

ESCAPISM?

Some people argue that going on retreat is either too expensive or an escape from the realities of everyday life.

I agree that retreats can be expensive although they don't have to be. More churches and circuits are holding quiet days rather than weekends away and, indeed, the Ignatian Exercises can be worked through as part of everyday life.

The second argument against retreats is not just true of retreats. There is a very real danger of our spirituality becoming isolated from the issues of everyday life. Christianity can be an escape from reality. I have met a number of Christians recently who quite happily clock up many air miles going on holiday each year without giving a thought to climate change. Is there any justice in people owning more than one home when many are homeless? We pray for peace but maybe this involves taking an active part in peace movements.

'Spirituality' and 'spiritual life' are not religious departments, walled-off areas of life. Today is Sunday, or, I am on retreat, and so I am going to be 'spiritual' but tomorrow is back to work so I will be normal. This is to induce religious schizophrenia and contradicts the continuity we see in Jesus who says 'strive first for the Kingdom of God and his righteousness'.(Matt. 6:33)

Authentic spirituality can disturb just as prayer can. It is more comforting to think about my own spirituality rather than the arms trade or my own rich life style compared to the millions who live in abject poverty, or what exotic place I can go for my holidays when many are without work. My experience of retreat is that it makes me more aware not only of God's presence but issues of justice and is therefore far from being an escape. Away from everyday distractions one is more able to answer the following, 'As God look at my life what does he see?' 'As God looks at my church what does he see?' 'As God looks at the world what does he see?'

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