

***“FROM THE SACRED HEART
TO THE HEART OF THE SACRED”:***
**The Spiritual Journey of Australian Catholics
Since the Second Vatican Council**

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Candidate's Certificate

I certify that the thesis entitled

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is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis whole or in part has not been presented for the awarding of a higher degree at this or any other tertiary educational institution.

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Acknowledgements

The source of this research has been and continues to be the commitment that Catholics have made to search for God in the Australian context and environment. Over many years of living and ministering with many people in differing localities across the country I became aware of their search to give expression to God's presence amidst the changes and the challenges that had come into their lives. This response revealed the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in a way that its documents could only suggest. As such this was a conclusion before I began the research. Therefore, this thesis is dedicated to the many who inspired and encouraged my life as a priest and gave expression to the spiritual journey that we undertake together in this land.

There have been two principle sources of support that I have drawn on: my family of origin from the eldest to the youngest and my religious family in the community and beyond. Both have sustained and encouraged me not only to stick to the task through the research and writing, but provided me with the opportunity. Others who have been directly involved in guiding the work as it unfolded were my supervisors, initially Rev. Dr. Frank Maloney SBD, then as principle supervisor Dr. Gideon Goosen, who was assisted at crucial times by Rev. Dr. Tony Kelly CSSR. Gideon's patience and persistence was the key to producing plausible argument from rambling thoughts and thousands of words. Many others assisted me in the onerous task of checking and again checking the text as it developed and then in its final form; John, Philip, Helen, John and Betty. Thus, the thesis involved many people and I will always be grateful for their generosity and support.

Finally, to those who read the thesis, especially those who seek to develop further its arguments I offer my encouragement to pursue the issues it raises. The hope for the Church is the continued examination and reflection on its life and ministry as in this it will be faithful to the renewal of the Council and Christ's mission in and for our world.

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to investigate and to propose a solution to the pastoral dilemma that faced the Catholic Church in Australia the 1990's. The pastoral dilemma contrasted two opposing pastoral responses to the significant changes in Catholic life since the Second Vatican Council. One response reacted to the changes by interpreting them as "crises of faith". This response determined that the decline in mass attendance, the fewer vocations to the priesthood and religious life and the disregard of the teaching authority of the Church was the result of a loss of faith. Consequently, it prescribed a return to previous values and behaviour. The other response was more difficult to determine and has been the principle work of this thesis.

The second pastoral response was identified in the search for the sacred in the daily lives of the people. This search linked the changes in Catholic life to the ongoing journey of faith that has taken place. A pastoral response based on this understanding of the changes in Catholic life was seen to provide an opportunity for "all who invoked the name of Christ" to enter a deeper relationship with him and each other. This response embraced the spirit of renewal proposed by the Council.

A review of religious literature published in Australia since the Council was conducted to provide an overview of the journey of Catholic life. It identified four categories of literature that displayed the most interest in the changes. Whilst the review had a particular focus on Catholics, it included other traditions. Of the four categories initially sociology of religion which attracted most interest, followed later by theological reflections and interpretations, and ultimately an interest in spirituality, or the "spirituality revolution". The historical and biographical studies reviewed recounted the changes in Church life and remained at a lesser, but constant expression of interest.

An examination of the research of sociology of religion in Australia established that the changes in religious belief and practice were influenced by environmental factors and, for Catholics, the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The methods of sociology identified the significant areas of change, but their limited explanations of the changes did little to assist church authorities to resolve the tensions and difficulties. The limitations of statistical information about religion contributed to the pastoral dilemma.

The findings of sociology increased interest in theological reflection about the influence of the changing context of society on Catholic life. These reflections endeavoured to explain the reforms of the Council, the relationship to the changes to the reforms and led to “contextual” theology which was embraced by the “Discovery of an Australian Theology”. Spirituality by the 1990s had become a popular response that purported to take the place of “organised religion” in the community. The interest in spirituality also became the key factor in the Catholic search for deeper values, and inspired a renewed sense of the spiritual in ordinary everyday life.

The popular interest in spirituality was located in the tradition of Christian spirituality, and the thesis concluded that this tradition embraced the personal experience of God, as expressed in the lives of Catholics in Australia. Such personal experiences were identified and discerned to benefit of the individual and through dialogue transformed the community. The transformation, thus begun, continued in further dialogue, engaged the community, and inspired others beyond the community of the Church to believe. Therefore, the personal experience of the spiritual was authenticated by its place in the developing tradition of the Church.

The Council called for individuals and communities in the Church to identify the “signs of the times” as the opportunities for renewal, and personal renewal was closely linked to communal renewal. The “search for a soul” expressed an Australian “sign of the times”. The search

provided the opportunity for many people to embark on a journey that led to personal and communal renewal or transformation.

Consequently, pastoral responses to renewal based on rule and regulation, or expectations of the past, lacked the personal spiritual dimension. Thus, the title of the thesis figuratively describes the spiritual journey of Catholics from a devotional religious experience to one that seeks to find the sacred in the core values and experiences of life.