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The role of the imagination in the religious conversion of adolescents attending Catholic secondary schools

Richard Patrick Branson

Doctor of Philosophy
College of Education
University of Notre Dame Australia
2010

Declaration

This thesis is my own words and no part of it has been submitted for a degree at this, or any other, University. Due acknowledgement is made to the work of others used in this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the support of the staff of the University of Notre Dame Australia, particularly the teaching staff of the College of Education. They assisted me throughout the preparation of this thesis with timely advice. I acknowledge with gratitude the direction provided by my supervisors, Dr Wayne Tinsey, Dr Anthony Imbrosciano and Prof. Richard Berlach. I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Dr Anthony Imbrosciano whose patience and enthusiasm helped me to shape my research. Sadly, he fell ill and passed away on July 13, 2008. I would like to acknowledge the generosity of the 15 participants in the study. They called themselves Alexandra, Alyssa, Cameron, Cecil, Elizabeth, Emily, Frank, Glynna, Gunter, Kevin, Luke, Mikaela, Morgan, Sophie and Stephen. Their willingness to be interviewed, and in some instances, to keep journals made the study possible. Finally, this thesis would not have been completed had it not been for the encouragement of my wife Maryanne and our daughter Melissa. I am forever in their debt for their interest and patience.

Abstract

The mission of the Catholic Church is evangelisation, the purpose of which is conversion. At a diocesan level, the mission is carried out through the agencies of family, parish and school. Every Catholic school is mandated to carry out its part in the Church's mission through its curriculum that incorporates both Religious Education and planned catechetical experiences. This study was devised to find out some students' perceptions of their faith, the influences that they perceive on changes to their faith, and to describe how the imagination assisted their faith development and religious conversion. Fifteen Catholic secondary school students from four schools in the Archdiocese of Perth, Western Australia were interviewed in their final year of school. Some also kept journals and some were interviewed again in the year after they left school. The data collected was analysed using methods associated with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Conclusions were drawn about how the imagination assists faith development and religious conversion. The findings were aligned with the Western Australian Catholic Bishops' Mandate Letter to the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) (2009) and recommendations were made to assist the evangelisation of youth in Catholic secondary schools.

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List of abbreviations used

AG *Ad gentes divinitus*. Vatican II (1965)

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic church*. (1994).

CS *The catholic school*. Congregation for Catholic Education (1977).

CSTTM *The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium* Congregation for Catholic Education (1997)

CT *Catechesi tradendae*. Pope John Paul II (1979).

DV *Dei verbum*. Vatican II (1965).

EN *Evangelii nuntiandi*. Pope Paul VI (1973).

FC *Familiaris consortio*, Pope John Paul II (1982).

GDC *General directory for catechesis*. Congregation for the Clergy (1998).

IC *Inter oecumenici* [Instruction on the proper implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy] (1964).

LC *Lay Catholics in schools: witnesses to faith*. Congregation for Catholic Education (1982).

M01 *Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia* 2001-2007

M09 *Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia* 2009-2015

RD *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*. Congregation for Catholic Education (1990).

RM *Redemptoris missio*, Pope John Paul II (1991).

SC *Sacramentum Caritatis*. Pope Benedict XVI (2007).

SD Salvifici Doloris, Pope John Paul II (1984).

The use of inclusive language in documents published by the Catholic Church is a vexed issue. Out of respect for the authors of the texts cited above, the original language has been retained. No attempt has been made to make the language gender-inclusive.