is for God or for divine gifts, and also to see if there will be continued following even in “darkness”. The third concerns God allowing one to experience one’s own poverty and need.

At the end of the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius ([1548]/1951:101-103) puts his “Contemplation to attain the love of God”. Noticeably he calls it a contemplation rather than a meditation. Barry (1991:132) notes that in an Ignatian meditation, reflection is on the mystery which is presented, whereas in a contemplation the hope is of experiencing God’s own presence. The aim Ignatius ([1548] 1951:101) has for the retreatant is “to ask for an intimate knowledge of the many blessings received, that filled with gratitude for all, I may in all things love and serve the Divine Majesty”. In a sense this is his goal, to enable retreatants to experience the love of God. Despite his use of the word “attain”, Ignatius’ ([1548] 1951:102) words indicate this is only possible by God’s grace:

I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses, and finally, how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to His divine decrees.

Such grace that Ignatius describes is nevertheless tied to surrender by the exercitant. Thus, paradoxically, freedom is linked inextricably with surrender in Ignatius’ thinking. Ignatius’ ([1548] 1951:102) prayer in this contemplation is:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine,

dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.

The culmination of the *Exercises* is thus love: the love of God and the retreatant's response of love.

Ignatius includes notes on distributing alms, on dealing with being overly scrupulous (which he knew from his own experience), and on interaction in the Church. Almsgiving and Church relations were integral to his own experience. They form critical areas of ministry in his view. He sees their practice as flowing out of the retreat of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

#### E. Desire

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* are deeply linked to desire on the part of the exercitant. Anyone doing the *Exercises* is drawn to consider what one's desires are, and indeed what one's particular desire is. This is not meant to be forced nor manipulated by the process of the *Exercises*. Barry (1991:88) puts it this way:

Ignatius does not tell people what to desire. Ignatius hopes that if they allow God to lead them as God led him, their deepest desires will gradually emerge. Moreover their desires will also change in the course of the developing relationship with the Mystery we call God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ignatius expects that the relationship itself with God will not only change and develop our minds but also affect our hearts, our desires, our hopes.

O'Malley (1989:12) points to a contrast between the repose of monastic contemplation and Ignatius' sense of questing and desiring of more, indicated particularly by his favourite expression in the *Constitutions*, "the greater glory of God". The "more" that Ignatius desires is for a more generous desire for the divine will and for grace. His intention is to help retreatants using the *Exercises* to make God the one all-embracing desire.

#### 4. THE DIRECTORY

The Jesuits composed a *Directory*, first published in Rome in 1599, to aid fellow Jesuits in guiding someone through the *Exercises*. It was the first book of its kind.<sup>40</sup> The *Directory* consists of a set of instructions on how to lead people, under God's guidance, through a set of considerations leading to "reform of life". In the main, the *Directory* does little more than paraphrase, expand and specify Ignatius' instructions in the *Exercises*. More significantly, in the *Directory* the "weeks" of the *Exercises* are explicitly related to the three traditional "ways" of Christian spirituality: purgative, illuminative and unitive. The *Exercises* are thereby presented as being more than "a recipe for conversion"; rather, they are a recipe for ongoing conversion that leads to higher prayer and a more interiorized spirituality (O'Malley 1989:22).

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The Jesuits had as their primary instrument a guidebook to an extended retreat written by their founding leader. They were a group that drew from monastic traditions, but their emphasis was on service rather than withdrawal into prayer. This focus on service, without negating the importance of prayer, meant that the need for retreat was even greater. If they could not set aside all else for the monastic hours of prayer, they could draw on their own resource, the *Spiritual Exercises*.

For the Jesuits, "finding God in all things" has been of great importance in giving a basis for their active lifestyle. Barry and Doherty (2002:77-78) assert:

Jesuits, taking their cue from Ignatius, find the transcendent triune God always at work in the world and try, with the help of God, to work together with God. Thus, when they are true to their spirituality, they try to find God in all things, in their prayer, in their apostolic activity, even in their play, while, at the same time, trying to keep in mind that God is always greater than any of these.

In the Society of Jesus, there is daily examination to "find" God in the day concerned. This method was put into operation to have a sense of prayer and noticing God's action

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<sup>40</sup> The *Directory* did rely on some preliminary versions (O'Malley 1989:22).



on a daily basis. This, along with retreats, gave the Jesuits a foundation indicating the importance of prayer apart from the structure of monastic hours.

In 1547 Ignatius wrote to Rodrigues of his desire to see opened in Rome and elsewhere houses for novice training and for those who wished to do the *Exercises* without entering the Society of Jesus (de Guibert 1972:302). The *Exercises* were thus meant from the outset to be an instrument which was not exclusively for Jesuits. The seventeenth century saw the development of Jesuit retreat houses reserved for the purpose of giving the *Exercises* alone (1972:301).

The Jesuits required aspirant newcomers to do the *Exercises*. This was an obvious requirement as the *Exercises* were integral to the Society of Jesus from its foundation. Subsequently, according to de Guibert (1972:237), the *Exercises* were only done on extraordinary and rare occasions. However, practice changed with Decree 29 of the Society's General Congregation in 1608. This required all Jesuits to make the *Spiritual Exercises* for eight or ten days each year. Thus Jesuits were then required not only to do the *Exercises* as part of joining the Society of Jesus, but also to do them on an annual basis (usually in an eight day shortened form) as a participating member of the Society.

The practising of the *Exercises* on a yearly basis and the opening of retreat houses by the Jesuits saw other active groups draw from the Jesuits' method. Others saw the need for prayer but were not monastic in lifestyle. Hence the Jesuits helped to give a new and vital meaning as to what retreating for prayer and reflection meant. They also gave impetus to a new focus on retreating.

It was the Jesuits who first developed "the retreat". There was no widely recognised codification of the retreat concept until the *Spiritual Exercises* (O'Malley 1989:22). It provided a new framework in which a specific period of time was designated for prayer and reflection. This was to enable service in the name of Christ to be done more effectively. As O'Malley (1989:22) asserts, a new era in Christian spirituality was inaugurated: periodic retreat became a regular pattern for various people in Christian ministry.

## CHAPTER 7

### DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ignatius of Loyola left a legacy that had a lasting impact on Catholic spirituality and ultimately on other Christian traditions. Contemporary with his life was the Protestant Reformation. While the new impetus for retreats which came from the Jesuits was restricted to the Roman Catholic Church, prayer in various forms of withdrawal was practised by the reformers and their followers. Catholic forms of retreat did not remain static either.

Developments continued in the Christian fold with the separation of the Church of England from Roman Catholicism, the practices of the Puritans, and the emergence of the Methodists. These movements influenced how prayer in withdrawal was seen after the Reformation. There were, in addition, new developments in Eastern Orthodox practices of prayer, especially from the eighteenth century. Not surprisingly, these developments drew on Orthodoxy's rich heritage in respect to prayer in withdrawal.

As we move towards current practices, developments that had an impact on Christian retreats will be examined in the traditions of: Reformers, Catholics, Puritans, Quakers, Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, the Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostals.

#### 2. THE PROTESTANT REFORMERS

The Protestant Reformation reacted against monasticism along with questioning matters such as the selling of indulgences, the authority of Scripture, the role of the Pope, and the nature of salvation. This negative attitude to monasticism meant that new retreat opportunities which were coming forth from the Jesuits and others within Roman Catholicism were largely avoided.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was an Augustinian monk whose lack of fulfilment in such a calling, along with the negative reaction he received concerning his famous 95 theses,

meant an aversion to monasticism for Lutherans. The concept of the priesthood of all believers was strongly embraced by Lutherans. Luther (in Bainton 1978:156) said:

Monastic vows rest on the false assumption that there is a special calling, a vocation, to which superior Christians are invited to observe the counsels of perfection while ordinary Christians fulfil only the commands; but there simply is no special religious vocation since the call of God comes to each at the common tasks.<sup>41</sup>

Luther advocated the use of personal prayer. As such, he promoted times of retreat on a daily basis. However, there is no developed sense of longer times of retreat from him. Tripp (1986:345) relates the early Lutheran pattern of prayer in this way:

Prayer is the setting of the working day and the dedication of the hours of sleep. Morning prayers link the priestly duty of prayer with the fulfilment of vocation in worldly business. Intercession is prayer for the victory of the cross and so also for the enemies of the cross.

Retreat into prayer was thus linked to a daily rhythm for Luther. In personal prayer he asserted that Christians should not only use pre-established texts, but also use their own words and enter into a good attitude for prayer (Lienhard 1987:288). In Luther's *Simple Way to Pray* of 1535 he advised the use of the Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer as immediate preparation for mental prayer. The preparation involved ordering of the day, choice of priorities and discipline of the will (Tripp 1983:254). Luther also wrote of using a "garland of four twisted strands" in mental prayer. This involved taking each commandment, or other aspect used: firstly, as a teaching, reflecting on what God requires; secondly, as a thanksgiving; thirdly, as a confession; and fourthly, as a petitionary prayer (Tripp 1986:345).

For Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), prayer was considered to be from the heart and involved a direct communication with God. He believed many words were unnecessary and that the best prayer, both for the individual and the congregation, was silent. Private prayer was, for Zwingli, the ideal of the true worship of God. Ideas integral to retreat, like heartfelt prayer and silence, were expressed. This did not mean the neglect of the

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<sup>41</sup> This is a paraphrase of Luther's words.

corporate aspect of Christian devotion in his thinking (Dent 1986:348). However, with Zwingli, these aspects did not develop beyond personal devotional prayer and congregational worship.

John Calvin (1509-1564) saw prayer as the principal exercise and expression of faith (Wakefield 1983c:65). In Calvinist spirituality there is a stress on thanksgiving in prayer. Praying is seen to be best done using the words of Scripture (1983c:66).

Being a Protestant reformer, Calvin dissociated spirituality from monastic spirituality. He viewed monasticism as exclusive (Bouwsma 1987:321). Calvin also asserted that human beings were made to work. Hence Calvin attacked monasticism (1987:330). This did not mean that aspects of prayer compatible with monasticism were all thrown out. Calvin (in Bouwsma 1987:329) asserted: "Solitude helps [people] to compose themselves, to examine themselves thoroughly, and to commune with themselves freely and in good earnest." Calvin saw privacy as helping believers to discover that what they lack in themselves "may be recovered in God" (1987:329).

The reformers were anti-monastic, but very much in favour of the expression of prayer in a disciplined and heart-felt way. This meant that Reformation spirituality was integrally linked to the hours of prayer without always having a set daily timetable. Nevertheless, retreat was for the reformers and their followers a time daily, or several times a day, in prayer.

### 3. FRANCIS DE SALES AND OTHER FRENCH ROMAN CATHOLICS

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) came from a family who remained Roman Catholic in what had become a largely Calvinist area. He was educated at the Jesuit college of Clermont and he lived under Jesuit direction for the rest of his life. Against his family's wishes he was ordained as a priest. He became Bishop of Geneva in 1602 and was exiled, due to the Calvinists, at Annecy (Stopp 1986:380-381).

The Jesuit retreat pattern was firmly entrenched in Francis' life, for he made Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* annually at a private retreat (1986:381). Francis was a leading figure

in developing retreat ideas, especially due to the popularity of his writing, which was heavily influenced by the Jesuits and their retreats.

Francis published the *Introduction to a Devout Life* in 1608. It proved to be influential with ordinary people (Wakefield 1983b:158). In line with Ignatius' *Exercises*, Francis asserts in this work that holiness is possible for those who live entirely in the world. His desire was to teach people holiness in the work place and domestic life. Francis explained "devotion" or real holiness as being not a possession of the spiritual elite, but attainable to all who were willing to put their heart and mind to it (Stopp 1986:380). Francis' claim for his *Introduction* was that it was an elementary teaching manual (Wakefield 1983b:158). Buckley (1989:36) asserts that by "devotion" Francis means magnanimity in love; it is the grace to love frequently and immediately. One who longs to love God, given the appropriate name of Philothea, is imaginatively addressed in the *Introduction*. Philothea is told that "devotion" is "the spiritual alertness which makes us respond wholeheartedly and promptly to what love asks of us" (Stopp 1986:382-383).

The *Introduction* shows a striking resemblance to the first week of Ignatius' *Exercises* in subjects for meditation, simple methods of mental prayer, treatment of confession, the exhortation to frequent communion and directions for a life of growing virtue (Buckley 1989:36-37). However, when compared with Ignatius, Francis is more conscious of goodness in the human soul and is less focused on warfare with the demonic. He nevertheless demands total dedication to Christ. Francis allows for the use of imagination and "composition of place", and seeks for results shown by a stimulus to love, resolution to act, thanksgiving and offering (Wakefield 1983b:158).

Significantly, in a final section of the *Introduction*, Philothea is helped to renew her resolution to love in an annual retreat and review (Stopp 1986:383). Therefore the necessity of retreat was seen as a vital aspect of spiritual growth in Francis' thinking.

In 1610 Francis de Sales founded the order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, together with a widow Jeanne de Chantal. It was a contemplative religious foundation in Annecy which drew together a community of nuns. The order "provided a pattern of the contemplative life lived without undue austerity but with exacting demands on the hidden, simple virtues" (Stopp 1986:381-382).

In Francis' own life the place of retreat, even in the midst of busyness or turmoil, was noticed by others. He was known for being able to withdraw without being cut off from the world. Francis saw the soul as being like a dwelling where we know what is going on outside and in other rooms, but we must identify ourselves only with "the inner sanctuary where we are alone with God and nothing else may enter in." This was, as Jeanne de Chantal said of Francis, "his retreat and his usual dwelling place. He kept his spirit within this inner solitude, living in the topmost point of the spirit, without depending on any feelings or on any light save that of a bare and simple faith" (Stopp 1986:384).

In addition to de Sales, and following his example, retreats were encouraged and led by people such as Vincent de Paul, Pierre de Berulle (1575-1629), the founder of the French Oratory, and Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1680) (Townroe 1986:580). The Jesuit influence was large in the field of retreat in the Roman Catholic Church in France. This was evident in the foundational role that the Jesuit-educated Berulle played in post-Reformation Catholic spirituality (Saward 1986:386).

The contribution of Berulle and others included a firmly Christocentric approach to prayer. This was exemplified by what has been called the "Sulpician Method" which was used in retreats. In this method there is adoration (Jesus before my eyes), communion (Jesus drawn into my heart), and finally co-operation (Jesus in my hands) (1986:395).

Jesuit practice and influence was not static. Jesuits adapted Ignatius' *Exercises* to new and different situations, while still seeking to be faithful to the original. The practice of undertaking an annual retreat became more common among Jesuits and other Catholics. The influence of the Jesuits was not restricted to their own Society, and so the idea of specific times of retreat, and even the practice of annual retreats, grew.

#### 4. OTHER ROMAN CATHOLIC DEVELOPMENTS

Various forms of Roman Catholic devotion were centred on the Mass. Some of these practices took on aspects of retreat. Most notable was the Forty Hours devotion which started in Milan in 1520. It moved on to have a carefully defined rite by 1537. The

practice consisted of a vigil before the Host, which was exposed on the altar for three days. Its original purpose was as a setting to petition for divine aid (Luria 1989:115).

The Counter-Reformation and the effects of the Enlightenment saw Roman Catholic devotional expression shift in various ways. There was a move away from what was regarded as superstition and practices such as flagellation. The Jesuits had influence in this process as well. New examples of retreat came forth. For instance, the Redemptorist missionaries in eighteenth century Italy promoted the use of what was known as *esercizio devoto* or the *vita devota*. French Capuchin missionaries used a similar practice. The Redemptorist practice had similarities to Ignatius' *Exercises* and De Sales' *Introduction to a Devout Life*. It was intended for a wider and less literate audience. Such an exercise consisted of meditation on some devotional topic such as the passion or sorrows of the Virgin. The meditation was meant to be an individual act but was done in a communal setting. Families could also practice such exercises at home. The Redemptorists placed a Madonna in mourning clothes before the congregation at such occasions. Other orders suggested meditating while holding a crucifix (Luria 1989:99-100).

Monastic life continued to be an option in post-reformation Catholicism. This was one stream in which a retreat model was offered in an ongoing way. Monasticism continued to have fluidity in some existing orders, and new communities emerged.

One new set of communities with an interesting link to the desert, the starting point of monasticism, emerged around the person of Charles de Foucauld (b.1858). His story included the loss of his faith while in a military academy and then being posted as a soldier to Algeria. Following leaving the army he explored Morocco for eighteen months. Back in France he was to experience Jesus becoming "real for him" (Gibbard 1986:420). As Gibbard (1986:420) points out: "Love for Jesus became – and remained – literally the passion of his life."

De Foucauld became a Trappist, but life there was not hard enough for him. He dreamt of founding a more extreme order. After four years with the Trappists, he was summoned to Rome to study. He was then released from his vows to discover his unique vocation. Two years were spent in Nazareth. There de Foucauld experienced the

revelation that love, and not austerity, was the heart of the matter. His spirituality included long times of prayer. Gibbard (1986:421) describes his contemplative practice as follows: "He knelt motionless lost in contemplation with his eyes fixed upon the tabernacle on the altar usually for seven hours on weekdays and nearly all day on Sundays and feasts."

He moved deep into the Sahara Desert where he ministered to Taureg tribespeople and spent long periods in contemplation. Systematic meditation is, for many Christians, preliminary to contemplation; for de Foucauld they ran side by side. He wrote out thousands of meditations originally meant only for him. He engaged in vocal prayer, in intercession and the liturgical offices of the Church, as well as meditation and contemplation (1986:421-422).

During the First World War de Foucauld was tragically shot dead. The circulation of his writings saw small groups try out his ideas. The resulting religious communities were called the Little Brothers of Jesus and the Little Sisters of Jesus. Today the noviciate for one of these communities begins in a tough, working situation. Weeks of solitude are then spent in a desert cave with sparse rations. A period of study follows. Soon after the Second World War the Little Brothers and Sisters moved into the slums of the West and poor areas of the Third World. The communities are small, normally three to five people in number. However poor their housing, one room is kept as a chapel where the holy sacrament is reserved. When members of a community return from work, they spend an hour in silent prayer together (1986:421-423).

The role of the Society of Jesus in retreat options grew. As the Jesuits gained more members for their society, they had an influence in Catholicism wider than their own membership. By the nineteenth century there was a generalized expansion in the Roman Catholic Church of retreats among secular priests and devout laity. This meant a vast expansion in the giving of retreats. Pierre Chaignon (1791-1883) preached more than three hundred retreats to priests. Pierre Bouvier (1848-1925), a Jesuit like Chaignon, led a similar number of preached retreats (de Guibert 1972:489). The Code of Canon Law of 1917 said that both religious orders and secular priests in the Catholic Church had an obligation to undertake periodic retreats (1972:489). What had been a



new and groundbreaking move by the early Jesuits thus became standard practice for Catholic clergy and religious orders.

## 5. THE PURITANS

The name “Puritan” links with Protestants who sought reform in the established English Church context. The word was first used in the 1560’s by those who thought reform had not gone far enough, for they were dissatisfied with the Elizabethan settlement of the Church by the Act of Uniformity of 1559 (Keeble 1983:323). Puritans were found amongst Presbyterians, Independents and in the Church of England (Wakefield 1986a:438).

For the Puritans, Christianity was considered to be a “universal daily service”. A structure for this was laid out in various Puritan devotional manuals, replacing the old Roman pattern of the canonical hours. Richard Rogers laid out an order which was both typical and widely used. The order of a normal weekday started with early rising, followed by meditations on God’s mercy which had enabled survival through the night, together with other musings on God’s attributes and one’s own sin, which were to accompany ablutions. Morning Prayer followed later, either alone or as a family. Thereafter there was employment in one’s lawful calling, without idleness, watching over thoughts, words and actions. The evening meal at home was to be prefaced with a grace. Supper was to be followed by a period of reading and teaching of the whole family, including any servants. At the end of the day there was evening family prayer. In bed one was to make sure that there was meditation on matters spiritually profitable, such as the similarity between the sheets and the burial garment that must eventually be worn<sup>42</sup> (Lovelace 1989:306-307). Examination of conscience particularly characterized pre-sleep meditations, during which the day past was scrutinized (Hambrick-Stowe 1989:348).

Puritan spirituality was not about retreat from the world, but about God’s transforming power being experienced in the secular world. Emphasis was placed on having a

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<sup>42</sup> This idea is expressed in Lewis Bayly’s *The Practice of Piety* published in 1610, which had a wide influence for the next two centuries. It included meditations that related “the common tasks of daily life and necessities of nature to their awesome ends” (Wakefield 1989:264).

spiritual life while being householders (Hambrick-Stowe 1989:341). There were, nevertheless, devotional times which can be considered as retreat periods. Individual devotions were held to be of great importance, using “secret exercises” of reading, meditation and prayer (1989:348). Meditation often began with self-examination, which included identification and consideration of one’s sins (1989:348). Wakefield (1986a:443) indicates the importance of reading and listening: “Puritan spirituality was supremely of the word, and fed on preaching.” Music was also used, but the visual was deplored. Meditation was integral to the Puritans, for even a sermon was considered a meditation, and was to be further meditated upon. Meditation built on the exercise of reading. Hambrick-Stowe (1989:348) points out:

Formal or ‘ordinary’ meditation involved the successive application of the passage or topic to each of the human faculties: from cognition and memory to conscience, affections and will. Using a technique similar to Catholic “composition of place”, Puritans aimed to move the object of meditation from the mind to the heart. They engaged in meditation at regular times, morning and evening, with additional “extraordinary” or “occasional” times of meditation for the especially devout or when circumstances warranted.

Contemplation, seen as a stage beyond meditation, was considered as suspect. This was because mystical states were discouraged and the mind was seen as central and the gateway for spiritual experience (Wakefield 1986a:443).

Hambrick-Stowe (1989:349) asserts: “Secret prayer was the apex of Puritan spirituality, the culmination of private exercises every evening and morning.” Such prayer times constituted most of the limited opportunities that American Puritans in the seventeenth century had to be alone. Although set prayers were not used in their corporate worship, Puritans were encouraged to use them in private devotions, especially to help beginners and as guides for free prayer (1989:349).

Puritans made use of short, ejaculatory prayers. These thanksgivings, petitions and intercessions were said in the midst of secular activity in immediate response to some happening, or in the evening to express a brief and pithy prayer (1989:350). This practice was similar to that found in other traditions including Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox, of using a short prayer that is repeated.

Diary or journal keeping was also a hallmark of Puritan practice. This was a spiritual exercise, vitally linked to prayer and meditation (1989:351). Such writing took on retreat style qualities, in that it gave the opportunity to reflect on the spiritual life and the events of the writer's life, an important consideration in many retreat modes. Diaries also became objects of devotion because old diary entries were studied and consulted in order to experience greater levels of assurance of grace. This was called "reading the evidence" (1989:351).

The Lord's Day, Sunday, held to be a Sabbath, was prominent in Puritan spirituality. The Sabbath in the Genesis 1 account of creation was given prominence in expounding the importance of the Sabbath. The whole day was to be devoted to spiritual matters and exercises, while both play and work were unlawful (Wakefield 1986a:442). Sunday routine in Rogers' presentation included: catechizing the family before the morning service; mental review of the sermon on the way home and conversation about it at the dinner table; consecutive reading of the Bible and other devotional books, preceded and followed by applicable prayers; and various works of mercy within the family and beyond (Lovelace 1989:307).

The Puritans displayed aspects of retreat life by daily times of retreat and a weekly Sabbath which had elements of retreat. This can be seen in their emphasis on prayer and their orderliness in devotional life.

## 6. THE QUAKERS

The Quakers emerged around 1647 and gained their name in 1650 because of their trembling at the word of God (Wakefield 1986b:446). George Fox was their founding leader who emphasised "the divine light of Christ" which was seen as the Inner Light (Duffy 1983:327). Such light was seen as corresponding with the work of the Holy Spirit as described in the Scriptures. As Hinson (1989:332) states: "Quakers have sought to revive primitive Christianity's vital experience of the Spirit." Therefore, the Quakers had charismatic features. In the eighteenth century they came to be known by the alternative name of The Society of Friends.

A feature of traditional corporate Quaker worship was, and often continues to be, silence. This is an exercise in waiting on God (Hinson 1989:334). Silence had been practiced by the Seekers, a group with whom Fox interacted (Duffy 1983:327). Silence was understood to be a waiting on the word in order to speak with prophetic inspiration, rather than being a silence of a mystical nature (Wakefield 1986b:448).

The use of silence meant that Quakers had an element of retreat life in their corporate worship. It was unhurried, waiting prayer that was not that dissimilar to other settings such as prayer in monasteries and in private.

## 7. THE EARLY BAPTISTS

The Baptists originated in approximately 1612 drawing from Anabaptists, Puritans and Pietists. Hinson (1989:332) asserts that “the Bible has been the chief Baptist ‘sacrament’, that is, the means through which Baptists expect to experience God’s grace.” Baptists were largely negative towards meditation except when they meditated on the Scriptures. Despite their distance from monasticism, it is noteworthy that such meditation finds parallels with the *lectio divina* of medieval monks, as Hinson (1989:332) points out. Baptist devotional practice, from early times, commonly involved sitting and reading the Bible and then closing eyes to let the word soak in (1989:332). Elements of retreat practice, especially with regard to daily private or family devotions, are apparent in such Baptist devotional routine.

## 8. THE EARLY METHODISTS

Methodism is integrally linked with its founder John Wesley (1703-1791). He was brought up within a devout Christian home with a clergyman for a father, and a mother who was even more instrumental in shaping his foundational spirituality. Both Wesley’s parents were children of clergymen who had Puritan involvement. Puritan influence as well as Anglicanism was integral to Wesley’s upbringing. In line with these influences, Wesley trained for the Anglican priesthood. Aspects which he later emphasised were, in many areas, already evident in his time of training at Oxford University. It was there that he experienced the small group meeting in various forms. The importance of such meetings for Wesley saw the later development of societies, bands and class meetings.

Several years after Wesley's death a memoir by John Gambold, who had in the meanwhile become a Moravian, was published. It was entitled "The Character of Mr. John Wesley" and concerned his experiences with Wesley during their early adulthood. Gambold (1984:39-40) told of how the band of which both of them had been members, met together, prayed together, shared simple meals with one another, often sang, and turned to their "chief business", which was "to review what each had done that day, in pursuance of their common design, and to consult what steps were to be taken next." Each member also undertook outreach into the community, which was regarded as integral to the faithful life. Gambold (1984:39-40) wrote of regular fasting, celebrating the Eucharist and participation in set services of worship. He maintained that Wesley "thought prayer to be more his business than anything else."

Gambold (1984:41ff) reported on what Wesley "earnestly recommended" to the small group. Daily conduct included morning devotions, usually commencing an hour before sunrise; the determination of what use ought to be given to the various segments of the day; visitation of the poor, imprisoned or ill; careful study of the Bible; the regular practice of prayer; and the continual meditation upon the riches of divine majesty. As Trickett (1989:359) points out, in this group, the Holy Club, the nurture of the experience of living in genuine community was of paramount importance. The seeds were laid at this stage for what would become integral to the life of the Methodist societies as a result of Wesley's subsequent instructions.

Wesley put emphasis on "the means of grace". He (1944:136) explained what he meant by "means of grace" in his sermon of that title: "By 'means of grace,' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained by God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to [people], preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." The instituted means that Wesley laid out in 1744 were: prayer (private, family and public), searching the Scripture (reading, meditating and hearing), the Lord's Supper, fasting and Christian conference (George 1986:457). Harper (1983:80) points out that prayer came first in Wesley's list because of his understanding of Christianity as a relationship. Prayer was seen as the key to the Christian life, as the means to maintaining and growing a living relationship with God (Williams 1960:132). Wesley (in Telford 1931:VIII, 90) wrote: "Prayer is certainly the grand means of drawing

near to God; and all others are helpful to us only so far as they are mixed with or prepare us for this.” Williams (1960:133) outlines how prayers, as Wesley saw them, should express the total range of life:

They must include the expression of our awareness of sin (deprecation), the longing for the fulfillment of God’s will within us (petition), requests for the needs of others (intercession), and our gratitude for all God’s goodness and lovingkindness (thanksgiving). It must represent our life as individuals (private prayer), as participants in the primary social group (family prayers), and as members of the great congregation (public prayer). All this needs a constant discipline so that prayer may be kept as the constant basis of the daily life.

In his sermon based on Matthew 5:13-16, regarding Jesus’ examples of being like salt and light, Wesley (1944:237) preached that “Christianity is essentially a social religion; and to turn it into a solitary religion, is indeed to destroy it.” Nevertheless, Wesley (1944:237-238) asserted shortly thereafter in the sermon, of the importance of retreat for prayer:

Not that we can in any wise condemn the intermixing solitude or retirement with society. This is not only allowable, but expedient; nay, it is necessary, as daily experience shows, for every one that either already is, or desires to be a real Christian. It can hardly be, that we should spend one entire day in a continued intercourse with (people), without suffering loss in our soul, and in some measure grieving the Holy Spirit of God. We have need daily to retire from the world, at least morning and evening, to converse with God, to commune more freely with our Father which is in secret. Nor indeed can a (person) of experience condemn even longer seasons of religious retirement, so they do not imply any neglect of the worldly employ wherein the providence of God has placed us.

In the hymn writing of Charles Wesley, John’s brother, and the musical poet of the early Methodists, elements of retreat are to be found. A noteworthy example is in the first two verses of the following hymn, with echoes of Elijah’s experience (*Hymns & Psalms* 1983:#540):

Open, Lord, my inward ear,  
And bid my heart rejoice;

Bid my quiet spirit hear  
Thy comfortable voice;  
Never in the whirlwind found,  
Or where earthquakes rock the place,  
Still and silent is the sound,  
The whisper of thy grace.

From the world of sin and noise,  
And hurry I withdraw;  
For the small and inward voice  
I wait with humble awe;  
Silent am I now and still,  
Dare not in thy presence move;  
To my waiting soul reveal  
The secret of thy love.

The early Methodist emphasizes on prayer, devotion and consideration of one's own life or "soul", meant that there were significant features of daily retreat in Methodist practice. There was, however, no organised practice of extended retreat periods.

## 9. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The evangelical revival that had had an impact on eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain through the Methodists also had an impact on the Church of England. Amongst such evangelicals prayer held a vital place. Early rising was considered essential to give prayer its necessary place. Such prayer could be verbal or silent. Family prayer also held an integral place amongst such evangelicals (Hennell 1986:460).

William Wilberforce (1759-1833), well known for his anti-slavery endeavours and a leading evangelical, had family prayers in the morning and evening following his conversion. He also instituted two hours of prayer and Bible study after rising at six in the morning. He practised fasting during the days of secret prayer that he arranged in his own schedule. Sunday afternoons included an hour and a half of reading devotional material (1986:460-461).

Charles Simeon (1759-1836) was one of the leading figures in Church of England evangelicalism. He rose at four a.m. and spent four hours in prayer and Bible study. He had a vast influence on others, causing the use of such devotional practices to spread.

Simeon differentiated between prayer and meditation. He encouraged his pupils to wait in quietness and not always to frame their prayers in words (1986:461).

A different spirituality from evangelicalism was also expressed within the Church of England. This was especially seen in the Oxford Movement, otherwise known as the Tractarians because of their use of tracts to spread their message. This was a High Anglican movement considered to have started in 1833. The leading figures included John Keble and John Henry Newman, who joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1845 (Rowell 1983:285). Holiness was integral to the movement, as was the case with Methodists, but there was suspicion of religious excitement and undue emotion. Worship was seen as a discipline rather than a search for a feeling (Wakefield 1989:278).

Newman's move to Catholicism was not a widespread trend. However, the movement had close ties with Catholic practices. The year 1845 not only marked Newman's move away from Anglicanism, but also a new phase for the Oxford Movement. The Tractarians became a movement wider than just the Oxford region. It was through the broadening of the Oxford Movement that retreats, in the full sense, were first held in the Church of England. These were held in 1856 at Chiselhurst in Kent and in Christ Church, Oxford. The Oxford Movement then fostered the growth of retreats within Anglicanism (Townroe 1986:580).

The revival of religious orders within the Anglican fold was a consequence of the Oxford Movement. Marion Hughes took private vows in St. Mary's, Oxford in 1841. The first order of Anglican nuns, the Sisters of Charity, was founded in 1845. Many more orders of nuns and monks sprang up shortly afterwards. One of the outstanding figures was Richard Meux Benson who founded the Society of St. John the Evangelist.<sup>43</sup> Benson set forth an ascetically severe lifestyle. He held that contemplation through reading the Scriptures was the foundation of the life of holiness, and that such life must reach out into the world (Wakefield 1989:280).

Benedictine and Franciscan life was introduced into the Church of England. New orders, native to Anglicanism, the Community of the Resurrection and the Society of the Sacred

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<sup>43</sup> The community was also called "The Cowley Fathers".



Mission, were also born. Anglican religious houses thus sprang up (Wakefield 1989:280). The monastic life became an option within the Church of England. Also these houses fostered the retreat movement by providing venues for retreats. They helped in giving a theological underpinning for a new movement within Anglicanism that soon came to be embraced by a much wider constituency than monastics.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) had a major influence in the growth of the use of retreats within the Anglican Church and beyond in the early twentieth century. She was for many years a writer with Roman Catholic sympathies, including being an interpreter of mysticism and a leader of retreats. She only became a practising member of the Anglican Church in the last twenty years of her life (Wakefield 1989:283).

The development of Catholic-style retreats and monastic houses within the Anglican fold meant that the practice of retreating spread in the Anglican Church and in time had an effect on other denominations which interacted with Anglicans.

## 10. EASTERN ORTHODOX DEVELOPMENTS

Monasticism continued to hold a central place in Eastern Orthodoxy from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Monastic style prayer was the example of how to pray even for Orthodox laypeople. This meant that pilgrimages to monasteries were held in high regard. Spiritual guidance was sought at these monasteries particularly from monks who were considered to be *staretz*, or wise spiritual directors.

A revival in hesychast spirituality took place in the eighteenth century, particularly under the influence of Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809). Sherrard (1989:420) asserts that "it was largely because of his intensive labour that the revival of hesychast spirituality was set within the whole theological, liturgical and canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church."

Nicodemus and Macarius of Corinth edited a collection of Orthodox works from the fourth to the fifteenth century, which was called the *Philokalia*. It was published in 1782 and translations from the Greek into Slavonic in 1793 and into Russian in the nineteenth century followed (Ware 1986e:257). The *Philokalia* had an immense impact on the

Orthodox Church. Through translations into Western languages in the twentieth century it had an influence wider than Orthodoxy.

Another significant work was *The Way of a Pilgrim* published anonymously in Russian in 1865. It brought the use of the Jesus Prayer and the *Philokalia* to a wider audience (Sherrard 1989:418). Hesychast style praying was thus integral to Orthodox practices of withdrawal for prayer.

Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain made use of Roman Catholic works of spirituality as well as the *Philokalia*. This indicated more interaction by the Orthodox with the West, although the use of resources was very selective. Nicodemus produced adaptations of Lorenzo Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat*, which had a wide impact, and Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*. He adapted Pinamonti's edited version of the *Exercises* for Orthodox use (Ware 1986e:257). Nicodemus embellished the original text with notes and abundant references to the Bible and the Church fathers (Bobrinskoy 1989:450). The *Exercises* were used only to a limited extent in Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, their use within the Orthodox Church indicated a new use of retreat forms within that tradition. Ware (1986e:257) asserts: "What Nicodemus seems to have found valuable in such volumes was their use of discursive meditation, allowing full scope to the imagination; this, he felt, helpfully supplemented the type of image-free, non-discursive prayer commended by Hesychasm." This was certainly an opportunity for a widening of ways of retreating into prayer for the Orthodox faithful.

While Orthodoxy did not fully embrace Jesuit style retreats, the tradition of prayer within its fold means that retreat in various forms grew in the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy also had an influence on Catholic and Protestant prayer, especially through hesychastic methods. Therefore Orthodoxy has had an impact on methods of retreat even outside its own fold.

## 11. EARLY PENTECOSTALISM

Twentieth century Pentecostalism traces its origins to a revival in Los Angeles which started in 1906. The leading figure in the early stages was William Seymour. Noteworthy aspects of the first meetings included speaking in tongues, prayers for healing and

expressively heartfelt worship. Hollenweger (1986:551-552) lists five characteristics of early Pentecostal spirituality. These are: firstly, an emphasis on the oral in worship; secondly, the use of narrative to express faith; thirdly, maximum participation in reflection, prayer and decision-making to express a strong and reconciling community life; fourthly, the important place of dreams and visions; and fifthly, experience of correspondence between body and mind in worship.

It is therefore apparent that prayer was, and is, integral to Pentecostal faith and practice. This was especially expressed in corporate meetings and most often vociferously. However, early Pentecostalism was about revival meetings and therefore any focus on private devotions lagged behind. In addition, silence was almost the antithesis of early Pentecostal practice. This meant that retreat was not part of early Pentecostal experience. With prayer being so vital in Pentecostalism a need was seen, as the movement matured, for withdrawal into prayer. Thus, openness to withdraw for prayer meant that aspects of retreat life came to have an influence on Pentecostal practice.

## 12. CONCLUSION

The importance of prayer, which is integral to Christian retreat, was vitally and noticeably evident in every movement and group that had an impact on the spiritual and theological climate of Christianity from the sixteenth century into the twentieth. In each case daily prayer, and the Pauline call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), was taken to heart and linked to relational spirituality. Some of the major movements of the period have been examined in this chapter, but there were many others too. Daily retreat times can be identified in Reformed, Puritan, Anglican, Baptist, Quaker, Methodist, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox practice. This practice had an influence on Pentecostalism as it developed.

More developed forms of retreat can be seen from Jesuit origins through to the 1917 canonical requirements for retreats for Roman Catholic clergy and members of religious orders. Retreats also came to be more common among Catholic laypeople. High Church Anglicanism saw formalized retreats get underway in 1856. This practice soon spread to include those considered to be within other branches of Anglicanism. In turn, the value of retreats was seen in other parts of Christianity through interaction. The use of retreats

was to blossom across the spectrum of Christianity in the twentieth century. It is to that century and our current practices that we now turn.

## CHAPTER 8

### MODERN IGNATIAN RETREAT DEVELOPMENTS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* not only launched the retreat movement, but they continue to be used for modern retreat purposes. With the development of Christian spirituality and the interaction between various and often diverse groups, Ignatian influences on retreats are multi-faceted. The *Spiritual Exercises* are still integral to Jesuit spirituality, but Jesuits draw on many sources wider than their Ignatian heritage. As a result, new and creative retreat manifestations have come forth from the Society of Jesus. Ignatian spirituality has an influence far wider than Jesuit circles as manifest in the blending of Ignatian ideas and methods with other traditions. Some of these developments will be explored in this chapter.

For Ignatius, the focus of the *Spiritual Exercises* was on making an "election", a means of making a decision about one's state in life (Fitzmyer 2004:2), or as a means "of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of our soul" (Ignatius 1951:1). However, the *Exercises* are used far more widely than for an elective vocational choice or salvation experience. This is not to dispute that any genuinely experienced Ignatian retreat will surely intersect with decision-making and salvation as a broad concept. However, as Fitzmyer (2004:3) rightly notes: "The Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* . . . are often made with a less fundamental purpose in mind, simply as a means to renew or revitalize one's spiritual life, for instance, in the annual retreat made by many persons."

Aschenbrenner (2004:5-9) writes of five ways of viewing an experience of the *Spiritual Exercises*. His analysis is helpful in considering the place of the *Exercises* in modern retreat experience. Firstly, there is the dynamic of love, which is developed by God's love in the retreatant. God is the initiator of the encounter. Love is thus the outstanding experience of retreat in this case. Secondly, there is the discovery of self-identity through the encounter with God's revelation. Thirdly, there is a progressively developing dynamic in praying for what is the desire of the retreatant. Such desire requires linkage with the

mystery of God's saving love as revealed in Christ for an objective basis. Fourthly, there is emphasis on the retreat being an environment and atmosphere for choice and action. This involves discernment at the level of faith. Fifthly, the *Exercises* can be a way of sharing in the experience of Ignatius.

For members of the Society of Jesus two thirty-day retreats in a lifetime, following Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, are still required. There is also the necessity for eight-day annual retreats, with at least resonances of the Ignatian *Exercises*, in the Jesuit regimen (Lonsdale 1990:147). Others, outside the Society of Jesus, can also follow the thirty-day or shorter format of the *Spiritual Exercises*. The *Exercises* are thus still integrally part of what constitutes current Christian retreats. Naturally, the different era we live in, compared to the time of Ignatius, means that the *Exercises* need to be interpreted in a new situation. Jesuit and other writers do this ongoing task. One example in this regard is Fleming (1978), who sets side by side a literal translation and a contemporary reading of Ignatius' *Exercises*. The reality of the requirement of an annual retreat following the *Spiritual Exercises* for Jesuits means that the retreats are re-examined in creative ways to enable retreat experiences to have freshness and the opportunity for newness in spiritual encounter. The fact that other orders, groups, clergy of various denominations, and individuals have annual retreats as a requirement or personal discipline means that Ignatian roots in retreating have interacted with other spiritualities. This has led to the blossoming of retreats of great variety. There is also the reality of those who have occasional retreats, which spawns even more forms that are new.

The focus in this chapter will be on Ignatian spirituality, while acknowledging that Jesuits use more than only their own spirituality, and that Ignatius' influence has moved far beyond the Society of Jesus. Examination of the classical use of the *Exercises* will be followed by a study of some creative retreat ideas from Jesuits. Thereafter will be an investigation of some Ignatian presentations from beyond the Society of Jesus. Then contributions from Ignatian retreats to the wider Christian fold will be set forth.

## 2. USE OF THE *SPIRITUAL EXERCISES* IN A CLASSICAL MANNER

Ignatian retreats were originally given on a one-to-one basis. Their evolution saw them given, mostly, as preached retreats, with one director and a group of retreatants. In the

modern era, up to the mid 1960's, the full *Exercises* of thirty days were given in a relatively fixed programme to a group (Barry 1991:18-19). According to Green (1986:18), groups in such preached retreats numbered from thirty to two hundred people. These groups were too large for the director to interact with each individual. The director easily became a lecturer instead of a co-discerner. Barry (1991:19) describes his experience of the *Exercises* as follows: "The director gave four or five talks each day in which he set out the matter for prayer for the four or five hours of prayer." A later shift has been to one director with six to eight retreatants; each of whom the director can see individually on a daily basis. Another development, catering for larger numbers per director, has been the use of "semi-directed retreats" where one director sees eighteen to twenty retreatants, each on alternate days. This is suitable for retreatants with maturity in prayer (Green 1986:18-19). Thirty-day retreats now tend to follow the *Spiritual Exercises*, adapted to the individual's situation in line with Ignatius' guidelines.

A shortened form of the *Spiritual Exercises* is done over eight days. This is an annual event for Jesuits after completing a thirty-day retreat and for some who do the *Exercises* for the first time. The eight-day Ignatian retreat has developed more variety. Here we examine three Jesuit writers who express modern retreat forms based on the classical Ignatian presentation.

#### A. Thomas Green

An example of a modern Ignatian retreat, using an eight-day (or alternatively a twelve-day) format is that given by Green. He (1986:11) puts emphasis on such a retreat being "a vacation with the Lord", in contrast to a previous conception of Ignatian retreats as a time of "soul-scraping", or "an uncomfortable confrontation with the demands of God and with their own inadequacy and infidelity." This description represents a negative way of doing the *Exercises*, particularly with regard to the first "week". Green (1986:12) asserts the importance of taking Ignatius' *Exercises* on their own terms, rather than with preconceived additional notions. This helps to experience a truly joyous and liberating encounter with the loving God.

Following the eight-day format, Green (1986:33) sees Day One as introductory and suggests engaging in a review of the history of God's acts of love in the retreatant's life.

Day Two, which he (1986:41) links with the first week of the *Exercises*, is about encounter with God and one's true self at the present time of life. This concerns seeing self as God sees us, and involves self-knowledge, sin-consciousness and honest self-confrontation. It is about hollowing out a space for God to fill (1986:42-43). Green (1986:52) proposes the use of self-examining questions such as, "What would God like for us to confess?" and "How does God see us?" He (1986:52-54) writes of an "autobiographical approach", in which the retreatant thinks of what God likes in you, and then what God dislikes in you. There then follows a ranking of these qualities and actions, followed by asking God for correction or confirmation.

The Third Day, which is still within the First Ignatian Week, needs "a seeing with the heart", or a felt seeing (1986:59). This is a continued time of self-examination, with the importance of recognizing desolation, to make wise decisions, or to delay decision-making where desolation hampers making a suitable election (1986:69). Green (1986:61) highlights the necessity to recognise sin as sickness, rather than as malice, at this stage of the retreat.

The beginning of the Fourth Day corresponds with the start of the Ignatian second week. The emptiness within the retreatant is to be filled with the Lord, or the seeking can be viewed as being clothed with Christ (Gal.2:20) (1986:73). Green (1986:81) sees the fourth day as the central aspect of the retreat, for he states: "The heart of the whole retreat is our desire to be filled with Christ and to discover where he is leading us now." There is a focus on coming to know Jesus, which takes place through the Scriptures (1986:79). Hence, there is a concentrated reading of the Gospel account. This is done with the following purpose in mind: "We seek to allow him to penetrate into the corners of our lives which have not yet been filled with Christ in order to allow him to continue our conversion, since we are always *becoming* disciples" (1986:81).

Day Five continues with the second week focus on being filled with Jesus. Meditation is upon Christ's public life to concretely follow him (1986:100). This can be a time of decision, but not necessarily a new one (1986:101).



The Sixth Day is used to finish the second week theme. Green (1986:119) asserts that there needs to be a looking for one word or message in order to make a good retreat. This day is a time to clarify what that message is. He thus highlights the need for a special focus so that the benefit of retreating is not watered down by seeking to experience too many messages at one occasion. He (1986:120-121) argues for a holy realism that is, to see the retreat in the context of daily life. The formulating of a prayer expressing the particular message received is recommended. This prayer is said on this and the following days of the retreat. This helps keep alive the vision and spirit of the retreat. The prayer can then be used for "contemplation for attaining the love of God." The sending of the disciples also comes in on this day, evoking in the retreatant a sense of being sent (1986:131).

Day Seven focuses on being "loved unto death", and links with Ignatius' third week where the theme is Christ's suffering and death. Green (1986:137) sees this as a "time of confirmation". The purpose is "to be confirmed or strengthened for our living of the word that the Lord has spoken to us" (1986:138). Green (1986:141) links this with the Ignatian pattern by highlighting realising that Jesus suffered for us personally.

The Eighth Day is in line with the fourth week of the Ignatian *Exercises*. This links the day to the resurrection theme. Green (1986:169-170) also espouses the necessity to look back to the first day of the retreat to evaluate the retreat time as a whole and the discernment exercised on the retreat.

## B. Edward Yarnold

Yarnold presents a retreat in Ignatian form, following the format of the four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*. He includes some of Ignatius' *Exercises*, as well as his own adaptations. As the title of his book suggests, Yarnold (1991:7) sees a retreat as a "Time for God". The idea is to allow God to have the rightful place in one's life - at the centre (1991:7). Yarnold (1991:13) proposes the use of a good procedure for each meditation. He thus presents exercises designed to produce an effect, acknowledging the need for the action of the Holy Spirit. He suggests the following step-by-step process. First, be aware of the presence of God and ask the Spirit for grace to pray. Second, read the whole section of notes. Third, read the Biblical passages. Here follows, fourthly, the

jotting down of particular phrases that have a noteworthy impact while reading. This flows into the fifth step: keeping these phrases at hand and in mind. Sixth, pray for grace that is needed. Seventh, use the first phrase meditatively, repetitively, or to converse with God. A second phrase may be used in the eighth step, but dwelling on one phrase can be sufficient. The use of some set or known vocal prayers comes in step nine. Tenth, there is the bringing of the prayer to a conclusion. A brief thanksgiving prayer follows in step eleven. Twelfth, there is opportunity for evaluation, in order to consider any possible improvements. This is a basic outline to use through the “four weeks”.

It is noticeable that as a basic method, Yarnold makes use of a *lectio divina* approach to the Scripture passages. This indicates a readiness to borrow and supplement (in this instance from a Benedictine model) which is apparent in modern Jesuit presentations.

Yarnold's (1991:8-10) presentation is for an Ignatian eight-day retreat,<sup>44</sup> but his presentation is designed for a full-time or part-time retreat (of longer duration than the eight-day full-time one). His (1991:5-6) presentation is in the classic Ignatian form. The first “week” focuses on sin and forgiveness. The theme of the second “week” is the following of Christ. The Biblical passages are divided into three sections here. They are: Christ's call, to know him more clearly, and to follow him more nearly. The focus of the third “week” is the passion of our Lord. For the fourth “week”, the theme is the resurrection.

It is noticeable that the retreat guidelines and themes are presented in a way that indicates the Ignatian *Exercises* being applied to a wider audience than the Jesuit one. The presentation of the themes is in a simple and ecumenically sensitive manner. This exposition is an example of the outreach and appeal of Ignatian spirituality beyond the Society of Jesus.

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<sup>44</sup> His book “Time for God” was first published under the title: “Eight Days with The Lord” (1984).

### C. George Maloney

Maloney, who draws from the spirituality of Eastern Orthodoxy, presents an eight-day retreat which follows the Ignatian pattern. He (1982:11) outlines the purpose for such a retreat as follows:

We need to enter into an aloneness with the Alone, with God himself, if we are to find any meaning in our human existence. This is not escapism or avoidance of our responsibility to serve others. It is a movement of the Spirit to contact God and to experience him as the beginning and end of our lives.

Maloney presents three sub-themes for each day. At the end of each sub-theme a meditation is given.

The first day is a preparatory day, entitled “Alone with the Father” (1982:27). Maloney (1982:32-44) presents meditations indicating that God knows us in every detail, has called us by name and that we are not to worry about our lives.

On the second day, there is consideration of one’s sinfulness, under the theme “My Dark Side”, in line with Ignatius’ First Week. Maloney’s (1982:49) first meditation of the day is on “My Brokenness”, and involves prayerful consideration of a number of Scriptures on David’s repentance, the tears of a woman (Lk.7:36-50), turning to God with fasting and weeping, sin in one’s members, and the parable of the prodigal son. The second “meditation” involves half an hour each of praying the Jesus prayer, “Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner”, and a review of one’s daily life with God, neighbours and self (1982:56). The meditation after the third session of the day involves imaginatively being in Lazarus’ tomb and experiencing Jesus unbinding the retreatant. There is then the moving on to healing of memories and Maloney (1982:60) then recommends receiving the sacrament of reconciliation.

“Jesus – the Way to the Father” is the theme for the third day (1982:61). This is the beginning of linking with Ignatius’ Second Week. On this day “Jesus is seen as still touching us as he touched the broken ones of his world” (1982:64). The first session focuses on Jesus as king. The meditation involves consideration of Jesus before Pilate, who asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (Lk.23:3), and then pondering what kind of

king Jesus is for the retreatant (1982:74). The challenge is then to offer to follow him. The second session concerns Jesus' hidden life. Contemplation of Jesus' poverty, hard work, obedience and prayer is instructed. There follows consideration of the question, "What must your life be if your humanity is to become completely divinized by his Spirit?" (1982:84). The meditation of the third session is on the account of the twelve year old Jesus at the temple (Lk.2:41-52). Maloney (1982:91) also makes the invitation to flesh out one's baptism and to meditate on God's will for the retreatant.

The fourth day's theme is "Jesus, the Freest of All Persons". Maloney (1982:93) recommends:

Pray today and always for the grace to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more ardently and to follow him more closely. Seek to understand how attractive Jesus is in his freedom so that you may love him and receive his freeing power and be beautifully free in his love.

The first session emphasizes Jesus' integrated personality and the call is to see what level of harmonious integration there is in one's own life, and to pray for freedom (1982:98). Jesus' gentleness is the theme in the second session. Maloney (1982:106-107) instructs meditation on Jesus' humanity and emptying as related in words by St. Tychon of Zadonsk, a Russian of the eighteenth century. The third session is on the need for discipline. The meditation in this instance is on imaginatively seeing Jesus in his emptiness before Pilate, but Jesus giving himself to the retreatant (1982:115).

Day Five, "Jesus, Broken Love" (1982:117), continues with meditation on Jesus' life, but shifts closer to the cross. In the first segment, Jesus' temptations are considered. The call is to have a burning desire to have the same values as Jesus in the face of one's own temptations (1982:123). In the second segment, "Jesus as Suffering Servant", there is a meditation on the washing of the disciples' feet (1982:130). Thirdly, the focus is on "Power to Love". Maloney (1982:135-136) suggests reflection on the dignity of having been called by Jesus to be his follower, and of bringing forth the fruit of love and healing. There follows praying John 15 and the consideration of one's calling in relation to Jesus choosing of the twelve apostles and their being sent to preach and heal (Lk.9:1-6).

The sixth day links with the third week of Ignatius' *Exercises*. The theme is "The Seed of Wheat Falls and Dies" (1982:137). First, the focus is on the Eucharist, with meditation on the happenings of the Upper Room described in Jn.13:1-17:26 (1982:145). Secondly, the theme is "Agony in the Garden". The approach given is to share in Christ's sufferings in the garden or Caiphas' dungeon (1982:151). Thirdly, meditation on the crucifixion is prescribed (1982:156).

Maloney (1982:157) describes the seventh day of the retreat as "The Life of Glory". He (1982:158) makes a strong link between Jesus' death and resurrection as the retreat moves onto Ignatius' Fourth Week theme, for he says that "death through love is directly linked to glory." The theme for the first session of the day is "Jesus Risen", with meditation on three resurrection appearances. Maloney (1982:165-171) moves on to "The Indwelling Spirit" in the second session, with meditation on the first Pentecost experience. The title for the third session is "Transforming Light". The meditation this time is on the Transfiguration, with a "hearing" of being sent forth "to become light for your world" (1982:178).

The title of the eighth day is "A Diaphanous World". It is aimed to help transition from the "top of the mountain" to the "marketplace" (1982:179). The first meditation is on "The Indwelling Christ", with prayerful pondering on Jesus as the vine and believers as the branches (1982:185). The focus in the second segment is on the Body of Christ, with believers as Christ's body (1982:191). The third segment is on a well-loved Ignatian theme: "Finding God in All Things". The call is to do everything in daily work for the love of God, with the realisation that God is within the follower of Christ and in the material with which one is working. A meditation involving the offering of hands and lips to God concludes the day (1982:198).

Maloney's presentation is of a standard eight-day Ignatian retreat in which he shows a readiness to borrow wider than his own heritage. He also shows flexibility with regard to the beginning and end of the retreat so as to enable orientation at the beginning and re-orientation towards the world at the end. This indicates a greater awareness for those outside the Ignatian tradition who are interested in the *Exercises*, whose growing numbers have been evident since Vatican II Council (1962-1965).

### 3. CREATIVE MOVEMENTS IN RETREATS BY JESUITS

Jesuits have an annual retreat discipline. This, allied with interaction with other spiritualities, has seen a great variety of retreat models coming forth from Jesuits and others who draw from Ignatian spirituality. Here follows an examination of some retreats birthed out of Ignatian spirituality, but showing synthesis with other traditions and ideas.

#### A. Anthony de Mello

De Mello was a Jesuit who conducted retreats drawing from a variety of traditions including other religions. He is, nevertheless, Christ-centred in his approach. His retreat conferences reflect only the traces of Ignatius' format. De Mello (1998:119) writes of the customary start to an Ignatian retreat, the meditation on one's sinfulness and the seeking of pardon from God through the grace of repentance. This he (1998:125) regards as the meditation of those who have progressed a great deal in holiness. He gives special guidelines on prayer which includes petitionary prayer (1998:69-76) and the Jesus Prayer (1998:85-103).

Three guidelines are suggested by de Mello (1998:26-28) which link with his focus on prayer. Firstly, the strict observation of silence is highlighted. Secondly, he advocates the avoidance of reading, except reading Scripture and texts that will foster prayer. He recommends, thirdly, the investing of time heavily in prayer.

De Mello (1998:107-111) also highlights the use of shared prayer at silent retreats. This is prayer aloud and in a group gathering. Due to emphasis on silence he regards one session a day as the maximum, and participation not to be compulsory. Prophetic insights have been experienced in such times that have made a tremendous difference to some retreatants. Such prophecy is "speaking to someone on behalf of the Lord, giving someone a message from the Lord" (1998:113). This is not necessarily spoken specifically to an individual, but can be received as a message by people in a shared prayer situation. De Mello (1998:111) writes of such shared prayer: "You go there to pray with others, to pray for them and to ask for their prayers, to be open to what they are saying to us and to what the Spirit may inspire us to say to them." This method draws

from prayer meetings and allows the benefits of extemporary vocal prayer to filter into a silent retreat context.

## B. Franz Jalics

Jalics (2002) presents a retreat designed to engage in contemplative prayer in *Called to Share in His Life*. It is noteworthy that, despite being a Jesuit priest, he does not draw on Ignatian imaginative use of Scripture. Jalics (2002:324) seeks to help retreatants develop “simple prayer” or “active contemplation”, otherwise termed “loving attention to God”. He describes this as “a looking without words, thoughts, or a multitude of feelings.” The design of the outflow of the retreat is to continue in regular, preferably daily, meditation using the name Jesus Christ.

The retreat presented is a ten-day experience for a “closed” retreat. He also sees the possibility of doing the exercises he outlines in a retreat in everyday life. He envisages spending one to one and a half hours daily on the exercises, taking a fortnight over what would constitute a day in a closed retreat (2002:27).

The first day involves the instruction to “go out into nature and begin with the conscious effort of being aware” (2002:39). He places emphasis on developing “awareness”, initially through interaction with nature. This involves perceiving “everything just as it presents itself” (2002:38). Jalics (2002:37-38) asserts: “With awareness comes a completely new experience: we do not have to achieve a result.”

The beginning of the meditation times, from the second day onwards, involve the specific intention of giving the meditation session to God (2002:130). The second day requires meditation exercises sitting or kneeling in an upright position, with attention directed to the respiratory tracts. The idea is to feel the full extent of one’s breathing. At least eight of these sessions of 20-25 minutes each is recommended (2002:64-66). The focus of the third day’s meditations is on the centre of the palms of the hands. An association with Christ’s wounds is made, but particular emphasis is placed on awareness of the palms of the hands during these sessions of twenty minutes each (2002:94-96). The fourth day involves the same meditations as the previous day, but extending the time of each session to half an hour. The sessions on both the third and

fourth days are recommended to be done in pairs that is, two sessions consecutively with a five minute break in between (2002:130).

Meditation on the fifth day involves an interiorly said “Yes” into the palms of the hands with each exhalation. Jalics (2002:165) urges the increasing of the number of thirty-minute sessions to encompass six or even seven hours of meditation on this day. He (2002:165) also asserts: “Do not enter into the philosophy of the ‘Yes’.” He therefore recommends suspension of using the intellect in this exercise.

The sixth day meditations use the name of “Mary” or “Mother of God” in the same manner as the “Yes” of the previous day. If there is resistance to this usage, the alternative of using the retreatant’s own mother’s name is given (2002:199-200).

In these first six days there is nothing specifically Christian in the meditation exercises. Only an orientation at the beginning of meditation sessions can be seen as being pointedly Christian, and that is, if the retreatant has such an orientation. The use of “Mother of God” then orientates the way to the name of Jesus, especially for Roman Catholic retreatants. On the seventh day the name “Jesus Christ” is introduced for meditation and continues through to the tenth day. Jalics (2002:236) gives the following method: “With every exhalation now say the name of ‘Jesus’ into your hands with an inner sound and with every inhalation ‘Christ’.” The saying of the name “Jesus” accompanies inhalation more naturally in other meditation techniques which associate breathing in with being welcoming of and receptive to the Holy Spirit, and thus also Jesus Christ. Jalics (2002:236) acknowledges that it may seem more natural to say Jesus on inhalation but remains inflexible in his directions. Foster (1980:25) gives a similar meditation exercise of releasing burdens and tensions with exhaling and welcoming Christ’s love and light in association with breathing in, that many have found helpful.

Jalics (2002:299) outlines the purpose of contemplation using the name “Jesus Christ” as follows: “The repetition of his name turns us to his person, and that is already the goal. We encounter Jesus Christ ‘in’ his name and not ‘through’ his name.”



For Jalics (2002:302) there is a much deeper contact with Jesus Christ through the contemplation he describes than through the events, images and reflections of Bible meditation. In his understanding, the time for scriptural meditation has passed for the person who has fully entered into such contemplation. Jalics (2002:323-324) writes of levels of prayer, in the sense of saying that vocal prayer, mental prayer (including scriptural meditation, reflection and examination of conscience), and affective prayer (the sharing of deeper feelings with God) are all to be left behind by the person who has fully experienced “active contemplation”. Such an assertion is significant from a Jesuit, grounded in scriptural meditation in his training. He appears to be influenced by the Eastern Orthodox tradition. However, his presentation is done in too categorical a way. Prayer methods in retreat are not mutually exclusive from each other, however long a path a retreatant has travelled.

The implication from Jalics’ presentation is that he sees imageless contemplation as the highest form of prayer. He has thus moved from his Ignatian roots.<sup>45</sup>

#### C. Max Oliva

Oliva, a Jesuit, uses Ignatian style imagination, which he applies wider than scriptural imagination. This is in the form of imaginative prayer which links with emotional, psychological and spiritual healing.

In seeking to deal with what Oliva (2001:87) calls an “unfreedom” (this is linked to an excessive need), or a fear, he suggests the use of a freedom-prayer. In line with his own Jesuit experience, he presents the use of imaginative prayer, though not on a scriptural passage, for the freedom-prayer. He has borrowed from further afield.<sup>46</sup> In one meditation, he suggests imagining climbing a hill up to a lovely deep pool carrying two heavy rocks. These represent an unfreedom or excessive need, which has kept one bound for a long time, and a fear that keeps one from doing what God asks of the person. A meeting with Mary or Jesus takes place near the pool through which the participant needs to be convinced to drop the two stones into the pool from a bridge

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<sup>45</sup> See further in section 5 B of this chapter, *Ignatian Contemplation*, for related discussion.

<sup>46</sup> The following meditation has been adapted by Oliva from: Powers, I 1991. *Quiet Places with Mary: 37 “Guided Imagery” Meditations*. Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, pp.6-7.

above. The sense of freedom and release is experienced, followed by a new openness to God's presence and availability from the participant.<sup>47</sup>

#### D. Joseph Fitzmyer

Fitzmyer, a Jesuit scholar in Biblical Studies, uses a text that is not usual as a basis for Ignatian retreats, Paul's letter to the Romans. His (2004:3) "concern above all is to let Paul speak to modern exercitants." His departure from the Gospels to a Pauline basis for retreatant exercises is a creative one. However, his presentation comes across much in the style of a commentary, despite the fact that he had previously written a commentary on Romans<sup>48</sup>, and then sought to apply those insights to the *Exercises*. He does not fully link with Ignatius' *Exercises*. This is, at least in part, because the *Exercises* are so integrally linked to the Gospel accounts.<sup>49</sup>

Fitzmyer seeks to place each of his exercises into the retreat realm by posing a series of reflective questions, followed by a colloquy, which in most exercises is a Psalm. Here follows an example of his questions, which are based on Romans 5:12-21 (2004:90):

How much aware am I of my Adamic condition? Not just my mortality, but my sinful heritage? Even if I have never dishonoured God by transgressing his laws in imitation of Adam's violation of the command laid on him, am I nonetheless aware of my share in sinful humanity? How much more so, if I have indeed transgressed? By contrast do I fully comprehend the immense gift of uprightness that has come to me in Christ Jesus? Do I thank God for the grace bestowed in Christ Jesus that will bring me one day to eternal life?

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<sup>47</sup> I adapted this exercise for a group of Methodist ministers. We carried two actual stones and climbed a hill. Following a presentation and then consideration of an excessive need and a fear, they threw the stones into the sea. The sense of release and joy was tangible. We followed with a time of Holy Communion overlooking the ocean.

<sup>48</sup> Fitzmyer, J A 1993. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday.

<sup>49</sup> Lonsdale (1990:87), writing from a Jesuit perspective, asserts: "The gospels are the means by which God addresses each individual person in the circumstances of his or her life. They are an important document which mediates God to each of us."

## E. Analysis

The variety, borrowing from other traditions, and creativity expressed by Jesuits considered in this section indicates the interaction that Ignatian spirituality currently has with other traditions, both Catholic and others. This leads to the combining of different methods of prayer and other spiritual exercises on one retreat. Ignatian spirituality has also had influence upon other spiritualities, which is examined in the next section.

## 4. WIDER IGNATIAN INFLUENCE ON RETREATS

There are many who are not Jesuits who use Ignatian methods in retreats. Here we examine some examples.

### A. Margaret Silf

Silf presents the Ignatian *Exercises* for the everyday pilgrim in her book *Landmarks*. Her presentation brings across the *Exercises* in a modern context in which personal reflection is still essential. The desire to retreat, especially in line with Ignatius' nineteenth annotation, is still vital. She (1998:27) presents the intentions of the participant to be as follows on the Ignatian journey: discovering who I really am; directing myself towards God; noticing God's action in my life; responding to the movements of my heart; discovering the nature of my deepest desire; seeking God's will; becoming free of all that distracts me from my deepest desire; making choices in line with my truest self; connecting my lived experience with the life, death and resurrection of Christ; responding to God's love for me; and finding God in all things. These are basic expressions of Ignatian spirituality.

Silf uses images to express the *Exercises* in visual and pictorial fashion. In a sense, this is faithful to Ignatius' injunctions to use the imagination. Silf (1998:39) describes the four "weeks" of the *Exercises* as four "layers": weather, soil, rock and fire. The weather of the first week is "the weather of ourselves, our moods and feelings, our dependency on God, our transience, our unreliability, our fragmented nature, now rain, now sunshine, storm and glory." She uses this as a description of the brokenness of sin, "spanned by the rainbow of an unconditional love." The image for the second week is "the soil of our

growing, learning, listening, sitting at the feet of the Lord, imbibing his goodness; sharing in his earthly ministry; becoming, in him, the person we truly are.” The splintering, shattering rock is her image for the third week. This involves a breaking open and a breaking down. It is “the Calvary journey, with the Lord and in ourselves.” The fourth week image of fire is presented as that which breaks forth as a result of an earthquake. Of this fire, Silf (1998:39) writes: “[It is] consuming and destroying, or quickening and energising. Destroying all that is not Truth, and transcending truth into Life. The fire of the spirit, breaking open the locked space of the tomb.”

In her companion volume *Wayfaring*, Silf (2001) uses Ignatian-style imaginative use of Scripture passages to apply the Gospel message into one’s life as a reader in retreatant mode. Here follows an example of her use, inviting the reader into the milieu and experience of the passage described (2001:182):

Read the account of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples in the upper room, in John 20:19-23. Let yourself be there in imagination, and feel with the disciples something of the despair and fear that grip them. Bring your own fears into the scene. Notice who or what is evoking fear in you right now. The source of your fear is on the other side of the locked door. Is there anything you can do to open the doors to your fears? Simply notice how you feel, and what your real desire is in this place.

Now let Jesus come into your locked inner room, with his prayer for your “wholeness”. How do you feel? Is there anything you want to say to him? He shows you his wounds, and then he says that just as he has been sent by his Father, to kindle a new flame in the darkness of history, so he is sending *you*. But he doesn’t just commission you to go out into the world you fear so much. He gives you the empowerment to do so. He brings a new flame into being, and breathes new life, new hope, into the heart of your being. Can you remember any times when you have felt, perhaps unexpectedly, that you were able to cross some threshold that you would previously thought impossible? If so, recall that “resurrection event” with gratitude, and take hold of everything it means for you.

Silf (1999:33) uses the Ignatian focus on desire in her book on prayer *Come and See*. The question: “What am I really asking for?” becomes a crucial and valid one in prayer and in the broader context of retreats (1999:38). A vital part of prayer, in the Ignatian tradition, is to notice what one really is seeking, and then to ask for it (1999:33). This can be a very difficult step. It may involve the overcoming of the concern that desire is, in

some minds, automatically associated with sin. There is also the difficulty of actually identifying desires and uncovering the deepest desires. These are often in line with God's desire for human wholeness but are easily submerged under superficial and lesser wants and wishes (1999:33-35).

## B. Jane Ayer

The use of imaginative meditation on Scripture in the Ignatian style of using the senses and seeking to be a participant in the particular passage is used in many approaches to prayer. Ayer (1998) uses this style in her guided meditations. A passage is used to meditate upon a particular theme that is, a typical human experience, e.g., loss or gratitude.

Ayer's (1998:11-20) method constitutes guidance for a period of mini-retreat. She sets forth the theme followed by an opening prayer. Thereafter the Biblical passage is read. Relaxation exercises are a precursor to the imaginative meditation on the prescribed pericope. The design of the meditation is to evoke certain feelings in line with the set theme. Reflection questions to consider during the meditation time are then posed. Optional art expressions continue on the theme. A closing responsive prayer draws the time to an end.

One of the Ayer's themes is "Courage". The passage used is the account of Jesus' healing of the paralytic recorded in Mark 2:1-12. Ayer (1998:13) begins the scriptural meditation period as follows (she indicates where there are times of pausing):

You are in the middle of a crowd just outside a house in which Jesus is visiting . . . . Like those around you, you long to see his face and the action that is going on inside. You have just witnessed a group of people climbing up onto the roof, tearing off part of it. With them, they carried a paralysed man, and they are about to lower him through the roof so that he can get closer to Jesus.

. . . Keep moving gently through the crowd so that you can get closer, too . . . .

Further on in the meditation is the invitation to experience Jesus meeting with the participant. There is a drawing aside from the imaginative experience of the Biblical scene into relational encounter in line with the Scripture. Ayer (1998:15) writes:

As you walk together, Jesus lovingly asks you to share what paralyzes you . . . . to name the fears, weaknesses, sins, persons, or problem areas that cripple you . . . . Allow the caring and concern that you hear in Jesus' voice to encourage you now to open up and share all that is in your heart.

### C. Open Door Retreats

Open Door retreats are Ignatian retreats that consist of two-hour weekly sessions for nine consecutive weeks. They are designed to follow Ignatius' *Exercises* in an adapted form for people who are not able to get away for an extended retreat. The retreat format "was drawn together, in response to the need for an appropriate form of prayerful renewal, by two Sisters of the Cenacle Community in 1980" (The Retreat Association n.d:1). The Cenacle Community were helped in their spiritual formation by Jesuits from 1834 and have continued to practice Ignatian spirituality ever since<sup>50</sup> (Cenacle n.d:1). The name "Open Door" is taken from the image of the need for an opening of the door from Revelation 3:20 (The Retreat Association n.d:1-2).

## 5. OTHER RETREAT ISSUES RELATED TO IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

There are a number of contributions which Ignatian spirituality brings to Christian retreats. Some of these have been examined in the previous sections. Here follows four other issues which have ecumenical importance in terms of retreats, viz. discernment, contemplation, charismatic prayer and conversion.

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<sup>50</sup> The Cenacle Sisters began as the Congregation of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle in 1826 in La Louvesc, France. The founders were Father Stephen Terme and Mother Therese Couderc. Father Terme discovered Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* in 1829 when he made a retreat. He was so enthusiastic about them that he had the sisters make this form of retreat. Terme died in 1834. In his will, he confided his "daughters of the retreat" to the Society of Jesus, who had occasionally assisted him with the community. The Jesuits continued the formation of the sisters in Ignatian spirituality and in using the *Exercises*. Hence the Cenacle Sisters have been practitioners of Ignatian retreat forms since then (Cenacle n.d:1).

## A. Discernment

According to Green (1984:23), the principal charism of Ignatius and the Society of Jesus is “discernment of spirits”. Discernment is integral to Christian retreats because decision-making is often vital in a retreat. Hughes (1985:91) seeks to place “discernment of spirits” firmly in the realm of everyday experience by asserting that this Ignatian concern might be termed “sifting our moods and feelings” or “learning to read the body’s signals”. Bauerschmidt (2003:45-46) asserts that Ignatius has relevance in the current situation, where for many people the multitude of activities and demands make it difficult to have focus. Many of these modern pursuits become “gods”. Ignatius’ insights help one experience “purity of heart”, or “focused single mindedness”, amid the babble of many voices, says Bauerschmidt (2003:46). He thus rightly indicates the importance of discernment in current spirituality, and therefore the integral place of Ignatian “discernment of spirits”. Hence, Ignatius’ rules for discernment can be helpful on retreat.

Green (1984:83-84) points out that there are times of revelation, although they tend to be rare. In such cases, “God’s will is so clear that the soul cannot doubt what [God] wants.” There are also times of reasoning for making a decision. This involves the use of “natural powers of reasoning and imagination to weigh the pros and cons of the situation and come to a tentative decision concerning God’s will” (1984:85). Nevertheless, for Ignatius (1951:74), discernment proper involves the following: “When much light and understanding are derived through experience of desolations and consolations and discernment of diverse spirits.” A choice, often made through reasoning, needs to be presented to God for confirmation using Ignatius’ principles in respect of consolation and desolation (Green 1984:88). Green (1984:150) also highlights the “danger of urging retreatants to commit themselves to a plan of life...Such a plan is good and valuable, but only if it is brought to the Lord for confirmation and ratification.”

What Ignatian spirituality brings to Christian retreats is the vital importance of making good decisions without letting desolation spoil such choices.

## B. Ignatian Contemplation

Contemplative prayer is a vital part of many Christian retreat experiences. While Ignatian prayer is not especially known to be contemplative in nature, certainly not in the sense of imageless contemplation or apophatic prayer, it does have a contribution in this area. Ignatian prayer can be described as imaginative meditation. According to Aschenbrenner (2004:78-79):

Ignatian prayer is a progressive concentration and assimilation of a person's energies and powers in an encounter of love with God in Jesus. Primarily neither contemplative nor meditative, the heart of Ignatian prayer is this progressive assimilation. The types of prayer in the *Exercises* move you from consideration to meditation, to contemplation, to repetition, to application of senses. This development draws you gradually into the simplicity and intimacy of the encounter with Jesus.

One of Ignatius' favourite forms of prayer was the "application of the senses". In such prayer one imagines being in a scene from the Gospels and seeks to imaginatively engage the senses to the story (Oliva 2001:26-27). As Oliva (2001:27) relates, "If you have a good imagination,...this can be a powerful way to realise your friendship with the Lord."

Ignatian contemplation is imaginative by nature. According to Lonsdale (1990:87): "The subject matter of Ignatian contemplation is typically some aspect of God's dealings with the world, especially as revealed in the images and stories of Scripture."

However there are other viewpoints from Jesuits. Faricy (1989:27) asserts that contemplation is "conceptless". Johnston (1985:113-114), a Jesuit who writes on mysticism, sees the *Exercises* as means to move in prayer to mystical silence:

Early in the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius speaks of a discursive prayer wherein one freely uses one's memory, understanding, and will. But now, at the end, he proposes something different. Now he says in effect: "Lord, take my memory – I *will not remember*. Take my understanding – I *will not think*. Take my will – I *will make no colloquy*." And in this way I am brought into silence, into mystical silence, without words or reasoning or petition. Now I enter a state where words are no longer necessary.



The Ignatian idea of contemplating God in all things has a contribution to make to the use of contemplation on retreats. Lonsdale (1990:88) writes as follows concerning such contemplation:

This is based upon a particular understanding of created reality by which the world created is seen as an image which mediates the presence of God to us in various forms, and as an arena in which God is continuously at work. If God is also really present and active in the world at every level of being, if the world truly is a sacrament of God, who is Lord of creation, and Lord of history, then any reality in the world, person, event or object can become an image of God and a focus of contemplation.

Lonsdale (1990:88) notes that “finding God in things” does not imply that every event and action is a divine epiphany. This helps with regard to discernment because not all happenings are regarded as divinely inspired, according to this viewpoint.

There is not unanimity amongst Jesuits about the nature of contemplation, especially because there is a drawing from other prayer styles. For example, Hughes (1985:43-45), a Jesuit, presents a variety of prayer ideas with coming to stillness exercises, a prayer of the senses, and rhythmic prayers (which are repetitive prayers said in conjunction with one’s breathing, or with steps while walking). There is also a variety of prayer methods presented by Ignatius, meaning that there is not only one Ignatian style of prayer. Modern Ignatian retreats, drawing on finding God in all things, can therefore include a variety of prayer methods depending on leadership, the retreatant’s own experience, and flexibility that is allowed or even encouraged.

### C. Charismatic Prayer

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues in prayer is linked with contemplation by the Jesuit, Faricy. He (1989:26) regards contemplation as a “mysterious and conceptless interpersonal encounter with Jesus Christ.” It is noteworthy that he views contemplation in the apophatic sense. For Faricy (1989:27) glossolalia is a type of contemplative prayer and a help into further contemplation. Oliva (2001:28) also sees speaking in tongues as a form of contemplative prayer. Praying in tongues, Faricy (1989:27) asserts, is “a non-

conceptual prayer, a conceptless looking with love at the Lord.” This linkup between praying in tongues and contemplative prayer makes possible the stretching of Pentecostals and Charismatics into new avenues of prayer and retreat.

#### D. Second Conversion

According to Faricy (1989:53), the idea of a second conversion came from the first few generations of Jesuits in the sixteenth century. The first conversion was seen as the decision to give one’s life to the Lord as well as acceptance of the Jesuit vocation. The holding together of these two distinct happenings is noticeable. The third year of the novitiate was intended to dispose the Jesuit to a second conversion. This was “marked by new graces of prayer, a new outpouring of apostolic zeal and gifts, and a new level of relationship with the Lord” (1989:53). Faricy (1989:53-54) asserts such experiential happenings have been verified in modern people’s lives, sometimes in private prayer and, on occasions, in directed retreats.

Faricy (1989:54) brings in a link with the charismatic longing for the gift of the Holy Spirit with the Jesuit “second conversion”. This is the case, for Faricy (1989:54) asserts that such an experience is often the result of prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In Pentecostal understanding, the “baptism in the Spirit” is seen as a second distinct post-conversion happening. A new openness to the Holy Spirit is integral to a modern Ignatian understanding of retreat, despite the lack of a developed presentation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the *Exercises* (Lonsdale 1990:53).

In respect of the use of the word “conversion”, every retreat experience needs to embrace the idea of conversion, for it is a meeting with God in which the retreatant is not left the same. This may be a profound “second conversion”, or one of many conversions on the spiritual pilgrimage.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The *Spiritual Exercises* still have an integral place in the milieu of Christian retreats. They are used in their classical format to great effect in many lives. Creativity, along with interaction with other traditions, sees new forms emerging. It is apparent in this chapter

that silence, group prayer, imageless contemplation, imaginative prayer wider than straight scriptural meditation, use of the Scriptures other than the Gospels, and charismatic prayer (including glossolalia) have a place in Ignatian retreats, along with the specific Ignatian avenues of the *Spiritual Exercises*, imaginative use of the Gospel accounts for prayer, and discernment.

The interest that Ignatian spirituality evoked in the twentieth century has seen its influence penetrate into diverse traditions. With increased busyness, greater freedom to travel and move home, more commercialisation, and wide-scale mechanization there has been an accompanying need: the soul-searching desire for time with God. The search for suitable tools in this kind of world became urgent for many. It was also an age with a new focus on psychology in relation to the spiritual. It is not surprising that Ignatian spirituality with the opportunity it gives to retreat (rather than frenetic busyness), to use the imagination (instead of rational thought alone), and to experience psychological-spiritual growth (rather than an emphasis on material and positional success), should be viewed as a vital tool. Hence, Ignatian retreats have grown in use across Christian traditions in current usage.

Christian retreats are, nevertheless, practiced much wider than in Ignatian circles and styles, and to this we turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 9

### OTHER CURRENT RETREATS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The variety in Christian retreats currently is extensive. The Retreat Association (2005:1) in the United Kingdom lists a number of retreats and workshops about which they supply brief information. Their list gives an indication of the variety in Christian retreating: individually-guided retreats, contemplative retreats, theme retreats, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, Myers-Briggs workshops, Enneagram workshops, Journalling workshops, Open Door retreats, retreats in daily life, weeks of accompanied prayer, group retreats, quiet days, choosing a spiritual guide, finding silence and stillness, prayer, and silent prayer groups. This is, by no means, an exhaustive list.

The large variety of types of retreat and the practices used on retreat means that this examination of current retreats is selective to a degree. However, varied and diverse retreat forms are examined, to ensure that the study is sufficiently broad. In this chapter, there will be focus upon extended solitude in the hermit life and other forms. There will then be a short examination of recent retreat growth in Protestant Churches, as this has extended the use and influence of retreats greatly. Following this will be a section on personal retreats in the form of centring down, short retreats that constitute a portion of a day, one-day retreats, longer retreats, and individually given retreats. Consideration of the use of spiritual disciplines for retreats follows. The influence of Eastern Orthodoxy on retreats in the Western Church, particularly through the idea of the *poustinia*, is then examined. The use of journalling is extensive on retreats; therefore, a section is devoted to this practice. A study of group retreats follows. This includes consideration of planning principles for group retreats and the following types of retreat: dialogical retreats, personally guided retreats in a group setting, preached retreats, Emmaus Walks, Spiritual Enrichment Encounters with Christ, and Shalom retreats. Thereafter there is a short section on Daily Life Retreats. An examination of a spiritual formation academy's use of retreat principles follows. Then there are sections that consider aspects of African and Native American spiritualities that have applications for Christian retreats.

## 2. EXTENDED SOLITUDE

### A. The Hermit Life

The clearest form of Christian retreat is in extended solitude. Hermits practice this in a permanent or semi-permanent fashion. Most hermits are nuns or monks who are attached to an order that recognises the hermit's calling. Some hermits, especially those who are experienced, have some form of ministry through correspondence, or by giving spiritual counsel. Where such a call is evident, there is the necessity to have the spiritual sensitivity to know when to break from silence and solitude (Clare 1977:75).

The extreme solitude of hermits readily leads to questions of relevance for society. Hermits, and the wider Church, seek to explain the place of the solitary life, which has never ceased to exist in the Christian East, and is being increasingly rediscovered in the West. Allchin (1977:77) gives some of the reasons for the hermit life as follows. Firstly, the life of solitude is "in profound communion with the whole Church and all [humankind]." Secondly, hermits are "called to experience with an especial directness the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, into which all Christians are called to enter." Thirdly, the existence of solitaries helps others to realise the solitary dimension of their lives. Walls (1977:50), in asserting the vital place of the solitariness of hermits and others, for the benefit of the whole Church, says, "Communal theophany is unusual in the Bible, but all theophany is for community." Hermits thus see their role as an integral, though small, part of the Church's ministry. They also point out the vital place of prayer for the whole Church.

### B. Long periods of Solitude

Some monks and nuns practice long periods of solitude. For example, Brother Ramon (1987:186), an Anglican Franciscan, has spent several six-month periods in solitude. In these times, he had some support from his community. He subsequently lived the life of a hermit.

Paul Hawker (2001) went on a forty-day period<sup>51</sup> of solitude in the wilderness and mountains of New Zealand, without external support. His spiritual quest was that of a family and career man. He took to heart going into the wilderness for a Biblical forty days. It was a Christian experience of retreat of profound proportions for a man in mid-life who engaged the elements and met with God. His story is a representative one, not in the sense of the wilderness extremes, but with regard to time in solitude that is needed by so many busy people.

### 3. RECENT RETREAT GROWTH IN PROTESTANT CHURCHES

The practice of making retreats that became integral to the life of Roman Catholic and Anglican clergy was noticed in Protestant circles in the mid twentieth century, as Christian groupings began to interact more with others beyond their own denomination. One of the results was the role of retreats being seen and tried out. This brought a new dimension to the prayer life of a number of Protestants, through practising meditation and contemplation.

Ward (1967:126), a Methodist minister who was a forerunner in seeing the place of retreat beyond Anglo-Catholic circles, asserts:

When people are persuaded to leave the environment of their daily life and go some distance into a completely new spiritual situation (especially if it is in beautiful surroundings and where there is a long tradition of community prayer) they find that they are able to receive in this isolation and concentration much more of God than they apparently receive in the familiar pattern of regular weekly meetings of worship or instruction in the life of the local Church. It is very likely that this more concentrated and prepared method of spiritual rehabilitation is going to replace some of the traditional weekly programmes of the average Church.

Ward (1967:127) sees silence as integral to this movement to retreat, even where participants come from traditions in which silence is not the norm. She says that in silence the true self can hear itself speak, instead of the false. Writing of this need for silence Ward (1967:127) asserts:

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<sup>51</sup> Due to health concerns about frostbite, he ended the time on the 37<sup>th</sup> day.

This repels or intrigues people according to their spiritual make up and present need, but to those who are intrigued the realisation of the value of silence is a moment of true spiritual discovery in their lives. It is the awakening of a thirst that will never leave them, the thirst for silence.

Job and Shawchuck (1990), who are Methodists, have been instrumental in emphasising the place of both daily devotions and monthly days of retreat. They (1990:23) give a daily regimen as follows: invocation prayer; a Psalm; readings from various sources of devotion and theology, designed to also be used for reflection; Scripture reading for the day, which links with the Sunday lectionary readings and theme; reflection in silence and in writing especially on the Scripture passage; prayers for the Church, others and self; a prescribed hymn; and a benediction prayer.

The recommendation from Job and Shawchuck (1990:16) is to use their retreat outlines for a full day's retreat, and to make such a retreat monthly. They only give the basic outline for such retreats. An example of a day's retreat entitled "Prayer and My Life" (1990:345) begins with arrival and getting settled. There follows a set prayer: "Our God, who always calls us to prayer, teach me in these hours to pray as I should and for what I should. In Jesus' name. Amen." Thirty Minutes of silent listening is then recommended. A Scripture reading (Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 63; Matthew 6:1-17; Romans 8:18-39), using one passage for each cycle, follows. The recommendation is to follow a pattern of personal response, journalling, prayer, decision for action, reading and reflection (from an anthology of readings) and recreation or rest. The cycle is repeated with a new reading. When a group has gone on retreat a Love Feast and/or Wesleyan Covenant Service can follow. A Covenant prayer is then given: "My Lord, how good it is, how blessed, to be with you in this place of prayer. Send me from this place in the power of your ever present Spirit. Amen."

Job (1997:17-19) writes of spiritual life retreats, which are designed to enhance the spiritual life of congregations and individuals. He highlights four distinct kinds of retreat that are frequently practiced within this area of retreats. These are dialogical retreats, personally guided retreats, preached retreats and private retreats. The last mentioned, private retreats, will be considered under the heading "Personal Retreats". The first three will be considered under "Group Retreats".

#### 4. PERSONAL RETREATS

Retreats spent alone with God, generally with some basic guidelines have become increasingly popular. This is especially so because of adaptability to a wide variety of situations, both with regard to schedules and in respect of differences in spiritual growth or personal needs.

##### A. Centring Down

On personal retreats, various meditation, prayer and contemplation exercises are often used. The importance of centring down, or focusing one's prayer, and moving away from mind and sensory distractions, is a common theme among writers in order to spend retreat time fruitfully. On short retreats, but also applicable to longer periods, there is the need to centre down. This is to focus one's attention when beginning a retreat. This can also be called "re-collection" (Foster 1980:24). Foster (1980:24) says of centring down: "It is a time to become still, to enter into the recreating silence, to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become [centred]."

Many centring techniques for prayer include concentration on the breathing<sup>52</sup> and concentration on the body such as deliberate tensing and relaxation of the body progressively through the anatomy. This is in acknowledgement that one's body is integrally involved in prayer. Wuellner (1987:10) points out: "Because our faith is rooted in the incarnation of Jesus, any form of spirituality we claim must also be *incarnational*, which by definition includes the wholeness of the person." Whitcomb (2002:17) suggests an interesting breathing exercise during a retreat on the topic of the Sabbath. This involves rhythmically breathing in creativity and breathing out Sabbath. This exercise comes from an insight from Muller (1999:36), who notes that in Ex.31:17, where God is described as "resting" or being "refreshed". He asserts that the literal sense is that "God exhaled". Thus, Muller (1999:36) says: "The creation of the world was like the life-quickenning inhale. The Sabbath is the exhale."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Chapter 5, Section 5A on breath prayers and Chapter 8, Section 3B for more on breathing and prayer.

<sup>53</sup> The Hebrew word *vainaphesh* (refreshed) comes from the root *nephesh*. The verb form means respire, take breath, refresh oneself (Davidson 1981:558), blow or breathe (Gesenius 1979:556).



Wuellner (1987:47-48) relates a meditation that involves progressive consideration through the body.

In a restful posture, breathe gently and slowly. Picture God's love rising like a healing spring of water, a river of light from the very (centre) of the earth. Picture it flowing slowly into your feet and legs, and then, with each slow, gentle breath, rising higher into the body: up through the abdomen, the back, the fingers, the arms, the chest, the shoulders, the neck, into your facial muscles (especially the eyes and jaw), into the whole head area, then flowing from the head like a fountain and down around the outside of the body. Your whole body is filled with the warm, healing river of light.

Wuellner (1987:48-49) uses this meditative technique as a precursor to bring unhealed hurts to God, or to use daily as a centring exercise.

An exercise from Foster (1980:24), in using the physical to aid centring down, is called "palms down, palms up". This involves putting the palms downwards as a symbolic indication of the desire to turn over any concerns to God. Prayers of handing over tensions, concerns and anxieties to God accompany this. The upward turning of palms is a symbol of one's desire to receive from God.

Another example comes from Edwards (1995:36-40) called "Presence through Sound and Silence". He suggests hearing a sound without labelling it or judging whether one likes the sound or not. This helps with awareness, rather than being a distraction (1995:36). Edwards (1995:37-38) also asserts the value of chanting, especially through using a spiritually meaningful and powerful word, such as *Adonai* (Lord), *Abba* (Father), *Amma* (Mother) or *Emmanuel* (God with us).

## B. Short Retreats

DelBene and Montgomery (1984:21-24) outline a two-hour retreat plan which is suitable for beginners, as well as more advanced retreatants, as follows. At the start, there is the

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The applied meaning for *nephesh* is "soul", as being able to breathe is implied for having a soul. Refreshing is thus allied to taking breath. The description of God being "refreshed" on the Sabbath in Ex. 31:17 could apply as readily to inhaling as exhaling. Perhaps refreshing links more readily with breathing in.

creation of a suitable environment and an opening prayer (five minutes). There follows a ten-minute period of becoming still using both breathing and repetition of a prayer or song. Reading and reflection on a Scripture passage follows for twenty-five minutes. A brief fifteen-minute meditation that presents another view of the passage, or enables seeing an aspect of the story that may not have been considered before, follows under the heading: "Consider another dimension". A break to rest or walk for a quarter of an hour comes thereafter. A half hour is set aside for considering the inner dimension, which is a period devoted to inner reflection, normally involving writing, and usually is designed to seek clarification regarding God's action in the retreatant's life. Praying a response follows, using one's own prayer style or a set prayer (ten minutes). There is a final reflection, involving a review of the time alone with God, and a brief closing prayer.

DelBene and Montgomery (1984:33-41) title one retreat session "Our Many Faces". This is based on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). The method used in reflecting on the Scripture involves the imaginative identification with each of the characters in the parable. The questions are posed as follows: How am I like the robbers? How am I like the person beaten on / the priest / the Levite / the Samaritan / the innkeeper / the beast of burden? A time of journalling is then proposed in which personal examples are required to complete the following sentences: I'm like the robbers when I ...; I'm like the person beaten on when I..., etc. Meditation on the main insight gained from this exercise is then suggested. This procedure draws on Ignatian style imaginative entering into the Biblical account, which is a much used retreat method to personalize the reading of Scripture.

In another retreat, DelBene and Montgomery (1984:44-45) propose imagining the account of a woman caught in adultery and brought before Jesus (Jn.8:2-11), from the perspective of different people in the story. These are Jesus, the Pharisees and the woman. The perspective of the crowd can also be added. This utilises a method of reading Scripture from the eyes of the people in the pericope.

The *lectio divina* method of reading Scripture (cf. Ch.4.6) readily applies to short retreats, and can be used on longer retreats too. Wiederkehr (1997:12-20), a Benedictine nun (and thus schooled in the *lectio* method) presents a six-stage format for short retreats based on the idea of growth. The first element is quieting the soul, which

she relates to “the fallow season”. This is silent preparation time. Secondly, there is reflective reading, related to the sowing of the seed. This is deep listening through unhurried Scripture reading. The third stage is contemplative sitting, or “resting in the soil”. Here the period of contemplation is placed after the first reading and before the scriptural meditation, unlike the classical *lectio divina* method. The suggestion is to spend at least twenty minutes of contemplation. Fourthly, there is meditation, which is compared with reaping. This involves further reading of the Word. From this reading a word or phrase needs to be gleaned which is to then be a songline to be carried through that day. The fifth element is prayer, “the song of the seed”. This is a personal response prayer time due to interaction with the Word of God. There is then, sixthly, journaling (cf. Section 7 in this chapter), which she relates to gleanings. She suggests using many and varied journal entries: memories, poems, prayers, songs, ideas and quotes. Wiederkehr is willing to be flexible with a long-standing and classical practice. Such creativity can be commended, so long as the basis from which it is taken is given the commitment it deserves. Such a commitment to *lectio divina* is clear in Wiederkehr’s treatment of the method and Biblical passages. Encounter with God needs to be placed as more important than method; therefore flexibility is to be welcomed.

### C. One-Day Retreats

The value of retreats of a full day is increasingly being recognised. Quiet days are offered as an opportunity even for busy people (and, in a sense, especially for those who are busy). As Huggett (2000:63) asserts, “For the person who desires to deepen their relationship with God, (the clearing of space in our diaries to enjoy a Quiet Day) is a wise move because such occasions provide...much needed time and space to make prayer a priority.”

Dove (1996) presents a one-day retreat that has seven sessions, each according to the applicable time of day. Dawn is marked by the call to praying in silence (1996:22). She (1996:30) then suggests having a walk with God, either real or imaginary. Dove (1996:33) proposes reflection on this time by choosing and drawing a symbol that expresses how the retreatant feels. The symbolic is suggested further in the retreat too. For the second session, in the early morning, Dove (1996:35-47) focuses on solitude and then sin and forgiveness. Personal examination questions are given with an outflow

into specific thankfulness. The late morning (third) session has the themes of “God the Father and Creator” and “God the Holy Spirit” (1996:48). Dove (1996:58-68) invites the evoking of memories and the describing and reflecting on what one sees through one’s window in order to give a reflective opportunity in considering one’s relationship with God. The fourth session, in the early afternoon, begins reflection on Jesus. In this case, it is especially on his humanity. The session begins with the invitation to write a letter to God, “straight from the heart” (1996:69-70). Dove (1996:72) asks the retreatant to consider what it would be like to spend a day with Jesus, and to describe this in writing. She (1996:78-85) continues with Gospel meditations, in Ignatian style, to ponder on Jesus. The late afternoon (fifth) session continues with reflection on Jesus, especially as “Son of God”. Dove (1996:99) suggests writing a letter to Jesus as the retreatant has discovered him in the preceding time of reflection, and drawing whatever symbol of Jesus seems appropriate. The evening time, the sixth session, involves reflection on self, with specific questions to consider on body, mind and emotions (1996:106-107). The final session, at night, concerns “Looking Outward” and “Looking Ahead” (1996:116). This involves considering one’s neighbours and considering how one’s retreat will affect the next day and beyond (1996:117-121). Dove (1996:124) then suggests writing a letter to one’s self from God. This is designed to be a way of trying to see self as God sees one, and to see the retreat day as God sees it.

This presentation indicates the growth of one-day experiences of retreat, and the adaptation of longer retreat formats to a single day, or even shorter, as is evident in other presentations. The use of symbols, letter writing and journaling are noticeable, along with Scripture meditation.

Whitcomb (2002) presents one-day retreats with a common, though flexible, format throughout. The format involves planning in the week before the designated retreat day by focusing on a set reading and the theme of the retreat. Whitcomb (2002:13) advises the creating of sacred space. An example is as follows: “Create an altar by covering a small table with an old-fashioned white lace or linen cloth. Place on the cloth one flower in a small, simple vase and light a white candle.” The morning includes centring prayer, reading a Scripture passage and a meditation from the scriptural theme. A reflection period follows. This includes aspects such as the consideration of questions, writing, singing and drawing a symbol. Lunch and free time follow. A centring exercise begins

the structured afternoon time. Thereafter meditation on given material is followed by an afternoon reflection hour. Reflection questions and creative responses in writing or using artwork are given. A closing ritual to round off the retreat is suggested. Ideas here include singing a given song, saying words of blessing, writing a verse, and making an article to be a reminder of the retreat. Whitcomb (2002:94-96) also gives additional ideas and material to extend her one-day outlines into longer retreats.

Job (1997:18-19) writes of private retreats. Generally, these are done alone, where no spiritual guide is available. The situation is often in seeking discernment on personal matters, although it can be a time of simply being with God without outward distractions. Such retreats “may be built around a Scripture passage, a classic text in spirituality, or a contemporary spiritual reading source. At other times the retreat will be formed around the need of the person and perhaps most frequently around the basic themes of the spiritual life” (1997:19).

Job (1997:103-108) gives an example of a one-day private retreat, involving silent listening, Scripture reading, journal writing, prayer, reflection, rest or recreation, and a plan of covenant or commitment. He (1997:109-114) also gives guidelines for “an action retreat”, which is a single day or three separate sessions, designed to help people prayerfully make decisions in deciding on a course of action.

#### D. Longer Retreats

Brother Ramon (2000) gives a guide for a weeklong retreat based on the original creation week. He (2000:24-25) outlines a flexible daily structure. This includes a psalm and meditation before breakfast. Afterwards the morning focuses on a given theme, and includes centring down in prayer, the prescribed Scripture reading, a meditation guide that is provided, and then an exercise relating to the theme, e.g. a walk, meditation at sunrise, or going to a river (2000:47-83). Following lunch, manual work or creative activity is suggested. An evening theme follows a 4:30 p.m. refreshment break, which leads into another exercise. Thereafter a psalm and meditation follows. Music, reflection on the day and journal writing are recommended for the nighttime.

The daily themes are as follows: Day 1: Earth (morning) and Seasons (evening); Day 2: Sun and Moon; Day 3: Sea and River; Day 4: Mountain and Valley; Day 5: Wilderness and Garden; Day 6: Trees and Animals; Day 7: Sabbath and Paradise. Evening exercises include activities such as writing out a set prayer, reflecting on its meaning, moving out into the dark with a candle or torch imagining the experience in the Garden of Gethsemane (Day 5) (2000:129), and, for Day 6, observing an animal and actually doing something, or resolving to act, for an animal in need (2000:153). Br. Ramon (2000:158) suggests participation in a community Eucharist on Day 7.

The sense of rhythm with God-given time is apparent in Br. Ramon's presentation. His (2000:175-179) desire is to enable retreatants to experience creation-centred and redemption-centred spirituality, both nature and grace.

Foster gives another example of using the rhythms of time for retreat. He (1992:106) writes of his practice of scheduling four private retreats, following the seasons of the year – winter, spring, summer and autumn. These are times of solitude of twenty-four to forty-eight hours in duration. Such retreats often involve reflection and discernment in decision-making.

#### E. Individually Given Retreats

Such retreats, which can also be termed "individually guided retreats", are usually conducted in silence, in which a companion will, in a sense, accompany the retreatant through the retreat. The companion, or prayer guide, is available for appointment for regular, personal one-on-one meetings (Silf 2002:34). There is, at least, a daily time of meeting to share experiences with the prayer guide (2002:6-7). In these retreats it is normally only meals and daily appointments with a prayer guide that are set. Otherwise, each retreatant needs to plan his or her own time with regard to prayer, spiritual exercises, rest, exercise and relaxation (2002:7).

### 5. THE USE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES IN RETREAT

Spiritual discipline is integral to making a retreat, especially where silence and time alone are involved. Without discipline, the experience easily becomes marked by

distraction and the dilution of the original intention. Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline* (1980) has placed the role of classic devotional disciplines into the mainstream of Christian thought and practice. Foster (1980) categorises a list of twelve disciplines under three headings. The Inward Disciplines given are: meditation, prayer, fasting and study. Outward Disciplines listed are: simplicity, solitude, submission and service. The Corporate Disciplines are as follows: confession, worship, guidance and celebration. These disciplines are readily applicable to retreats. Indeed, without some of them, such as prayer and solitude, there would be major gaps in retreat experience. With some of these disciplines, adaptation of their role is needed where retreat is done fully alone. Griffin (1997) writes on applying these twelve disciplines to retreats. Even when retreat is done alone, she (1997:50) points out that our friends are with us in spirit, and people are held close in prayer. The corporate disciplines therefore are still able to be practiced while on personal retreat. Some people even write letters while alone on retreat (1997:50).

Griffin (1997:67-77) gives outlines for three retreats of different lengths. A one-day retreat with Hannah and Samuel has the general intention of "Renewing One's Call". A three-day retreat focuses on the prophets with the desire to enter the theme of "Hearing God's Voice". Readings are given from Elijah's life, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Second Isaiah. A seven-day retreat, using Mark's Gospel, has the general intention of a deeper understanding of discipleship. The whole Gospel needs to be read over the course of the week. This means nurturing the discipline of study along with prayer and reflection. Some of Griffin's (1997:77) reflection questions for this retreat are as follows: How far did I go with Jesus the Galilean today? In what ways is he leading and challenging me? How did he deepen my understanding of faithfulness and discipleship? How did I feel inadequate and afraid? How am I closer to Jesus?

Spiritual disciplines are integrally part of any deep retreat experience. Therefore, except where concentration on disciplines becomes more important than relationship with God, an intentional focus on constructive use of these disciplines is helpful on retreat.

## 6. EASTERN ORTHODOXY'S INFLUENCE ON WESTERN RETREATS

The use of the Jesus Prayer and icons has come into some Western retreats. For example, DelBene and Montgomery (1984:18) suggest using an icon (or a candle, flowers, cross or crucifix) to focus attention at the beginning of a retreat. Edwards (1995:50-53) gives a spiritual exercise which he calls "Praying through an Icon", which involves using an icon, or something with iconic value, as an aid for focus in prayer.

The idea of the *poustinia*, a Russian word meaning "desert", has had an impact on Catholic and Protestant spirituality through the book of that name by Catherine de Hueck Doherty (1977), a Russian who moved to North America. *Poustinia* can also mean the place where a hermit goes, and thus takes on the connotation of a hermitage (1977:30). According to De Hueck Doherty (1977:30), to the Russian, a *poustinia* "means a quiet, lonely place that people wish to enter, to find the God who dwells within them." By application, this could be an isolated place or even a room in one's house (1977:30-31). A Russian *poustinia* has a resident, called a *poustinik*, who having gone there for the sake of others, engages in prayer (especially the Jesus Prayer), but is also available and hospitable to visitors (1977:38-45).

For De Hueck Doherty (1977:63) the *poustinia* in the West is a place for people to come for a period, pray and fast. This is therefore a retreat experience. She (1977:83) extends the idea of *poustinia* to a disposition of the heart. Therefore, the *poustinia* experience becomes independent from a particular place. De Hueck Doherty (1977:83) says, "When this work of the Holy Spirit is really allowed to take place in a human heart, the person is utterly indifferent as to where geographically, he (or she) is situated." In this regard, she (1977:21-22) asserts:

Deserts, silence, solitudes are *not necessarily places but states of mind and heart*. These deserts can be found in the midst of the city, and in the every day of our lives. We need only to look for them and realise our tremendous need for them. They will be small solitudes, little deserts, tiny pools of silence, but the experience they will bring, if we are disposed to enter them, may be as exultant and as holy as all the deserts of the world, even the one God himself entered. For it is God who makes solitude, deserts and silences holy.



The *poustinia* idea is thus made into one that makes the concept of a retreat adaptable according to particular circumstances without diluting the desert, hermitage and solitude dimensions of retreat.

## 7. LISTENING TO GOD USING THE PRACTICE OF JOURNALLING

Journaling is used both as a means of communication with God and for self-discovery. It has become one of the most commonly used tools for retreats. Therefore, this practice needs specific examination. This is done in the light of the reality that this is one amongst many methods of divine-human communication.

Communication with God is a vital desire integral to Christian retreats. Johnson (2000:55-68) highlights four ways of “godspeech”, without seeking to make this an exhaustive list. The first of these is solitary speech. This is when God’s message is heard and can be acted upon. Secondly, there is dialogical speech, which involves conversational communication. Thirdly, God uses prophetic speech that is, God’s words come through a mouthpiece, the prophet. There is, fourthly, liturgical speech. In this case, God speaks through the liturgy in the corporate gathering of the congregation.

In human experience, the coming of the “voice” of God is varied. Dialogical speech often has vital relevance in retreat settings. Clarity in this divine-human interaction is, in many cases, aided by writing. Journaling thus has an integral place in many forms of retreat.

DelBene and Montgomery (1984:26-28) outline five types of spiritual journal keeping for use on retreats and even beyond. Firstly, there is random note taking. This involves writing down anything that is potentially important in spiritual development. Secondly, recording of dreams, both from sleep and awake, can be done. Thirdly, there is dialogue journaling. The recommendation is to write dialogues between one’s thinking self and one’s feeling self. Dialoguing with others, including people in Scripture is also suggested. Other writers, noted further on in this section, suggest penning dialogues with God, which is a form of prayer. Fourthly, there is reflecting in journal writing. This involves reflection at the end of each day, or time period, to evaluate changes taking place in one’s spiritual life. Fifthly, the outlining of discovery tasks is recommended. This form of

journalling is to investigate, from various angles, a particular subject which has a direct bearing on the retreatant's spiritual life.

Laubach (1937:9-30) describes how he went up a hill each evening and spoke with God. One evening, after speaking, he felt an urge to open his mouth and lend his lips to God. To his amazement, words began coming back through his own voice that seemed to come from God. These words were both assuring and prophetic. He states, "The newest experiment, and at present the most thrilling, is letting God talk through my own tongue and through my own fingers on the typewriter."<sup>54</sup>

Asking questions of God is a means of prayerful communication that can be journaled. Johnson (1999:101) suggests asking foundational questions like the following:

What are You telling me about my relationship with You?  
What are You telling me about my need for character change?  
What are You telling me about how You want me involved in  
advancing Your kingdom?

Such questions can form the basis for dialogical prayer in retreat times. "Asking God questions opens us up to hearing truth we are likely to miss. We contemplate what God might be telling us today or has been telling us for years (1996:75)."

Virkler and Virkler (1986:94-99) use the example of Habakkuk 2:1-2a to assert the importance of journalling. The passage reads as follows:

I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint. Then the Lord replied: "Write down the revelation."

Habakkuk describes what he did as he went before God to hear God's voice (1986:6). A four-phase process is proposed from this passage. Habakkuk became still (stood at his watch post), tuned to an inner spontaneous impression and word from God (he looked to see and was ready to listen), used "vision" (he was able to discern God's voice), and

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<sup>54</sup> Laubach's experience has mystical and charismatic features. It is largely personal in nature.

wrote out his prayer and God's response (he was instructed to write down the revelation).<sup>55</sup>

An example of dialogical prayer comes from the Sahara Desert experience of Carlo Carretto (1974:198-199), a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus, founded by de Foucauld. He writes, "[Jesus] will tell me, 'Do as I did. Love as I loved.' And how did you love, Jesus?" Carretto continues by writing of Jesus' dying for him and Jesus' call to serve and be compassionate. He then continues, "Enough, Jesus, quite enough. I am in the habit of forgetting these words. I should like you to explain to me through a simple example. 'Well read the story of the prodigal son: I am the father who pardons. If the same thing happens to you, act in the same way towards your son. It is a way of dying for one's own son.'"

Carretto's writing is largely Biblical quotations in this case and is therefore not especially unique. Nevertheless, there is a deep sense of communication with the risen Jesus that he portrays. In addition, dialogical journaling needs to have a Biblical foundation or background to keep it rooted within a Christian basis. In this regard, such writing can be commended as creative communication in a retreat setting set upon a Biblical starting point.

The Virklers (1986:100) point out that journaling, which is used in secular as well as spiritual circles, is an effective means of drawing forth what is within. Dialoguing is easily susceptible to psychological manipulation yet this does not exclude its importance as a tool in experiencing communication with God in a retreat setting.

## 8. GROUP RETREATS

### A. Planning Principles

When a group is set to go on a retreat that involves formulation by retreat leaders, sensitivity to the nature of the group and the individuals concerned is vital. Vandergriff

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<sup>55</sup> Rev. 1:10-11a represents a similar process. The passage reads: "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: 'Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven Churches.'"

(2001:9-11) gives five helpful strategies in planning a flexible retreat for a group. The first strategy is considering spiritual need. The group being planned for needs to be kept in mind. This involves consideration of what hopes there are for the retreatants' experience, such as evaluation of the specific graces desired for the retreatants (2001:12-15). The second strategy concerns scriptural grounding. Here the scriptural passages that come to mind in reflecting on spiritual needs are considered. There is also the consideration of whether the Biblical material and presentation for the retreat meshes with scriptural grounding in the Church tradition (2001:34-35). This is a notable Catholic checkpoint, which has wider validity. Strategy three concerns the schedule and format. This involves consideration of the location of the retreat, the number of people attending, and the age and personal needs of the retreatants (2001:36-40). Evaluating these factors affects the planning of sessions, time alone, unstructured time, meals, sleep and more. The fourth strategy concerns the structural design of the retreat (2001:4). Here the planning of the retreat timetable comes to finality. The fifth strategy concerns setup and ambiance. The central concern in this regard is how to create sacred space (2001:52). Consideration of quietness, music, furnishing arrangements, rituals, lighting, natural environment, open space, symbols and art come in here (2001:53-58).

## B. Dialogical Retreats

Job (1997:17-18) writes concerning dialogical retreats, which involve the interaction of the participants. Here a leader gives input and there are discussion groups guided by specific questions. Such a format is not a genuine retreat if participants do not have times of silence and reflection. Job (1997:71-76) gives a format for a weekend "Church-wide retreat" for a congregation in general. This is a dialogical "retreat", based mostly on discussion and input.

## C. Personally Guided Retreats

Job (1997:18) writes of personally guided retreats that are done with a small group under a spiritual guide. He envisions not more than nine retreatants, although the number of participants can be much larger by having a guide per limited number of people. Job (1997:18) says, "This kind of retreat is more focused on each individual and

involves relatively brief presentations by the leader, large blocks of time for personal reflection, and significant face-to-face time with the leader or spiritual guide.” Job (1997:91-102) gives guidelines for a five-day personally guided retreat. A Bible reading is given for each day as a focus. Afternoons are opportunity to meet with the spiritual director. The evenings are used for input, assigned reading or discussion according to the particular day’s plan.

#### D. Preached Retreats

Job (1997:17) also writes concerning the preached retreat. In such retreats there is the input, the “preaching”, and personal reflection, but less opportunity for one-to-one time, generally due to the number of retreatants. He (1997:77-86) presents a weekend youth retreat with a preached or taught basis, flowing into personal reflection and plenary discussion. He (1997:87-90) also gives an example of an “older adult” one day retreat, titled “Celebrating the Second Half of Life”. This time includes personal reflection and discussion using carefully framed questions, with less emphasis on preaching than for a preached retreat with major input sessions.

As Silf (2002:6) points out, Theme Retreats are a common form of group retreat, that is, the retreat is centred around a particular theme or spiritual topic. Many of these retreats are of the preached retreat type, with input on the topic at various stages of the retreat. Some are conducted mainly or partially in silence. These retreats typically run for a weekend, or for six or eight days, but other lengths of time are also used (2002:6).

#### E. Emmaus Walks

The Walk to Emmaus is a highly structured long weekend experience based on Catholic *Cursillo* courses, which were founded in Spain in the 1940’s. The Upper Room, an agency of the United Methodist Church in the United States, started *Cursillos* in 1977. The name of the Emmaus Walk was adopted in 1981 (Walk to Emmaus 1989:ii). The Emmaus movement has become ecumenical in character and international in scope. Silence is only prescribed on the first evening of the Walk (1989:3), but other times of reflection and guided meditation are in the programme. There are three consecutive morning meditations. However, fifteen talks (five on each of three days) give the basic

structure to the Emmaus Walk. Hinge topics are the grace talks: prevenient grace and justifying grace on the first day, means of grace and obstacles to grace on the second day, and sanctifying grace on the third day. Discussion in groups and projects flow from talks. The first day is about God's gracious offer to us of a relationship and of a new life centred in Christ Jesus. The second day's focus is about Christ as the model for response to the gracious offer and living in grace as disciples. The third day concerns the Holy Spirit's strategy for bringing about transformation to our world through the participants and the mission of the Church (Eastern Cape Emmaus Community n.d:5). There are also significant experiences built into the long weekend to engage the senses, the spirit and the emotions. This makes the Emmaus Walk much more than only a cognitive experience.

The Emmaus Walk long weekend is not in the format of a retreat with prayer and silence having priority. It is structured to the minute, and therefore needs to be in the hands of a trained team. Nevertheless, it does have retreat features due to withdrawal, prayer, decision-making and divine encounter experiences.

#### F. Spiritual Enrichment Encounters with Christ

A group called "SEE Christ" (Spiritual Enrichment Encounters with Christ) have an eight hour retreat monthly. Foster (1992:281) relates their practice: "The members take turns planning the activities of the day's retreat. Usually there are several one to two hour periods alone in silence followed by group interaction and prayer." This model seeks to hold together personal experience of retreat with community life.

#### G. Shalom Retreats

Shalom Retreats constitute a different form of retreat in that prayer is not a primary ingredient to the long weekend experience. These retreats draw from the Biblical vision of persons and the Human Potential Movement (Jud 1975:58). This movement in psychology places emphasis on the experiential awareness of the self, on the importance of feelings and a new freedom to enjoy them. The emphasis is on growth and entering the future (1975:59-60). A retreat generally consists of sixteen participants plus some leaders. The participants are asked to express how they feel as a starting

point (1975:59). Basic principles used on Shalom Retreats are: firstly, an emphasis on Biblical love as grace; secondly, self-actualization to experience liberation; and thirdly, story telling. The personal story of each participant is enacted on a mat and is then celebrated. The largest amount of time on the retreat is in story telling. The whole retreat community is present to the person who shares, but with a leader in charge (1975:62). Jud (1975:62) shares what happens as follows:

Mat work occurs as individuals, one at a time, get on the mat to release the feelings which are blocking their energy and capacity to give and receive love. The person gets on the mat when she/he is in touch with some deep feeling.

A laying on of hands, by the participants, upon the person who shared, takes place (1975:62).

Jud (1975:64) writes of the drawing of the retreat to a conclusion as follows: "The last morning of the retreat is carefully structured for gathering learnings, seeing the experience in the light of sacred story, for feedback and for closure - all in the spirit of celebration." Participants are asked to reflect on their experiences in the light of sacred story in writing. Each participant then spends five minutes with each other retreatant to give and receive feedback. At the closing ceremony a jug of wine, a loaf of bread and other symbols, that have emerged in the course of the retreat, are placed on the mat. There is then a celebratory time of sharing of gifts, as well as spontaneous responses such as dancing, singing, or quiet (1975:64).

Shalom Retreats show a synthesis of Christianity, particularly to convey unconditional love, and psychology. The use of "Retreats" in the description of this experience shows an emphasis on withdrawing from ordinary life to experience wellbeing or peace (*shalom*), rather than being a Christian retreat marked by typical retreat features.

## 9. DAILY-LIFE RETREATS

These "retreats" are designed for people who are unable to get away from home for any length of time (Silf 2002:7). The most obvious example is the carrying out of Ignatius' *Exercises* in daily life, according to his nineteenth annotation. However, other forms can be used. According to Silf (2002:7), daily-life retreat "involves committing to a daily time

of prayer for a specific number of weeks or even months, with periodic meetings with a retreat companion or spiritual director.”

## 10. SPIRITUAL FORMATION ACADEMY

The United Methodist Church in the United States began an academy for spiritual formation in the 1980's. This academy represents a significant combination of a retreat-style format allied to a semi-academic approach. Clapper (1991:389) asserts, “The long-term residential character of the [programme] betrays its reliance on the monastic tradition.” In practice the programme's format involves a five-day session once every three months over two years, totalling forty days. The goal is defined as follows (1991:389): “That dynamic process of receiving by faith and appropriating by commitment, discipline, and action the living Christ into our lives, so that our lives will conform to and reflect the living Christ to the world.”

The academy appears to have been born out of a cry for spiritual reality and growth in formation, especially in the light of emphasis that has been given to academic preparation for ministry. Worship is placed at the centre, as the day begins with corporate morning prayer at 7:30 a.m. Holy Communion is celebrated at 5:00 p.m. and the day is brought to a close with night prayer. Silence is kept between night prayer and morning prayer, though this is not a requirement for those who want to converse (1991:389).

There is an academic aspect to the academy. Each five-day module has two lectures of one hour's duration each morning and afternoon. Every lecture is followed by an hour of silent reflection. Each participant has two long-term assignments, one due at the end of the first year and the other at the conclusion of the second. One focuses on the participant's interior life while the other concerns ministry to others in the areas of spiritual formation. Reading is assigned ahead of time with the expectation of having read the material, but there are no tests (1991:389).

Community is a third key element, along with worship and academics. This is fostered through meeting in covenant groups of about eight members each that meet for an hour and a half each evening (1991:390).



This academy is a marriage of academic and prayerful elements. It makes for a tool, which draws from monastic aspects to create a retreat concept with a difference. This model seeks to place the reality of prayer and spiritual formation into the heart of an academically trained group continuing with academic dimensions of Christian expression. Indeed, the importance of retreat elements has been brought into this programme to enable a climate of spiritual formation to be fostered. It could be argued that the academic element detracts from the retreat basis of this academy. However, this creative way of combining diverse aspects to foster spiritual and ministry formation points to the reality that academic theology really needs to be intertwined with spiritual formation. In this regard, this academy shows strength.

## 11. AFRICAN ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN RETREATS

The issue of whether Christian retreats are basically a Western phenomenon needs to be addressed. Community is an integral aspect of the African outlook on life, which is intertwined with African Christian experience. Shorter (1978:12) points out that in the African viewpoint the soul is, above all else, community-oriented, and is “the centre of a network of personal relationships.” Christian spiritual development in the African context is “the integral development of human beings in community” (1978:10). Shorter (1978:10) asserts: “African Christian Spirituality begins and ends with people – people in their own world.” He sees that such a spirituality is allied to humanization in Christ.

Prayer, in African experience is often a community happening. Magesa (1978:109) asserts that emotions and feelings are very important elements in prayer, as understood and practised by Africans. Seeking to examine origins of prayer, Magesa (1978:109) says that African prayers “flowed spontaneously from the innermost depths of the heart, expressing emotions and feelings in clear idiom.” Such spontaneous prayers come forth readily in primary communities, such as families. In many Sunday worship services instantaneous prayer is not readily possible, and stereotyped prayers have a role (1978:110). The emphasis on spontaneous vocal prayers can be seen as excluding silence and reflection, but this is not necessarily the case.

Initiation rituals into adulthood in Africa, some of which include circumcision, involve withdrawal from society. In such cases, there are certain elements of retreat involved.

Arazu (1978:114) points out that in one locality of Nigeria, in an Ozo initiation ritual of the Igbo people, the chief-to-be goes into seclusion for twenty-four days. He then has to take a ritual bath at the dead of night before coming back to the land of the living. This is an example of how solitude has an integral place in African cultures.

Arazu (1978:114-115) indicates the place of contemplation in Igbo culture. The word for humanity is *mma-du*, literally meaning “let goodness exist”. According to Igbo tradition, Chukwu (God) looked on the world which God had created and pronounced “Let goodness exist”. Original sin is seen as pronouncing the name without a pause that is, without thought. “In the solitude imposed by the Ozo ritual initiation, the candidate learns to pronounce ‘(humanity)’ with deliberation” (1978:115). In this understanding, the one who does not meditate or contemplate will not realise what humanity means. Such a person is “*njo-du*” (let badness exist). Such requirements for contemplation have clear links to the notion of humanity made in the image of God. Shorter (1978:25) notes that Arazu’s presentation, from an African context, brings out the need for individual contemplation to enable Christians to know God through their own humanity as people created in God’s image.

Tutu (2004:99), writing out of an African and Anglican perspective, but seeking to embrace a wider audience, asserts that “all of us are meant to be contemplatives.” “Each one of us wants and needs to give ourselves space for quiet. We can hear God’s voice most clearly when we are quiet, uncluttered, undistracted – when we are still” (2004:100). He (2004:101) writes like this because his own routine includes a monthly quiet day and an annual retreat of three or more days. His spirituality is not exclusively contemplative, as his passion for social justice testifies; he (2004:107) says that authentic spirituality is “subversive of injustice”.

African spirituality is integrally experienced in community, with heart-felt spontaneity in prayer. However, this does not exclude the place of retreat. There are actually African cultural and religious practices that show the vital need for retreat in African Christian experience.

## 12. THE VISION QUEST IN NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUALITY

The “vision quest”, a ritual which is still practised by some Native American peoples, has elements of retreat which can have Christian application. According to Oliva (2001:113-114) the vision quest is designed to facilitate a boy’s entrance into manhood. The first vision quest takes place in conjunction with the onset of puberty. The community sees the boy as needing a guardian spirit to fulfil his future responsibilities as a hunter and warrior. The discovery of this spirit involves fasting. Depleted by lack of food, the boy becomes receptive to spirits within the natural world. These spirits are said to appear in visions during dreamlike trances.

When a boy or his father believes the time is ripe, the father takes his son away from the village and into the woods. There they build a simple structure in which the boy will live for as many as four days of fasting. The father returns to the village, allowing his son to begin his quest. As hunger begins to set in, the boy sits and waits, occasionally falling into unsettled periods of sleep, until the eagerly sought guardian spirit comes to him. The spirit will be his personal guide and protector on his life journey. Sometimes the spirit bestows special gifts on the boy --- for example, the power to heal or conduct tribal ceremonies. Continued direct contact between the boy and his guardian spirit will periodically be renewed by further vision quests (2001:114).

Oliva (2001:114) identifies the following as key elements in a vision quest: being led apart from one’s ordinary and safe place, fasting, listening with the heart for the voice of the guardian spirit, returning to the community to share the gifts received, and staying open and ready for future vision quests.

Parallels to Christian retreats are obvious: time alone, spiritual encounter, consideration of vital decisions, and implementing retreat experience into everyday and community life. Aspects of Native American spirituality need to be placed through the lens of Christian doctrine and devotion in order to be meaningfully applied to Christian retreats. Oliva (2001:115-124) explains his personal experience of Christian call by means of the vision quest motif, which indicates the application of one of the possibilities of using the vision quest idea in Christian retreating. Noticeably, the rites of passage from one stage of life to another have retreat connotations in various cultures, including many African ones, as well as in North America, and elsewhere.

### 13. CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered a great variety in retreats. Naturally, those presented had to be selected from many to provide a cross section of examples. The selection covered from short devotions to periods of over a month. The range went from complete silence to opening up dialogue. The possibilities of retreat types differed from embracing a link with academically rigorous reflection to seeking to disengage the prominence of the mind in centring prayer. Some retreatants experience retreat within their particular tradition and stay within that heritage, while others borrow widely across traditions, cultures and spiritual experiences. The knowledge of cultural roots in Africa and North America (and other continents can be added) applicable to retreat, sees people drawing from their own indigenous heritage. This is in addition to borrowing across cultures. For some people, where there is not a well-established knowledge of their own tradition, there is the opportunity for using their own spiritual heritage in a new way on retreats.

The variety evident in current Christian retreats means that welcome creativity has been applied to the idea of retreat. There has, however, been the tendency to label any time away from one's usual environment as "retreat". In some cases, this has led to stripping away the integral aspects of prayer and reflection from the retreat concept. This causes a weakening of what constitutes genuine Christian retreat. Nevertheless, there is a vitality in current retreats which makes the concept of retreat an integral part of Christian spirituality. This chapter has brought forth some of the variety in current Christian retreats, indicating that there is a richness in retreating for the purposes of Christian devotion and service for people of all types and traditions. There is the opportunity for stretching and growth in spirituality beyond a retreatant's own tradition and experience through the possibilities available in current Christian retreats.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

#### 1. THE CURRENT STATE OF CHRISTIAN RETREATS

This study has traced the progression of Christian retreats from pre-Christian Jewish influences as examined in the Old Testament through to current manifestations. The study has encountered retreat in the New Testament and other major eras of Church History including monasticism, Ignatian forms of retreat and a wide variety of traditions and influences. It is noticeable that the origins and later developments in Christian retreats have significant influence on the current forms of retreat. The investigation of origins and older developments has proved to be of vital importance to an informed perspective on the current state of retreats.

Retreats are not an exclusively Christian phenomenon. Retreats are used in the post-modern world in a variety of forms. This indicates a challenge to present Christian retreats in a relevant way in the post-modern milieu. Tacey (2004:100) who describes himself as a “mystical Christian”, but writes concerning spirituality wider than Christianity alone, sees the place of retreat and other forms of spiritual practices in the post-modern world as follows:

The self, and its deepest recesses of quiet wisdom, is often the only refuge we have against the howling storms of spiritual movement and social alienation. This is why meditation, retreat and autobiographical reflection have become important features of the postmodern landscape. We have to protect peace of mind and sanity in the face of our own spiritual anarchy (2004:42).

Retreat is sought in a world often marked by busyness and hurry. There is the challenge to make retreat not merely a tool to use in the face of “spiritual anarchy”, but as a rich resource for refreshment, life direction, and learning to pray in ways that have deep relevance for daily life. Christian retreat also needs to be an arena for encounter with Christ, which is greater than “peace of mind”, although such psychological experience can, and often should be integral to such encounter. It is relationship with Christ which lies at the foundation of making a Christian retreat. Such retreats have the resources, heritage and traditions from which to draw.

## 2. ESSENTIALS AND OTHER IMPORTANT RETREAT FEATURES

In the first chapter, I asserted that a description for Christian retreat is a period of withdrawal from usual activities to experience encounter with God through Christian prayer. This meant that I moved from the basis that there are essentials required for an event to be a Christian retreat. I identified three essentials in line with the above description, viz. withdrawal, encountering God and prayer. These essentials have been evident in every Old and New Testament event described as a retreat and in the forms identified as Christian retreat in the historical developments examined, as well as current manifestations.

Other important retreat features came up with regularity in my examination in this thesis. Ten features that I have identified are not universally part of every Christian retreat, but are of such importance that I list these characteristics. They are an integral part of most, though not all, Christian retreats. These features are significant enough to call forth consideration by any retreat practitioner, even if any of these characteristics are outside an individual's experience or tradition. Firstly, there is silence. Some degree of silence is common to most retreats. In certain traditions, retreat is synonymous with silence. For those whose tradition does not include silence, practicing silent prayer can be a welcome addition. Secondly, solitude is a feature of many retreats. Thirdly, Scripture is integral to retreats. Even where the focus is not scriptural meditation, it is against the backdrop of the Biblical focus that Christian retreats take place. Fourthly, personal reflection is a likely experience on retreat. Oftentimes it is a very deliberate focus, with a retreat being used for personal decision-making. Even where retreats are not specifically geared towards personal decision-making, there is most often, in encounter with God, also encounter with self. Fifthly, communal reflection often takes place on retreat, even in solitude, because pertinent insights with regard to communal life tend to emerge. Sixthly, confession, which is not restricted to a formal confessional meeting, is often expressed on retreat. Confession involves a recognition of sin in God's light and an owning of responsibility in respect of such sin. Seventhly, resolution to plan for the future is often a feature of retreats. Decision-making that translates into future action is, in many cases, a critical aspect of Christian retreat. This area is linked to intentional discernment, which is integral to Ignatian retreats, as well as many others. Eighthly,

meditation<sup>56</sup> is often practiced on retreats, as the reality of prayer on retreat means that there is often the pull to meditation and contemplation. Ninthly, worship is a common retreat experience. As encounter with God on retreat deepens, it yields worship. Tenthly, spiritual battle is the likely experience along the journey of in-depth Christian retreat. Areas of spiritual warfare include self-esteem, doubt about divine calling, decision-making, relationships, sexuality, addictions and compulsive sins. It is therefore likely that any retreating that goes beneath the surface of outward practices sees the reality of spiritual battle.

### 3. WITHDRAWAL AND ENGAGEMENT

The issue of the place of withdrawal in the Christian life is of critical importance. This concern then relates to the place given to retreat in individual and group priority ratings. Involved in this topic is the interplay between withdrawal and engagement. Critical to this concern is the example of Jesus that I examined in chapter 3 (Section 5A). Jesus' life showed the vital importance of both withdrawal and engagement, and a complex interplay between the two in which each aspect draws sustenance from the other. The examination of Jesus' life and the history of Christianity in this study indicates a vital place for withdrawal, and thus for retreat, in Christian devotional life. In addition, because devotional life integrally affects the way of Christian engagement, I assert that retreat has a vital place in influencing Christian engagement as well as being an integral part of Christian withdrawal. Hughes (1985:8) has an instructive comment in this regard. "Our treasure lies in our inner life. It is our inner life which affects our perception of the world and determines our actions and reactions to it."

In terms of different personality types, cultures and gifting, withdrawal has differing importance in various lives and groups. This begs certain questions. On the one hand, is there the legitimate Christian option of total withdrawal? The life of certain hermits and monastics shows some have taken this option, though their number is miniscule in terms of the total number of Christians. Monasticism still has a place in Catholic, Anglican and

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<sup>56</sup> Here I am using the term "meditation" in a broad sense, embracing various types of meditative and contemplative practices, rather than making a distinction between meditation and contemplation in this section.

Orthodox spirituality and draws participation from oblates<sup>57</sup> and others, some of whom are from other traditions. Withdrawal remains a focus in monasticism, although there are various levels of intentional engagement from monastic groups.

The question is, on the other hand: Is there a legitimate Christian option of total engagement without withdrawal? Some activists, especially in Christian-motivated political and social issues, as well as certain people involved in day-in and day-out ministries with needy people, seek to live in this way. The Christian norm, despite these examples (which I would argue are unhealthy if there is only withdrawal or only engagement), is an interplay between withdrawal and engagement. It is because of the busyness, high degree of scheduling, many commitments and hurriedness of so many lives that withdrawal through Christian retreat can have such a vital place.

An issue of major importance involved in any intentional retreat experience is how to integrate successfully back into routine and ordinary tasks. There is also the concern as to the implementation of decisions made on retreat into everyday life. Tacey (2004:147), for example, asserts that retreat needs an outer movement. Hart (1988:3), who writes concerning applying retreat experiences into everyday life, asserts, "During [a retreat] you enjoy a stronger sense of God's presence and love, feel a comforting and fulfilling closeness, and see your life's purpose and direction much more clearly." However, he (1988:1) recognises the danger of retreat experiences having little lasting impact: "For many people, a retreat is a spiritual high that quickly disappears when they reenter the world of daily work and relationships." One of Hart's (1988:6) suggestions is to have a time of mini-retreat on a daily basis.

None of the obstacles regarding retreat and re-entry into daily work and life should cloud the need for retreat. Retreat opens the way for a new way of seeing, gaining a new focus and profoundly affecting how we act. Deep inner work that is possible in the unhurried time of retreat is vitally necessary. Hughes (1985:x) writes of the possibility of such inner breakthrough in this manner, even where negative aspects require overcoming:

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<sup>57</sup> People who are in association with a monastery or convent are termed oblates or associates, depending on the particular order. Oblates and associates undertake to follow aspects of the monastic rule of life that are applicable to people not living in monastic community. Monasticism uses this as one way for wider ministry engagement.



Our minds contain many layers of consciousness. Breaking into a new layer is always threatening at first because we naturally fear what we do not know. The God who calls us to meet him is “the ground and granite of our being”. Our journey through these layers of consciousness will always be accompanied by some measure of uncertainty, pain and confusion. These negative feelings are the nudgings of God. The facts are kind, and God is in the facts.

Christian retreat holds a vital place in the interaction between active forms of ministry and withdrawal for devotional purposes. Retreat, when intentionally used with the purpose of application into daily life, has an enormous contribution to make to focused Christian ministry. This is in addition to being a devotional tool especially for periods that are longer than daily prayer times.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. THE INFLUENCE OF RETREATS

In virtually every Christian tradition both groups and individuals currently practise Christian retreats. This is the result of the influence of retreating growing vastly in the wider Christian picture in the second half of the twentieth century. The growth and accompanying diversification means that retreats have taken on a multiplicity of forms. Many events are given the name retreat that do not fit in with my description of a Christian retreat (cf. Ch.1.4). Examples of this phenomenon that I have examined are some dialogical retreats (cf. Ch.9.8B) and Shalom retreats (cf. Ch.9.8G).

It is clear from individual accounts of retreat experiences and the growing use of the retreat concept that retreats do have influence on the lives of people. This influence translates into aspects such as the expression of ministry callings, decision-making, life attitudes, dealing with stress, learning more about how to pray, growing in devotional life, experiencing healing and forgiveness, and growing as people within the Christian community.

While the scope of this study has not included a wide-scale examination of the impact of Christian retreats in the Church and wider society, there is evidence to indicate that Christian retreats have an effect on the Church and society. Individuals who experience

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<sup>58</sup> Daily devotions can legitimately be considered as mini-retreat times.

Christian growth and a focused sense of call have an impact on their Church communities. There are groups who constitute part of congregations who go on retreat and whose return into the life of their local Christian community makes a positive difference. This takes place through service, enlivening worship, deepening congregational prayer and compassionate action in the congregation and beyond. Indeed retreating, when the outflow is Holy Spirit led, can have an impact into communities beyond the Church because there is an extension of ministry into the wider world.<sup>59</sup> Research that questions a large number of diverse retreatants will yield valuable information in this regard.

## 5. THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN RETREATS

Diversity in retreats has grown greatly since the 1960's. This means that the multiplication in retreat types and in the number of participants is a relatively new phenomenon in the context of two thousand years of Christianity. It is difficult to gauge what forms of retreat will be used most often in the future and what new creative ideas will emerge, because the current situation is blossoming with many innovations. Nevertheless, Biblical and historical origins and subsequent developments at various stages of history clearly continue to have foundational value in the majority of Christian retreats.

The relevance of retreats remains a topic of debate. This is especially so where commercial activity, busyness, and materialism are highly valued. What is the relevance of retreat, with its seemingly nothingness of silence and time away from activity, in a productivity driven environment? Christian retreat exists as a necessary challenge to a mindset that espouses a productivity motivated lifestyle. There is the necessity for prayer as human beings, as our makeup as spiritual persons is taken to heart. There are also the simple requirements of rest and reflection which can take place on retreat against the backdrop of the acknowledgement of the need for withdrawal that has the spiritual as

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<sup>59</sup> I have noticed that where retreat experiences have had a deep-felt impact on colleagues, people I have led on retreat and myself, there have been tangible outcomes. I have observed a direct influence on personal intentionality in ministry in individuals; and in groups where there have been deep-level retreat experiences the worship and service life of congregations has shown positive change.

integral to time apart.

Retreats have had a role in the ecumenical dialogue that has resulted in greater co-operation between Christian denominations from the 1960's. The search for meaningful encounter with God on retreat has seen people move beyond their denominational events. Diverse retreatants have encountered people of other traditions amongst their number during time apart that has a significant place in their lives. The result has been the breaking down of many barriers. Christian retreat, which draws from many and diverse sources in its current forms, draws a variety of people. Some retreatants are plagued by doubts while others are mature in faith; and some are stuck only in their own tradition while others cross over freely to other Christian streams. These various mixes make retreats a vibrant tool to help individuals and communities grow in spiritual maturity and in Christian unity.

We live in exciting times with regard to the many life-enhancing Christian retreats that can be attended. As with any area experiencing growth and creative input, there is the capacity in Christian retreats for shallow and cheap formats and the use of manipulative techniques. Nevertheless, for those leading and attending retreats, along with all those Christians who engage in mini-retreats through regular devotions, there are wonderful possibilities in current retreats. Therefore, the situation is that current Christian retreats, which have such a rich Biblical and historical set of traditions from which to draw, have a vital and growing place in the realm of Christian spirituality.

Retreats that are formulated exclusively within one Christian tradition in the current challenging times are rare. This is not even the case with Ignatian retreats in a classical framework. If there is sufficient discernment (one of the great Ignatian ideals) and spiritual maturity, then retreats can be a vehicle for significant use in spirituality amongst believers and enquirers who display busyness, brokenness, loneliness and disconnectedness, as well as where Christian discipleship is evident. Christian retreat is essentially about being an opportunity for encounter with God, which involves communication in various forms that has the general term of prayer. The future holds forth the real need for many more people to use the opportunity that Christian retreat affords for experiential Christian spirituality.

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