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LOVED INTO FREEDOM AND SERVICE

*Lay Experiences of the Exercises in Daily Life*

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Patrick M. Kelly, S.J.

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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# THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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## *The first word . . .*

What is truly awful preaching really like? Several old movie images spring to mind. Try this one: Indians on the warpath, bedecked in feathers and paint, galloping frantically around the circled wagon train, whooping in a kind of manic frenzy and occasionally firing a harmless arrow at their prey. The settlers, meanwhile, hunker down among their Conestogas and pray for the inevitable bugle from the cavalry that signals their rescue. Or just as often they simply wait for the Indians to grow tired and just go away. Like all good metaphors this one holds a bit of ambiguity. Are the errant arrows directed at the topic of the homily or the congregation? It makes no difference. In either case, they miss.

Other preachers seem much more methodical in their tactics. One might think of one of those rickety tanks from World War I, rumbling in brute determination across no man's land, struggling for a moment to cross a ruined trench of an idea, then grinding on over tangled swirls of barbed wire and convoluted enthymemes. Machine-gun bullets and grenades bounce off its armor like pesky flies on an elephant's haunch. Having limited visibility, or none at all, it sets its destination and grunts forward, impervious to the shifting battlefield. Its pace however leaves snail and tortoise alike impatient for progress. What, in the end, is the point of all this churning of gears and screeching of steel? Will it even arrive at its designated destination, whatever that might be?

Perhaps other movie clichés come to mind: the lost legionnaire dying of thirst in the Sahara, with the mirage of an idea just over the horizon; Godzilla venting his reptilian rage by crushing cardboard skylines and every other sign of modernity with his plaster fangs and papier-mâché claws; Dr. Frankenstein, quite proud of his achievement, shouting, "It's alive," with little awareness that he has created a monster; Shirley Temple grinning cheerily as she tap-dances endlessly on the same square foot of stage with little desire to move on. Perhaps other images will come into consciousness.

Over the years, or centuries, the people out there in the pews have learned to cope with awful preaching. They come equipped with an on/off switch. There is empirical evidence to prove the point. Some years ago, a visiting missionary came to the small-town parish that I visited each Sunday. He was an engaging speaker and did what struck me as a fine job on the standard-issue appeal sermon. He greeted the congregation in the language of the area he served, told the obligatory story of the little girl at the mission station who could not be there to tell her own story, but

wanted to go to school. He explained that back in his parish there were hundreds of other orphans just like her who depended on the generosity of American parishes, just like this one. He was relatively brief, engaging, and enthusiastic. After Mass, he stood on one side of the front door, shaking hands with the parishioners as they left. I stood on the other. Although I did not keep count, my guess is that nearly a third of the people on my side of the doorway thanked me for the fine sermon I had just preached. Clearly, while this visiting priest spoke of the needs of the Church in some distant land and I sat quietly by the sacristy door, their thoughts were focused on the coming Sunday dinner with the in-laws and an afternoon with the NFL. Years of flipping the off switch left them like the parade of zombies from *Night of the Living Dead*.

These good people had become like regular movie goers, who have seen so much mayhem and murder on the screen that they have lost their ability to react at all. And then comes the next logical question: If many parishioners have grown desensitized to bad preaching, have they also lost the ability to respond to good preaching? Everyone tries to be polite, so as a result it's difficult for us, laity and clergy alike, to recognize the difference. We lack a realistic feedback loop to encourage good preachers to hone their skills and the poor ones to seek help to improve.

This dichotomy is overly simplistic, of course. Most of us have our good days and bad days. Sometimes the Scripture speaks to us, and sometimes not. We can be busy with other things, pressured, distracted, or not feeling particularly well. Sometimes ideas leap off the page, speak to our passionate concerns, and create their own electricity. Wonderful homilists can, on occasion, come up with dreary, incoherent sermons. Dull, incoherent preachers can, on occasion, sparkle, but don't count on it. One really has to look at the averages over the year before issuing a final grade.

Performance reports and grading have become a way of life in the corporate world. Colleges, especially, tend to take grades seriously, even for faculty. Tenure, promotion, and salary increments depend on one's effectiveness as a teacher. At the end of each semester, we distribute "course-evaluation forms." These allow students to switch roles and grade their professors. This is truly an amazing ritual. Almost every class will have a few comments along the lines of "This is the finest experience I have had in my entire college career." Predictably, these will be canceled out by a several remarks along the lines of "Don't ever let this guy step in front of a class again." Some will complain that I speak too loudly and give them a headache, while others say they can't hear because I drop my voice and whisper. The majority of comment sheets fall somewhere in the middle, which is probably a lot closer to the truth, since few of us have the power to be as inspiring or destructive as some of our students proclaim.

That critical center does shift between a positive and a negative reading, according to the group, since classes, just like individuals, have their

own personalities. Many of us have had the experience of teaching back-to-back sections of the same class. One is a delight and the other sheer drudgery, and the year-end evaluations tend to reflect this mysterious clash or mesh of personalities. Both classes have the same material, same teacher, same tests and papers, but far different results. Finally, some vociferous critics base their comments on issues beyond reasonable human control: "This class is a joke. It meets at nine o'clock and nobody is awake then." I can always count on a couple of comments from people who sign up for a class in early film history, "From the beginnings to the advent of sound," as the catalogue describes it, and then complain bitterly that "he makes us watch old movies."

In many schools, students have supplemented the official evaluation process with an open-forum blogsite. It's a great idea, but unfortunately many of the bloggers use the system to ventilate their rage at a disappointing grade, which they are convinced is the only thing standing between them and the medical school of their choice. Noting the spelling and grammar in some of these electronic tantrums, I recall the response of one veteran colleague in a pre-med program, who after listening to an adolescent tirade about his unfair grading, responded, "The only way you'll get into a medical school is on a gurney with a label on your big toe." The angriest blogs can be shrugged off as meaningless by tenured old-timers whose skin has thickened over the years. But they have to be painful for vilified younger faculty, especially when they have to propose to a skeptical rank-and-tenure committee that a few scurrilous comments on the Web may explain why they are not attracting their share of students into the department.

Constructive feedback in both preaching and teaching remains an elusive goal, and it's made even more difficult since both professions can be compared to those "time-release" medicines relentlessly advertised on television. Often the effect takes place long after ingestion. On occasion, years after the fact, grateful students or parishioners will thank us for something we said or did, for an idea or a course, that made a real difference in their lives. More likely than not, we cannot remember them or the circumstance they cite, but somehow, in some mysterious way, the Lord worked through our ministry to touch them. These are the kinds of moments that the most ingenious feedback questionnaires and course-evaluation forms could never account for in a million years. When it happens, it is a beautiful and humbling experience.

Spiritual direction is the delayed-action ministry par excellence, and more than in most other ministries appearances and immediate reactions can be deceiving. During a retreat, a person can have a cordial relationship with the director, have a positive experience with prayer, and eagerly look forward to returning for more of the same next year. The feedback is positive, without qualification. Or another person might dislike the direc-

tor, hold back information, struggle with prolonged desolation, and yearn to get out of the place as soon as possible, vowing never to return. Which one has made the better retreat? Who can say? Should the first director feel satisfied that he has “the knack,” or the second feel discouraged that she didn’t handle the relationship more creatively? The immediate feedback can be misleading in either case. What counts for everything is the way the experience of the retreat affects the rest of their lives.

In this issue of *STUDIES* Pat Kelly shares his own expertise in trying to construct a process for gathering feedback from twenty men and women who had made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. Several points of his study are instructive. The interviews take place some time after the actual retreat experience. The retreatants have had the opportunity to see how the graces of the retreat have worked out in their workaday lives. By this time they had moved beyond a good relationship with the director or the sense of consolation in prayer. Since Pat did not serve as their director, he could stand outside their experience as an objective observer, and they had no reason to try to make him feel good about what they accomplished under his direction. In this essay, he’s summarized only a few of the interviews. It’s just enough to give a sense of what happens to people in pews or parlors or classrooms after they have allowed God to speak to them through a limited but gifted minister.

*Richard A. Blake, S.J.*  
Editor

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# LOVED INTO FREEDOM AND SERVICE

## *Lay Experiences of the Exercises in Daily Life*

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*For the past several years, the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat has become an important element in supporting Ignatian spirituality among lay people. By selecting four interviewees from twenty diverse men and women who had made the Exercises while continuing with their other responsibilities, the author provides an insight into the long-term effect of this experience on their lives precisely as lay people.*

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A reading of the signs of the times since the Second Vatican Council shows unmistakably that the Church of the next millennium will be called the "Church of the Laity."

GC 34, "Cooperation with the Laity in Mission"  
d. 13, para. 331 (p. 159)

## Introduction

**W**e are *in* the next millennium. These are both perilous and exciting times in the Church and the world. In the Church, new opportunities were unleashed when the breath of the Spirit blew over those gathered at the Second Vatican Council and helped them to recognize and name the gifts of lay persons in a new way. By making the People of God one of its primary images, the council highlighted that the Church is made up of all the baptized and that each and every person is called to holiness. Each person is also called to participate in the mission of the Church.

In fact, the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well. In the organism of a living body no member is

purely passive: sharing in the life of the body each member shares also in its activity.<sup>1</sup>

In this new context, lay people are looking for theological and spiritual resources that can help them make progress in the Christian life and live out their vocations in the world. One resource many are turning to is the Nineteenth Annotation version of the Spiritual Exercises. Judging from the criteria of the council for the kinds of theological and spiritual "aids" lay people should be using, this retreat is uniquely suited to the needs of lay people at this time. For one thing, the Council Fathers emphasized the importance of union with Christ as a basis for the lay apostolate. As they put it, "The fruitfulness of the apostolate of lay people depends on their living union with Christ, as the Lord said himself: 'Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, for separated from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5)" (407, no. 4). At the very heart of the experience of the Spiritual Exercises is the fostering of an intimate relationship such as this with Christ.

Another reason the Nineteenth Annotation version of the retreat is an apt "aid," according to the criteria of the council Fathers, is that lay people can make the retreat while continuing to carry out their responsibilities in the world. Such accommodation comes highly recommended:

Lay people should so use these aids that, while doing what is expected of them in the world in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate their union with Christ from their ordinary life, but actually grow closer to him by doing their work according to God's will. (407, no. 4)

Over the last few years, I spoke at length with twenty lay people who made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat in an attempt to understand just how they found this retreat helpful in our time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, "Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People," ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1996), p. 405, para. 2.

<sup>2</sup> I interviewed twelve women and eight men. I did not direct any of these retreatants during the retreat. I spoke with each of them after they had made the retreat (with varying lengths of time having transpired between the time they made the retreat and the time we spoke) in a conversation that was tape-recorded and then later transcribed. I have edited some of their comments, without changing the substance of what they were saying, to make them more readable in a written

On the basis of these interviews, I am convinced that the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat is a particularly fruitful aid for helping lay people live out their vocations to the apostolate. The retreatants' prayer life deepens and they grow in their love of Jesus Christ and in their commitment to his way of thinking, acting, and living. They also grow in their understanding of how God is calling them specifically and uniquely in the contexts in which they live and work. Finally, the retreat helps them grow in the interior freedom they need to respond to this call with generosity. For these reasons, the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat can be immensely important in our time, and can help us to put flesh and blood on the high ideals and exalted vision associated with the Second Vatican Council.

Although many lay people are being drawn to this retreat in the years since the council, some Jesuits may find themselves unfamiliar with this particular adaptation of the Exercises. This lack of familiarity is not surprising, since the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat dropped off the radar of Jesuit ministries after the first century of Jesuit history.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the reasons for this would take another entire issue of *STUDIES*. Ignatius, however, clearly intended this as a legitimate way to make the Exercises. His intentions in this regard are evident in the annotation itself, which enables someone "who is involved in public affairs or pressing occupations but is educated or intelligent" to make the Exercises either in abbreviated or full form, by devoting an hour and a half each day to prayer while continuing to attend to one's responsibilities in daily life.<sup>4</sup> Ignatius gave this version of the retreat himself and continued to do so until the end of his life. According to Ignacio Iparraguirre, S.J.,

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format.

<sup>3</sup> As Gilles Cusson, S.J., has observed in a historical study of the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat, "It is a fact that after the first century of Jesuit history there is hardly any mention of this method of giving the Exercises in everyday life" (*The Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life* [St. Louis, Mo.: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 12]).

<sup>4</sup> This particular version of the retreat explicitly included the possibility of the retreatant making his or her way through the full four Weeks of the Exercises. After referring in this annotation to the Principle and Foundation and various exercises of the First Week, Ignatius writes, "For the mysteries of Christ our Lord this exercitant should follow the same procedure as is explained below and at length throughout the Exercises themselves" (*Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George Ganss, S.J. [Mahwah, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1991], p. 127).

After having given the Exercises in various ways at Manresa, Alcalá, Barcelona, Paris, and Rome, towards the end of his life he confined himself more and more to giving the complete Exercises of one month, in retirement from everyday life, with all the annotations and rules, adapting them to the condition of certain people who could not entirely leave aside their business nor withdraw to some solitary place, in conformity with the procedure suggested in annotation 19.<sup>5</sup>

The various directories for the Exercises written in the sixteenth century also mention this retreat format as a matter of course as one adaptation among many.<sup>6</sup> Our current context, and especially the renewal of the lay vocation, make it opportune now for this way of making the Exercises to be revived.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ignacio Iparraguirre, *Practica de los Ejercicios de San Ignacio de Loyola en vida de su autor (1522-1566)* (Rome: Historical Institute of the Society of Jesus, 1946), 2.

<sup>6</sup> See the various directories for the *Spiritual Exercises* from this time period in *On Giving the Spiritual Exercises, the Early Jesuit Manuscript Directories and the "Official Directory of 1599,"* ed. Martin E. Palmer (St. Louis, Mo.: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> There were some scattered attempts in the U.S. Assistancy before the Second Vatican Council to adapt the Exercises to the situations of lay people, but the use of the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat really began in earnest only after the council. In the mid 1980s Jesuits in different parts of the U.S. began giving the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat in a systematic way to lay people and training lay people to accompany others on this retreat. These initiatives continue to bear fruit to this day. In the years since the council, the Christian Life Communities have emphasized the importance of the Spiritual Exercises in the formation of their members. In the "General Principles and Norms of CLC," (1990) the *Exercises* are described as "the specific source and characteristic instrument" of CLC spirituality. This document requires all persons to make the complete Exercises prior to making a permanent commitment to CLC. Because it is often difficult for lay persons to find the time to make the thirty-day retreat, most make the Nineteenth Annotation version of the retreat.

Some important books have also been published about the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat during this time period. When Fr. Joseph Labaj, then provincial of the Wisconsin Province, invited all of the men of his province to make the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat in the early 1980s, Eugene Merz, S.J. (WIS) wrote a booklet entitled, *Place Me with Your Son: The Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life*, which suggested prayer materials for each day of the retreat. This booklet—and this version of the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat—was intended as a way to foster renewal in Jesuit life and ministries, and it included excerpts from the *Constitutions* and general congregations of the Society in the prayer material for each day. The book was later published by the Maryland Province and used by the Maryland, New York, and New England Provinces for a similar purpose. James Skehan, S.J., later revised and

For those Jesuits who are not familiar with this retreat, I hope this article can serve as an introduction to the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat as it is experienced by lay people in our own time. For Jesuits who are familiar with the retreat and are already accompanying people through this retreat or are training others to do so, I hope the sustained attention to the specific ways lay people have found the experience helpful in their daily lives will be illuminating and bear fruit.

With these purposes in mind, I have structured the essay into an introductory section in which I will make some general comments about how the retreatants came to know about the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat, their motivations for making the retreat, and what they found helpful in the experience. Then I will consider the experience of one retreatant for each of the following themes: (a) the experience of being loved into freedom, (b) the Two Standards, (c) making choices, and (d) the practice of the examen of consciousness. Finally, I will make some concluding remarks about what I have learned from these interviews about the value of the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat for lay people in our time.

## I. The Experiences of Retreatants

### *How did they learn about the Exercises?*

Most of the people I interviewed had some connection with Jesuits prior to making the Exercises. Some had attended a Jesuit high school or university; others belonged to a Jesuit parish. Some of these people had previously done weekend or eight-day retreats or received spiritual direction in those contexts. Several of the people in the Detroit area had completed a thirteen-week seminar called "Finding God in Daily Work," or a two-year internship program in Ignatian spirituality with Bernard J. Owens, a Jesuit priest from the Detroit Province. Both of these programs were meant to help people

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expanded this book to make it more accessible to lay people and published it as *Place Me with Your Son: Ignatian Spirituality in Everyday Life*, 3rd ed. (Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C., 1991). In 1989 Joseph Tetlow, S.J., published *Choosing Christ in the World: Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola according to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989). Tetlow's book is a handbook for directors and includes brief notes and explanations that can be copied and given out to retreatants at specified times during the retreat.

grow in their awareness of God's presence in their daily lives and in the workplace. After each of these programs, some of the participants made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat.<sup>8</sup>

Informal contacts with others who had a positive experience making the retreat were also important for some. One woman who had had no prior contact with the Jesuits was a little bit leery of moving "into this culture of these guys" (i.e., the Jesuits) and "letting them take over."

*I encountered a buddy of mine who had done the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. She recommended it to me. She actually had done Jesuit schooling and she worked for JVC and she was part of our Jesuit Parish and all of that. . . . I really trusted her opinion.*

Relatively few retreatants had no previous contact with Jesuits or others who had made the retreat, and found out through advertisements in their parish bulletin or in similar ways about opportunities to do an internship program in Ignatian spirituality and/or to make the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat.

Some retreatants were asked whether they would like to make the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. The invitation usually came from a spiritual director, or from someone who knew them well enough to know where they were in their spiritual lives. For one woman it came as a complete surprise when her spiritual director, who had been introducing her to contemplative prayer for over a year, suggested she consider making the Spiritual Exercises.

*Well, she might as well have been speaking Greek or speaking in tongues. I could have understood tongues easier than I could have understood the "Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola." I mean, Dear God! But I trusted her, I trusted her. So, she made some connections for me. Sure enough, I felt drawn to it. So, I took the Nineteenth Annotation. And it was life changing, and has been life changing.*

Being invited to make the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat was decisive for several retreatants.

*Why did they make the Exercises?*

All the people I spoke with had had committed prayer lives for many years, as well as other important formational experiences

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<sup>8</sup> After making the retreat, some of the participants also moved into formal training in spiritual direction.

in the Christian faith before making the Exercises. Some of the retreatants had been involved in the charismatic-renewal movement, and with groups such as Cursillo or Life in the Spirit Seminar. All of the retreatants viewed the Exercises as a way to continue their progress in the Christian life. Some spoke of this as a way to deepen their relationship with God, others as a way of growing closer to Christ.

For some, their job or other circumstances in life influenced their decision to make the Exercises. One woman, a campus minister at a Jesuit university, put it this way:

*At the time I was working in this Jesuit university, I was being called upon to talk about Ignatius, to talk about Jesuit this and Jesuit that. I was surrounded by people now, in this area, who love Jesuits. Jesuits were up on a pedestal. I was sitting here thinking, "What is up with this Jesuit stuff"?*

As part of the formation program for deacons in one archdiocese, the men training for the diaconate and their wives made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. This was the context in which two of the women with whom I spoke made the retreat. These women and their husbands now accompany other such couples through the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat.

None of the retreatants made the retreat to help them make a major decision. While making the Exercises, however, they did end up looking at decisions they had already made or would make in the future. One retreatant, for example, was trying to decide whether she needed to leave a marriage that was difficult and, at times, emotionally abusive. Another was trying to decide whether to get married to someone he had had a close relationship with for many years. Many said their experience of making the Exercises and learning about things such as discernment and the examen of consciousness began to influence how they would make choices, both large and small.

*What did they find helpful?*

All of the retreatants emphasized that the retreat made them much more aware of God's loving and redeeming presence in the world and in their own lives than they were before. As one retreatant put it,

*Before I did the Exercises, God was kind of out there. He was pretty far away. He was pretty disconnected. And if I were to tell you one thing that was a hallmark of the Exercises for me, it would be—you know, I thought I knew God and I thought I knew Jesus. But the Exercises brought me into a whole new realm of intimacy that was pretty mind-blowing, really.*

Important in this respect was a new awareness of the depth of God's love for them personally. This was foundational for all of them, although each person experienced it differently. One retreatant found herself asking the question, "Who am I?" during the first few months of the retreat and realized that it wasn't that she was the sister of so-and-so and the wife of so-and-so, etc., but that she was a child of God, pure and simple. As she became more convinced that her identity was rooted in God's love, she felt a new freedom with regard to the way she related to others.

Many retreatants said that the emphasis on God's love was different from what they had learned while growing up. Several of the retreatants who grew up in the pre-Vatican II Church expressed a frustration with having been led to believe that the point of the Christian life consisted primarily in keeping rules or in doing good deeds. As one man put it, "I was raised with, I am going to give money to the Patna Missions. I'm going to make so many novenas, I am going to do so much of that." When making the Exercises, on the other hand, he said:

*You see what Jesus meant and God entering into humanity, that says God initiates and I'm lovable. . . . One of the things that really lived for me is, who are the people he associated with? The outcasts, the woman at the well—I love that story—the leper, the "Prodigal Son" is an incredible story. Just great stories of the love of God. I have a little thing in my mirror, it says, "God loves the person in the mirror." So you look at that every morning when you get up. God loves the person in the mirror, me! What the Exercises did is give me a depth of feeling as to what Jesus and Mary went through, and I include Mary very much in that, out of love for me. That then is starting to transfer from the intellectual-historical into a depth of feeling and intimacy. The Exercises really brought that home to me.*

The profound experience of being loved by God did not give them license to do anything they wanted, however. Rather, this intimate experience of love gave them a new motivation to live their

own lives in a loving manner. A male real-estate developer put it this way:

*There are certainly some practice issues involved with being able to categorize things as good and bad. But what I began to think about or have more faith in, was this idea that if God loves me that much, then what do I do with that? . . . The answer is to live in that love and to live with that love, to live out of love.*

*And if God loves me that much and I am living out of that love, then, how could I do these things that are not loving? How could I do something that is not loving?*

Ignatian contemplation of the gospel scenes was new for all of the retreatants. And they appreciated this form of prayer because it was a way for them to become engaged with all aspects of their person—the body, imagination, senses, feelings, and thoughts—with the scriptural accounts of the life of Christ. They provided many examples of how their engagement in this kind of prayer played a crucial role in their coming to know, love, and follow Christ more closely. Generally speaking, the effect of this closer following of Christ was to expand their hearts in a compassionate way toward a wider circle of humanity, and especially toward the poor, suffering, oppressed, or marginalized.

Although none of the retreatants made the retreat because they were making a major decision, when they were making the Exercises they began to think about the choices they had already made in their lives and the ones that were still in front of them. Virtually all of the retreatants commented on the importance of making choices out of a deeper sense of being loved by God and of growing intimacy with Jesus. As their relationship with Jesus deepened and as they became more attracted to his way of thinking and living, they said they were less attached to what was financially lucrative or prestigious or even to what other people wanted them to do when they would make choices.

Most of the people I spoke with did not use technical terminology when discussing discernment, but they seemed to have picked up the basics of Ignatius's principles as expressed in the Rules for Discernment, either through readings, conversations with their spiritual directors, or by attending talks or workshops on the subject. They tended to sift through and understand what they learned in

these contexts in dialogue with their own experiences of making choices.

With respect to major life decisions, virtually all of the retreatants emphasized that a good choice or decision would be accompanied by a sense of "rightness" or "fit" and by peace. On the other hand, they would know if a major decision was not a good one because of a sense of agitation, a lack of fit, and a loss of peace. Some mentioned that it was important to pay attention to this dimension of one's experience over time, however. Some agitation or disturbance might simply be a part of life, or related to the cross that one is being called to bear in his or her present situation. According to the retreatants' descriptions, the peace that God gives was experienced at a deeper level, and could be present in the midst of pain and difficulties or in joyful and happy times.

## II. Loved into Freedom

When you're an advocate for a child you make enemies, which I kind of hadn't thought of.

Susan<sup>9</sup>

One of the most important things the retreatants experienced during the retreat was a profound sense of God's love for the world and for them. In every case this experience of God's love proved to be foundational for the rest of the retreat. And in every case it brought them to a new level of interior freedom. This new freedom, they felt, allowed them to be the people God was calling them to be and to follow Christ more closely.

Susan's story illustrates well the way the experience of being loved by God can lead to greater interior freedom, which then enables one to follow Christ more closely. She is a counselor in a public elementary school and works with students with emotional problems and learning disabilities. She also teaches a course on parenting skills at the school and has taught the counseling-skills sessions in the Spiritual Direction Program at the local Jesuit retreat center.

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<sup>9</sup>I am using pseudonyms for the four retreatants whose experiences I will discuss in this article, and for other people (family members, friends, etc.) they mention.

Susan had an especially important experience of God's love for her while praying with the story of Christ's birth. She described this in the following part of her interview:

*In St. Ignatius's way of praying we were taught to put ourselves in the scene. I would love to do that. My favorite was at Christmas. I was the baby sitter. That would be very alive. . . . Obviously at Christmas I got to hold the baby Jesus.*

In a later part of the interview she described praying with this scene.

*I would just start to visualize the scene. I wouldn't consciously think where I would be—I would just show up. And in this one I realized I was a kid, and I was the baby sitter. I had offered to do that. I had asked to do that: "Could I please be the baby sitter?" Because, you know, they really needed a break. They were tired. And how could I get my hands on that baby, basically? [laughing].*

One of the benefits of making the Exercises over the course of nine months is that the longer period of time allows for some of the experiences of prayer to sink in, even as one is going about one's ordinary activities. Susan pointed out that the graces associated with her prayer didn't stay in the forty minutes or hour set aside for prayer.

*I would be reflecting or gaining insights as I'm driving to work. It would just kind of pop into my head more and more as the year progressed. So I was starting to make connections and insights would come.*

Some of these insights and connections had to do with traumatic things she experienced while growing up. She was initially disappointed when she started remembering these things, because she had already dealt with these issues in other ways and thought they were behind her. During this time, she talked with a Jesuit director, who suggested that perhaps she had worked through these things psychologically, but not yet spiritually. She found this suggestion helpful, and said she in fact did experience another level of healing during the retreat. An important part of the healing happened while she was praying with the Nativity scene.

*I remember the part when I was in the Nativity scene, Mary called me "daughter," and for the first time in my life it was okay to be a daughter. So there was that whole movement then into—I can iden-*

*tify myself with the daughter now. . . . So the overflow is tremendous.*

Asked to describe what the experience when Mary called her daughter was like, she said:

*She looked at me and I had the baby. And she just called me daughter. It was just very powerful, very moving and very affectionate. And I heard it as affectionate. . . .*

*But to have it expressed with such affection and warmth—and because I was visually there and could hear the word, could see her face and just be enveloped into that warmth. Even with all she had been through, she could look at somebody else and think of somebody else and be grateful that somebody picked up her baby or helped in any way. It was powerful.*

When asked if she had any beliefs that influenced the way she prayed or if her prayer influenced what she believed, she replied:

*Yes, absolutely! All of a sudden it was okay to be a daughter. Then it was okay to pray to Abba. And some of that had come earlier. I was doing journaling and came up with this description of God . . . distant, judgmental, harsh, condemning. . . .*

*. . . But it was during the Exercises, the experience of being called daughter—that all of a sudden—it was Mary first.*

Susan's experiences while making the Exercises contributed to a profound change in her self-conception and how she related to others. For example, she began to realize that she had a tendency always to do or say things she thought would please others. This way of relating to others kept her from taking the risks involved in saying what she thought or how she felt, especially in situations of conflict. The experience she was having of being loved by God was leading to a new kind of freedom in this regard. As she puts it,

*I think when you are loved and it's okay to be a daughter, it's okay to be who you are, you start taking risks that I never would have taken. Just the fact that it's okay that people don't all like me—and it's part of my job—I wouldn't have been able to live with before. But it doesn't matter if these people don't like me, because I'm loved.*

It turns out that as Susan was making the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat, she began to find herself in situations of conflict in her daily life. These situations provided her with an opportunity to put

into practice the new way of relating to others that she was feeling called to in her prayer. The situations were ones where she was feeling called to act on behalf of others less fortunate, the kinds of actions that Jesus calls his disciples to take in the gospels.<sup>10</sup> In her job as an elementary-school counselor, for example, she felt some of the teachers were not attentive enough to the special needs of the children who were struggling with emotional problems and learning disabilities. She would tell the teachers that they can't be expecting the same behavior from these students as they would from others. The teachers insisted on doing things the way they had for years, however, telling her that the children have to be ready for the world. Susan said that in the past she would have shied away from a conflict such as this with the teachers.

*I would have avoided conflict. I do not like conflict. But when you know that you're loved and that this is your vocation and God has confirmed that—you can mess with me, but don't mess with my kids!*

Susan was involved in another situation of conflict at this time. The year before she began the Exercises, her nineteen-year-old son Thomas was fatally struck by a car while riding his bicycle. She found out that there had been seven accidents in five months at the intersection where Thomas died, the seventh resulting in his death. In fact, before her son's accident several people had written letters to the county officials over the course of many years insisting that something be done about this intersection, but the county took no action. After considering her options, she decided that filing a lawsuit against the county was the most likely way to get the county to take action to make the intersection safer. The other people in the group making the retreat were surprised she was filing the suit, and her children tried to persuade her not to do it. *And I said: "I cannot not do it." Because if somebody before Thomas had done it, they would have fixed the intersection.*

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<sup>10</sup>While praying with Matthew's Gospel, Susan was struck by how much of Jesus' ministry was devoted to healing people. She felt a call to participate in this healing ministry, specifically, in her work at the school with children with emotional difficulties and learning disabilities. She initially resisted, not feeling worthy, but over time it became clear to her that this was how God was calling her. "What really came out in the Exercises was God telling me to 'Be my compassion.' It was just—it was clear."

So she filed the lawsuit, with the hope of preventing others from being injured or losing their lives and other parents from having to suffer the agony she was experiencing. Even she was surprised at her boldness in the process, however: *"But again, this was where, 'Who is this person?' was coming out. I was surprised that I did it and kept going."* Susan was not able to be in court on the first day of the trial and the judge threw the case out—something not allowed by law. When she came to the courthouse the next day, she insisted on speaking to the judge, but was told that the judge would not speak to her, since the case had been thrown out.

*And I said to the court reporter, "Well, I'm not leaving until I speak to her." He said, "No, you would best go home. She's dismissed it." I said: "Well, she's an elected official. I'm not leaving until I speak to her." The lawyer was even looking at me. I said to the judge: "You know, you can't do this." And she said: "I know. And I would hate to be in your position—trying to find a reason for your son's death." And all of a sudden I said: "That's why I'm here—so you never have to do that. I just want to prevent this." So she put it back in.*

When she was on the stand, Susan's lawyer asked her why she was suing the county.

*And the other lawyer objected. And the judge said: "No. I want to hear this" [both laugh]. And I said: "I'm a teacher. We're held accountable all the time. You would think that \_\_\_\_\_ County—one of the five richest counties in the United States—you just assume this is done right. Then we find out that letters were sent ten or twelve years ago. Troy High said that this is a dangerous intersection. "Okay, we'll fix it." Then there's another letter. Then they put up a new obstruction and there's seven accidents within five months—the seventh being my son. I can't let there be eight, nine, and ten.*

During the case the lawyers for the county were telling Susan that nobody had ever won a case against the county and were suggesting in not so subtle ways that she was at fault for what happened to her son.

*They had this pre-meeting where they did everything in their power to intimidate me. They actually told me I was a terrible parent. That I didn't know where my son was. I said he was a mile and a half*

*from home. It was ten o'clock and he was nineteen and he was going seven miles an hour. Yeah. You can't really go that route.*

Susan won the lawsuit, which meant the county would be making adjustments at the intersection.

As I mentioned earlier, Susan came to experience herself as a daughter of the God whom she could address as "Abba" during the course of the Exercises. This realization was profoundly healing and gave her the strength and confidence to live in a bolder way—inspired by Christ's own life-for-others, and in particular for those who were suffering or overlooked. Her newfound sense of trust in God's love allowed her the freedom to forget about herself, in a sense, or about how others perceived her and to focus on the needs of those she was serving. This holy boldness even stayed with her in the courtroom when she was told her case was dismissed, and when attorneys for the county attempted to blame her for her son's death. When the judge said she would hate to be in her position, trying to find a reason for her son's death (an attempt to suggest that this was Susan's problem, and was going to be dismissed by the court), Susan used the judge's very words to persuade her of the importance of going forward.<sup>11</sup>

### III. The Two Standards

There are certain things about the Exercises that I love. I love the fact that Ignatius speaks about liberty. Christians are often the most bound people on the planet. No wonder people aren't drawn to us. I mean, who wants morbidity and more bondage? Ignatius speaks about freedom. We are free to choose, we are free to discern. We are free to go after whatever flag, and we are free to go back and live his life.

Maureen

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<sup>11</sup> Susan's story reminded me of Jesus' words to his disciples in Luke's Gospel: "When they bring you before . . . rulers and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say. The Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment all that should be said" (Luke 12:11-12). Susan herself felt that she was being helped by the Spirit in some sense in this process. The point of her story was that she was encouraged and strengthened by her new sense of God's love for her and did not have to shy away from conflict. She felt that she was being "given," in some sense, the courage and resources—even the words—to act on behalf of others (in this case, trying to prevent needless suffering).

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Maureen is the co-owner and vice-president of a company on the West Coast that she and her husband founded in 1989; it provides short-term training to injured workers, preparing them for employment in the health-insurance industry, the medical field, and in the business community in general. Their course offerings include courses in the areas of medical-claims processing and computer-based business skills. Maureen works with the employees and sees her work to be critical to the company's goals.

*I deal with the people, the employees, to encourage, to lift up, to admonish, and to give them hope in what they are doing. Almost all of our students are injured workers. So they come angry, they come fearful. So our job is to say, "You may never go back to the employment that you had, but there is a future and there is a hope and there is a dream that you can resurrect." So, I believe my role for the staff is to continue to build them up, because they deal on a day-to-day basis with injured workers.*

Some of the retreatants were frustrated with what they felt was an overemphasis in the pre-Vatican II Church on following rules, but frustration was not limited to those who were raised as Catholic. Maureen, who was raised in the Assemblies of God Church, experienced something similar during her childhood. As she remembers it, in her church "salvation" was "dependent on things such as if you wore make-up, or if you went to the movies, or if you swore. Which I did all three." Because of the discrepancy between these moral norms and the way she was living, she was often anxious about where she stood in relation to the "salvation" question.

*I used to stand out in front of the movies and stand in line and say, "Please Jesus do not come, please Jesus do not come until I am out of the movies." I mean, it is just hysterical [laughter]. . . . It really was always based on fear, not on love. It was whether or not you loved God, not whether or not He loved you. So, it was conditional.*

Maureen had a very different experience during the Exercises while praying with the account of Jesus' baptism in the Gospel of John. After contemplating the baptism of Jesus, she walked into the river and was baptized herself.

*And I come out of the water and I hear, "This is my beloved daughter, this is my beloved and I take delight in her." I am so in the scene and I am thinking, "Oh, yes." When Jesus comes and he stands*

*behind me, I don't see him but I know he is there and I hear him speak into this ear, "Did you hear it?" And I am saying, "Oh, I did, I did, I heard, I heard the thought." Then he speaks into my other ear and he says, "Did you really hear it?" So, then I have to take and sit with "I am his beloved and he takes delight in me and do I, honest to God, believe it?"*

The Two Standards were particularly important and helpful for Maureen, inasmuch as they alerted her to ways in which she could be diverted from living a life rooted in the love of God and reaching out to others in love. Maureen was drawn to this meditation, in part, because of the military imagery involved. She talked about how as a young girl she would paint pictures of Joan of Arc in art class, and that she chose Teresa as her confirmation name after Teresa of Avila, whose *"daddy had to go after her [when] she was going to fight the heathens."*

*I realized that there is a militancy, obviously, that I was drawn to. In the Exercises, probably one of my favorite things and one of the things that I live with daily, is the standards, the two flags. In that medieval army, if you didn't keep your eye on the flag bearer, you could forget what army you were in. I was just drawn to that.<sup>12</sup>*

As Maureen understood it, the standard of Satan was associated with power, riches, and fame and the standard of Christ with poverty and humility. She came to realize she had to be careful about the attraction of the first standard in her day-to-day life at work. She mentioned in particular the attraction of being in control of people and situations or in a position of power over others.

*When I find that in even the smallest detail, if I have got to be the one that has the last word, if I have got to be the one that has got to be in control, [if] I am moving towards a need to have the power, I have to pull back and ask myself, Have I taken my eyes off Christ?*

Maureen recognized the reality that she was in a position of power at her work place in relation to the employees. But she was sensitive to the difference between using this power in a domineering way and using it—in a relational context—to empower the other

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<sup>12</sup>Some commentators caution directors that the imagery in the *Exercises*—and the military imagery in particular—can be disturbing and therefore unhelpful for women. Maureen appears to be an exception in this regard.

person. She understood the latter to be more in line with the standard of Christ.

*The other day here at the office, I had to deal with an employee in a correcting situation. Now I have the power over her because I am her employer. However, I felt that I needed to give her the room to explain where she was coming from. I had to let go of that power that said, but this is what you did and this is the result of it; instead, I must ask her if she would like to tell her story so that we could come to a shared understanding of what was going on, so that I am not holding on to the power over anybody's life. When I do that, because I have a bit of a dynamic personality—when I do that, I know that I have taken my eyes off my flag bearer.*

Q: When you try to have control over somebody?

*When I have to win the argument. I really struggle. One of the things that I really, really struggle with is truth is truth is truth, and to allow someone else to stand in truth as they see it. That is difficult for me. So, I ask for the grace, "Lord help me, grant me the grace to allow someone to stand in the truth as they see it, for where they are."*

She also began to realize that living according to Jesus' standard might mean that other people do not understand her at times, which she found difficult to accept.

*The other grace that I ask for when I am looking at his flag is that I will not always be understood. And I have this great desire and penchant to be understood. I can not stand to be misunderstood.*

Maureen said she barely made it through the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, a film about a bank executive who is wrongly accused of murdering his wife and her lover and suffers terrible abuse in prison for years before his escape.

*But, he gets out of prison, and he knows that he is innocent, and he knows that he has a way to prove it now, but instead, he just takes the money that he has hidden and goes to Mexico and builds boats. I am screaming in my head, "Take an ad out in the New York Times, publish it. You are innocent." I really have to ask for the grace to stand when I am misunderstood because that is humility that leads to humiliations. Then I am not trying to be either in control or powerful, but being willing to be misunderstood and not feeling that I have to make it right.*

The Two Standards were also very important as a guideline for a decision Maureen was making about her involvement in ministry outside the workplace. In order to understand this aspect of her life, we have to backtrack a bit. After her difficult childhood experiences of growing up in the Assembly of God Church, Maureen had many other important experiences before she made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. One in particular was life changing. After she graduated from the university, she married and had two children. When she was delivering her third child, a daughter, there were complications. In the midst of the trauma she was undergoing in the delivery room, she said she had an experience of Christ's presence.

*When it was all over, the doctor said to me, I had tears running down my cheeks, and he said, "Oh honey, I am so sorry we didn't know that it was going to happen, it was just one of these freak kinds of things." I wanted to say, "Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet. I am not weeping because of that, I am weeping because Jesus was here and I don't know how he got here because I haven't kept the rules. I don't know how he got here and I don't know if he will come again." So, I lived on that experience for several years.*

After this experience of Christ's presence during the successful but complicated birth of her daughter, she began to pray regularly, participate in Bible studies, and read widely in the area of Christian spirituality. She started a popular Bible-story-telling group for children. She also became a much-sought-after Christian speaker to Protestant groups in America and abroad for about thirty years. These ministries earned her the Bishop's Cross, the most prestigious honor a lay person can receive in the Episcopal Church.<sup>13</sup>

After she had made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat, her life was moving in different directions, however. She and her husband had become Catholics. She did a three year internship in spiritual direction. During this time, while speaking at a Presbyterian retreat, she had an experience where she felt God was gently drawing her away from the ministry as a Christian speaker. This was not easy for her.

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<sup>13</sup> She and her husband had joined the Episcopal Church after they were married.

*Well okay, after thirty years of speaking you become pretty well known in my little world. I was in a Presbyterian retreat, walking into my bedroom, getting ready for my next talk. I had this sense that the Lord was saying that this was the last time that I would do anything like this. . . . But it was real scary because it is thirty years of giving your heart to it and being, in my little world, famous.*

Asked if this experience was related to the Two Standards, she said: "Well, I didn't realize it at the time except I felt what will happen—I mean, who will I be? Who will I be?" She referred to a group of four women speakers who traveled the country and would fill large venues such as the Rose Bowl and Anaheim Stadium. One of her daughters tried to encourage her to participate in this ministry.

*She said, "Momma, you could be a part of that; you are as good as they are. You could be a part of that." I said, "But it holds no attraction for me; it is not where my heart is." Then I realized that I didn't need it. I didn't need the power that goes with it and I didn't need the fame that goes with it, and in some ways, the riches in those situations that go with it. So, I began to just say, "Jesus, then what do you have for me?"*

During this time, Maureen had an important experience while praying with the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. As the story is told in John's Gospel, Jesus had asked the woman for a drink of water from the well. She asked him how he, a Jew, could ask her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink of water (since Jews and Samaritans share nothing in common). According to John's Gospel, Jesus responded, "If you only knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10). The part of the story that touched Maureen was the first four words: "If you only knew." "All I got to was 'If you only knew.' 'If you only knew.' Just those words, 'If you only knew.'"

She continued to pray with these four words and wrote in her journal about the prayer experiences to try to understand their significance for her life. Asked if the journaling process led her to any awarenesses, she replied:

*Well yes, "if I only knew" that I would—I have never liked small groups. I am not much of a groupie. So, the large groups are fine, and for me, I am quite safe in a large group especially if I am the speaker. And yet, I am drawn now to small groups. I am drawn*

*where I can go eyeball to eyeball and encourage them to be conscious. So, last night in my home I started a group that has done the annotation.*

Maureen had accompanied these people through the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat and was providing spiritual direction for them now. They wanted to continue to meet as a group in some fashion as well.

*So, there were twelve of them last night. If somebody had told me that I would be taking my time with a heart's desire, if I had only known that the Nineteenth Annotation, those Exercises, contemplative prayer, letting go of what I had known for thirty years, and now shutting the doors to my house, lighting a candle, and being with a small group of people, and finding sheer joy in journeying with them, I would never have believed it. But I would never have believed the previous thirty years either. But, this seems different and deeper to me and I am not discounting anything else that I might have done or been effective at. But, I love, I love, absolutely love seeing people having an "Aha" moment.*

## IV. Making Choices

The Exercises reminded me of Ignatius's notion that somehow we're created to praise, honor, and serve God, and in a kind of slightly less stilted vernacular, it means that I am here for a reason and that reason has something to do with serving God and that serving God is going to look something like the way God served other people when he was a human being, so Jesus' life.

James

James is a professor of political science at a public university in the Midwest, whose research interests have to do with the countries of the former Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the former Yugoslavia, especially Croatia. He has been a consultant to the political leaders of Slovakia and Croatia, and writes editorial columns related to his areas of research. While he was still an undergraduate student, he became interested in what was going on in the former Czechoslovakia after hearing Vaclav Havel (then president of Czechoslovakia) speak when he was in Washington, D.C., to address the U.S. Congress in 1990. President Havel personally invited college students to come to Czechoslovakia to teach English, and something

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about the democratic traditions of the West. James did so the year after he graduated. He worked with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps for one year after that, and then started graduate studies in political science. At that time Czechoslovakia was splitting apart, with the two halves moving in very different directions.

*And it was, for a social scientist, an almost perfect experiment because you've got one country that had the same conditions, the same institutional structure for seventy years splitting in half. And it looked like at the time, and this is what actually happened, the two halves were going to move in different directions. So I went to Slovakia, learned the language, which is mutually comprehensible with Czech, and started to do field work and that is how it moved in that direction.*

James was first introduced to Ignatian retreats while an undergraduate student at a Jesuit university. He described himself as having been "fairly strongly agnostic" through his adolescence, until the age of twenty, when he made his first five-day Ignatian retreat. During that retreat he returned to a belief in God that has not altered dramatically since. Indeed, he said the experiences he had on that retreat "laid the foundation for everything that I have come to since then."

If the foundation was laid with the first retreat, James said that it took many retreats to alter his value system fundamentally. He described himself as being very competitive and self-interested when he first arrived at the university. Because of the retreats, he said he was becoming more compassionate and concerned about others and the world around him. When he would come back from the retreats his friends also noticed that he was different and would comment on it. The difference didn't necessarily last a long time, however, and "the more compassionate, more caring me kind of ebbed, I think, back to what I was more comfortable with." But gradually, over time, the retreats had an influence.

*Each time that I do this there is more of a residual level on the bottom. I am more that person than I was before I did it, and it kind of peaks and then some of that wipes away, but not all of it. So there's more of it left each time. So I really do think that it played a critical role at a couple of critical points in my life in moving me in the direction of more compassion, more concern for social justice, more concern for other people. I think it was real important in that*

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*regard, actually. I became more conscious that it wasn't all about me. There was something bigger, more important.*

He made other retreats while in college, and was aware that the Jesuits for whom he worked would periodically leave to make their own eight-day and thirty-day retreats. He worked for a Jesuit who “*talked constantly about the Exercises,*” and who made the Principle and Foundation an explicit matter for reflection in the workplace. And so he was familiar with the *Spiritual Exercises* and had some appreciation for them when he came home from doing some work abroad in 1999 to discover that his wife had signed up to make the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat at their Jesuit parish. She asked if he, too, wanted to make the retreat. There was one space left, and James signed up.

The Nineteenth Annotation Retreat deepened what James had experienced in the earlier retreats, particularly the experience of being loved by God and called to be compassionate and loving toward others. During both the earlier retreats and in the Nineteenth Annotation one, James was discovering a self, “*a more compassionate, more caring me,*” whose desires and aspirations could be trusted, because they were related to the kind of person God was calling him to be. And this realization has influenced how he has made the major decisions of his life.

*Here I really am influenced by the Ignatian notion that underneath it all my real desire does have something to do with God and God's desire. And so, I've used, in particular, the mechanism with big decisions of getting up one morning and imagining my life as if I had chosen option A and trying to get up the next morning and imagine my life as if I had chosen option B. And I did that when choosing graduate schools, I did that when choosing jobs. And so I think the idea that somewhere inside of me is the capacity to know what is more and what is less of what God would want me to do, and more or less what I really want—that notion has been at the basis of those decisions.*

Similar to the other retreatants, James said he takes his feelings seriously when he is making a significant choice. By doing so, he can become aware of what the “full I” wants, as he puts it.

*I think a kind of a cost-benefit weighing is nice but I don't put as much stock in that as in emotional response, gut feeling, this idea of waking up with option A in mind and seeing how it makes me feel—*

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*whether it makes me happy, concerned, anxious. I think it's a real sign for me. I don't know how accurate it is but at least I've taken that as a sign of what—somehow beyond the conscious mind the full "I" is feeling or thinking. So I think it's sort of taking the options and subjecting them to the full person and not just the intellect.*

He used this approach when deciding which graduate school to attend, which has had long-term consequences for his professional life.

*When I discerned, I had a choice between entering the University of Chicago, Chicago being by far the more prestigious school. A school in the city where I was already living, but my visit there was one that filled me with a lot of anxiety for a variety of reasons. Because it looked forbidding, also kind of anonymous, also aggressively theoretical, as they called themselves, whereas the Notre Dame visit fit much more with, not necessarily my intellectual aspirations, but I think with who I felt I was at the time. And I remember spending the two days, the Chicago day and the Notre Dame day where I would try and see how it made me feel. I felt much more relaxed, much more comfortable with the Notre Dame option. Now, I don't know how it would have happened had I gone to Chicago, but I know that I got at Notre Dame the things that I was probably looking for in a way that I might not have gotten them from Chicago. There was, is, a normative aspect to the kind of academic work done at Notre Dame that I don't think you'd see in Chicago. There were a whole variety of ways that I think the decision really did fit more who I was and who I wanted to become.*

James associated feeling more relaxed and comfortable while at Notre Dame with being in a place where he could be himself and could grow into the person God was calling him to be. This was a theme he returned to often: *"There was something about that decision that said to me that I would be more—um—well, I would be more me if I chose the one over the other."*

He also mentioned that it was important to pay attention to his fears when making a significant decision. He distinguished between fears which were related to his own psychological history, which it would be important to face, and other fears that served for him as a warning sign that he was moving in a direction that rubbed against his deepest self and desires. When considering a given option, he said, he can sometimes feel *"This is not who I want to be. I*

*am afraid of the person that I would be if I made this decision, or afraid of becoming that person."*

James said that the experience of going through this process of decision making in his own life, which he feels has borne fruit, influences how he interacts with students. For one thing, he takes the time to talk with students about the decisions they are making in their lives.

*I spend a lot of time talking to them about where they want to be, what kind of person they want to be, what kind of career they should pursue to be that kind of person. I think all of which is really related to this sort of Ignatian approach about discernment of vocation and other things. . . . So, it certainly influenced me in that regard.*

He has also found ways to allow the "more compassionate, more caring" part of him to come through in the classroom, and to challenge his students to discover that part of themselves. Since making the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat, he has rewritten his syllabi to incorporate social-justice themes more fully into his classes. When he teaches from these syllabi, he says that he feels that he is being the person God is calling him to be.

*Yeah, I really accept this notion that somewhere buried under everything is a me that looks like the kind of me that a God, a loving God would create. I am certainly not that in most of my daily life. So I mean I do feel as if there is that kind of identity there in a still-limited form. But it does feel that way, when I'm able to get the social-justice message across. I do a little exercise with students where I divide them up according to the 1960 world distribution of income. I try to make sure that the wealthier students in the class get pissed off at the wealth that the rich have on the other side of the room. Then I update it with the 1995 world distribution, which would mean taking away some of the little that they have and giving it to the other people on the other side. I have the satisfaction in seeing that work in a way that's almost unrivaled in any of my teaching experiences. So yeah, it does feel that way. It feels like I'm doing the right thing. The same is true in a couple of book groups that my wife and I are in, and in the Social Justice Committee in our parish which is re-forming. So yeah, there are a couple of circumstances in which it really does feel like, "Yeah, this is what I should be."*

The decision he made to attend Notre Dame for graduate studies, in part because of the department's approach to political

science that took normative considerations into account, has had long-term consequences for the way he does his work. He is not satisfied with only publishing in academic journals or presenting papers at academic conferences, although he does these things. He also hopes to have an influence on people's lives in the parts of the world he studies.

*I see myself to be more active than some of my colleagues in using what I find in descriptive, analytical academic research in a normative context. Which means writing opinionated editorial pieces; it means doing a sort of consulting work, not only on what I see but what I feel ought to be done. I deal with countries, which are only recently democratic, and I've spent quite a bit of time trying to work with people who work in and with those countries on solidifying, consolidating those democracies. . . . When people don't have the right to talk about other ways of redistributing income because someone in power is preventing them from doing it, democracy is taking first place in my mind. As these countries consolidate, however, my research is increasingly going to be pointed at the question of social democracy and of kind of equitable resolution of ethnic conflicts. A couple of countries I study have larger groups that dominate smaller ones and produce a variety of unjust circumstances. So, yeah, Ignatian spirituality really does play a role in why I research what I research, and what I do with that research. It's not for me just a question of publication but it's a question of direct—getting involved sometimes. Not so much that it destroys my so-called objectivity or credibility, but enough that I can feel like I'm actually playing some kind of a role.*

## V. Examen of Consciousness

We're not just looking back to something that happened or some words somebody wrote several thousand years ago, wrote them down and now we have something to follow. It's living, breathing, supporting, guiding, loving all the time, and transforming all the time. I don't know how strong my beliefs in all those things were five or ten years ago, but they're dead center in how I move now.

Michael

One of the more challenging aspects of any retreat experience lies in finding ways to allow the graces of this special time to be-

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come a part of retreatants' lives as they return to their ordinary routines. For the retreatants I spoke with, this meant, How does one continue to live one's life out of a deep sense of being loved by God and called to be a follower of Christ, as one goes about one's daily responsibilities? And, in particular, how does one discern how God is leading one in the midst of the circumstances of everyday life? Of course, the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat is unique, in the sense that the retreat itself is made in the context of daily life. But still, it is a special time when one is spending more time in prayer than usual, and talking with a spiritual director more regularly. This kind of retreat, in other words, still involves a transition back to one's ordinary routine.

For Ignatius, the examen of conscience was one of the most helpful ways to stay attuned to the graces and challenges or temptations in one's daily life. In our time, this is commonly referred to as the examen of consciousness, and involves paying attention to places where one stands in need of God's mercy and forgiveness, as well as to the consolations and desolations of a given time period. This practice was important for Michael as he moved back into his ordinary life and routines after the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. When asked about his current spiritual practices, one of the first things Michael mentioned was the examen.

*The examen process is another thing that I try to do with some regularity—that process of really being aware of God's presence, being enfolded in that, being seen and being supported, and being loved in that presence and then moving on. And taking a look at the day before—it might be the week before—and seeing where there were times of consolation or desolation, or where there were tensions. And you could put a number of different names on it: Keating in the centering prayer tradition calls it afflictive emotions. Where you see that happening, to me that's the Spirit saying, "Something's happening in your spirit right now, pay attention to that." So too with the consolation experiences. Where are those graced moments popping up in a day or last week or last half a day? And then things start to crop up even month to month. You start to see a pattern.*

For Michael, experiences of consolation have an affective dimension to them. They are experiences of joy and hope. They are "very heartfelt experiences. They're warm. They're love." The affective experiences associated with desolation are the opposite of those of

consolation. Most importantly in his view, however, experiences of consolation involve *"a very noticeable increase in, you know, the bottom line, the three virtues: faith, hope, love."* He pays attention primarily to this dimension of his experience when doing the examen.

*Despite everything else that is going on, what's my faith doing? What is my level of hope in this situation? Am I loving? Or am I a little more loving than I was to this person yesterday? Or what direction am I going? Am I working out of faith, or am I afraid? What's the bottom line? Am I fearful? Do I mistrust this person? Am I operating out of mistrust? Is that the thing I am experiencing right now? Do I have some level of contempt or ill will or blown-up ego or distorted image? To me those all fall into the desolation category.*

On other occasions, he may look back over the day and feel sorrow about the way he responded to a situation.

*And then there are other times where . . . an event in the day where I know that my response just was not what it could have been, especially in an attitude I might have about somebody, being angry on the road driving and being just totally worked up about it. . . . Being able to see that in day-to-day events and feel that and be very sorrowful and feel the release of something and a bit of a transformation. That's God's grace at work.*

For Michael, the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat, the examen of consciousness, along with his more recent practice of centering prayer, have led him to a greater awareness of God's presence in the world and in his own life experiences. He mentioned in this regard one span of time during which he had healing interpersonal interactions with several different people—interactions he says he probably would not have been available for prior to beginning these practices.

The first incident he recounted had to do with Greg, one of his closest friends from graduate school. Greg had been an active cyclist and a very healthy person when he first met him. But he eventually developed Lou Gehrig's disease, a rapidly progressive neurological disease that attacks the nerve cells responsible for controlling voluntary muscles. Persons who have this disease gradually lose the ability to move their arms, legs, and eventually their whole body. Greg experienced these things and eventually died from the disease. Recently, Michael was attending a conference in Orlando, Florida, and he made plans to visit Greg's parents who

lived outside of Orlando. He hadn't seen them in twelve or thirteen years.

*I ended up meeting with Sharon (Greg's sister) and Greg's parents, and it was such a healing process. I think for them, too. I honestly don't know if I could have even entertained that in another state of life. I think the prayer time and the mode of being facilitated that openness and my ability to pour myself out to them and be there and be receptive.*

On the way home he stopped to see his mother, who lived in New Orleans. Her sister had died just a few weeks before after having lived and struggled with Alzheimer's for many years. This illness and death affected his mother more than she had anticipated, and Michael felt that it was good that he could spend time with her and just listen to her.

*Although they knew this was coming for a long time, it affected her much more than she had anticipated. . . . She just talked. I could tell by the end of my short visit—I was there maybe three or four days—that our interactions had somehow brought some sense of healing to her.*

When he returned to work at the university, a student came and talked with him about personal problems in her life.

*When I got back here, I was in my office, and one of our undergraduate students came in and just sat down and started talking about some personal issues she was having. I didn't ask for any of this. She came to me. Just started telling me stories about how she was doing in school. Some family issues, some painful things that were happening in her life. She was somehow comforted by the things I was able to offer her. Now, you can draw your own conclusions from all of that, but I think it has to do with sort of a state of being and a result of a prayer life.*

For Michael, these kinds of relationships with an ever-expanding number of people in different situations are what Jesus promises those who give up everything and follow him. He recalled the gospel story of the rich young man, whom Jesus tells to keep the commandments, give away what he has to the poor, and follow him. The rich young man went away sad, according to the story. Michael recalled that a little later in the story Peter says to Jesus, "We have

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given up everything and followed you," seemingly wondering what it is he and the other disciples can expect.

*Jesus' reply to them is, "Well, what you can expect is, you're going to have more brothers and sisters and relatives and everything than you can imagine." I don't think they get it, what that means. But to me that's the whole idea. Moving out of a prayer space, you get more brothers and sisters and people that you're connected to and that you're concerned about than you ever imagined.*

*So I can see that. Sort of the day-to-day routine, how I interact with folks, who they are to me now is a little bit different than they were five or ten years ago. And I don't know where that will stop, really. It always seems to be getting a little bigger.*

Michael ended up doing the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat because he had been interested in the role of spirituality in the workplace. He had done a two-year internship program in Ignatian spirituality that had precisely this focus. After the internship, he made the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat. During this time he was offered the job he currently has, doing research in basic radiology at a public research university. The offer of a new job provided him with an opportunity to make a concrete discernment in relation to his work.

The practice of paying attention to the faith dimension of his own experience during the examen turned out to be very helpful when it came time for him to make this decision regarding a change of jobs. When he told his former employer about the job offer at the university, the employer offered him more money and new responsibilities in an attempt to get him to stay. But Michael knew the company had many problems, and there were even some core values that were in conflict with his own values. When he imagined himself staying with his former company, he noticed he felt uneasy and agitated. When he considered his reasons for staying, he realized the appeals were primarily to his ego, a sign for him that this might not be where the Spirit was leading him.

*There was just such an agitation with staying where I was. . . . It was an agitation, but it wasn't a neutral thing. It just definitely seemed to me to be more about an enticement and a lure that I could rationalize taking, because maybe I was called to be in this*

*place and help straighten things out or whatever. The appeals were all to my ego.*

On the other hand, when he considered taking the position at the university, even though in some ways he was entering the unknown, and had to step out in faith, he said:

*Something was very correct, very right about it. That was very present, this rightness, this sort of lightness, I'll say. Just very correct. . . . This sense of connecting with the people, what the job was, a lightness about it, a sense of hopefulness about it—all this just said, "This is it!"*

*And I call that a discernment because there were so many things enticing me to stay in the familiar environment with the people I had come to know and stay where I was living and just change titles and salary and grow into that spot. There were things that on the surface looked very right about that. Very right. But the process for me was that I just had to keep listening to what was underneath all of that. What were the movements that I was experiencing under that? In which of these two decisions did I feel more at peace? and have more hope? and have a sense that this was going to flow out into something very fruitful in the world?*

Michael's experiences over the last five years at the university have confirmed the decision he made. He mentioned that he originally focused his engineering studies in the biomedical area, which would enable him to direct his research toward the medical field in such a way that it could end up helping people. He does just this kind of research in his position at the university.

*It's all related, I'm convinced. Even back when I was in grad school, I would think, people who were on some kind of spiritual path, some people become social workers and some people are counselors and some people work in soup kitchens. But what do you do when you're really good at digital-logic circuits? I don't know. Where's the slant there? And there are a variety of things I could have done with an engineering degree. I certainly didn't have to take the biomedical slant, which I did. That is one discipline that at least even on the surface has some kind of interaction with helping people. To me it's important that I believe in the kind of work that I do. If I didn't I wouldn't be doing it. It seems to be a nice mixture of my scientific slant and wanting to contribute back into humankind.*

Michael pointed out that other aspects of the work he does at the university are important to him from a faith perspective as well. He mentioned in this regard his relationships with other researchers and staff members and the opportunity to work with students and help them grow and develop as researchers and as persons.

*There's a fair amount of my interaction with students and so forth that makes sense with the whole prayer experience and what flows out of that. It's more than just the particulars of designing or testing a new imaging technique that might better show the vascular pattern of x-y-and-z. It's the whole process that may benefit somebody fifteen years from now if this ever reaches the clinical world—maybe. But it fosters a whole lot of other things in the process, with the students, with interactions, with relationships, with teaching, with people coming, you know, growing in their student life. The whole picture. So, I would certainly say they're related.*

## Conclusion

I would like to make some concluding comments now about the value of the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat for lay people in our time. In order to broach this topic, I will first need to return to some of the themes from the introduction to this piece. I mentioned there how the retreatants emphasized that they came away from the retreat with much more of a felt sense of God's love for the world and for them. The profound experience of being loved by God brought about a new level of interior freedom, which allowed the retreatants to respond in generosity to Christ's call.

Each person experienced this call uniquely, in accordance with his or her life history, personality, gifts and talents, and the needs of his or her family, community, place of work, and the broader world. The uniqueness of each person's call meant that collectively the retreatants had an influence that reached into many different areas of society or the world. Even in the four stories we considered, one can see that their different callings led them to have an influence in very diverse settings. The influence expanded even further if one considers all twenty of the retreatants I interviewed, who were involved in such diverse work as real-estate development, health care, businesses of various kinds, university administration, parish

ministry, social work, teaching special education, spiritual direction, and university campus ministry.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the retreatants spoke of feeling called to be more active in serving the poor, the suffering, the oppressed, or the marginalized. Three of the retreatants whose stories we considered mentioned feeling called in this way. Susan felt empowered to participate in a healing ministry with children with special needs; James was motivated to work actively for justice in Eastern European societies and to stimulate his students to think about issues of wealth and poverty; Michael spoke about comforting people who had suffered loss and comforting a student who was going through difficult experiences.<sup>15</sup> Commitment to the poor and marginalized was a common theme among the retreatants.

The retreatants expressed virtual unanimity with regard to how the experience of making the retreat affected their decision making. Although they typically did not refer to the text of the Rules for Discernment, the way retreatants described the affective experiences associated with good decisions was very similar to the way Ignatius describes the experience of the presence of the good spirit in the life of a person who is going from "good to better." It is encouraging and strengthening; there is a sense of obstacles being

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<sup>14</sup>Sometimes lay people who make the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat are working in Jesuit institutions, but often they are not. Only one of the twenty people I interviewed was working full time in a Jesuit institution at the time of the interviews. None of the four retreatants whose stories we here recounted did so. This phenomenon—which can be seen across the U.S. Assistancy—offers us an opportunity to consider in a more radical way than we have to date what it means for us to serve the laity in *their mission*, as some of our recent documents have phrased our charge today. The mission of lay persons is not circumscribed by the works of the Society. We need eyes to see outside our own group to the larger Church and churches, within which lay people are being called to mission, and to the needs of the world to which they have the gifts and talents to respond. If we can be aware of these realities, then we have the opportunity to participate in the marvelous new initiatives of the Spirit in our time by sharing what is central to our own tradition—the Spiritual Exercises—with gifted and generous lay persons who will be able to "help more souls" than we ever could on our own.

<sup>15</sup>Maureen's work was also directed toward the suffering and marginalized. The company she and her husband owned served injured workers, trying to get them into a position where they could reenter the labor force. Because we were focusing on other themes in Maureen's section, I did not emphasize this dimension of her work.

removed; it is a gentle and easy dynamic, like water falling on a sponge; and there is the feeling that one is coming into one's own house through an open door. Susan attended to such dynamics to learn how she was being called in specific ways in her day-to-day life at work and in the community. Maureen and Michael described such experiences as the basis upon which they made significant decisions regarding the kind of work or ministry they were being called to do. And James did so with regard to his decision about where to do graduate studies and how to approach his teaching, research, and writing.

Those last two images—water falling on a sponge and coming into one's own house through an open door—are found in the Rules for Discernment for the Second Week, which were appropriate for all of the retreatants' situations. They had all experienced the forgiveness and healing associated with the First Week in the course of the retreat (and many had important First Week experiences long before making the retreat). Although they recognized they would continue to struggle with sin, they now focused primarily on coming to know Christ more intimately and loving him more intensely, so they could follow him more closely. For Ignatius, such persons will experience the good spirit as going in the same direction they are—as gentle and easy, as a kind of “coming home” to themselves, God, and others.

It is important to acknowledge that these retreatants were being called to follow Christ in the manner described above. Ministry involves meeting persons “where they are at” and making the necessary adaptations in order to do so. Since lay people today are living in the mode of following Christ in this way, we should be providing them with “aids” which can help them to grow in their love of Christ and to follow him ever more closely. The full four Weeks of Ignatius's Exercises are uniquely suited for this purpose. And the Rules for Discernment are indispensable to the experience of the retreat as Ignatius understood it.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Recently, scholars are recognizing the centrality of the Rules for Discernment for understanding the dynamics of the Spiritual Exercises. John W. O'Malley, for example, writes that the Rules, “come as close as anything does to revealing the most basic assumptions Ignatius entertained about the dynamics of an individual's relationship to God.” For this reason, he understands the Rules to be “at the very core of the Spiritual Exercises,” and “a critical introduction to the meaning of the whole book” (*The First Jesuits* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993], 41).

The insights of Ignatius in this very practical realm of vocation and discernment offer one of the most compelling arguments for the need for the Nineteenth Annotation Retreat for lay people in our own time. After the first century of the Society's history, as we have seen, this particular retreat dropped out of usage and we were left with the thirty-day retreat—usually for potential religious or religious and priests—and the exercises of the First Week, which came to be understood as being primarily for lay people. But this in fact was not faithful to some of Ignatius's earlier inclinations or the practices of the early Jesuits. In the new situation of the Church today, with the recognition of a universal call to holiness, and the vocation of all the baptized to the apostolate, lay persons need a way to discover their own vocations and to discern how God is calling them on a day-to-day basis. This can happen during the Second, Third, and Fourth Weeks of the Exercises, when the retreat experience is accompanied by an introduction to the Rules for Discernment. This is one of the reasons the Spiritual Exercises, and the Nineteenth Annotation version of this retreat in particular, is so important during this "Age of the Laity."

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